

Discussion

On Anthony Kenny's *Aquinas on Being*

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IN 2002, Anthony Kenny published a book on St. Thomas Aquinas's doctrine of being.¹ He presents his aim as follows:

The subject of Being is one of the most important of all philosophical concerns. St. Thomas Aquinas was one of the greatest of all philosophers. It will be the aim of this book to show that on this crucial topic this first-rank philosopher was thoroughly confused. (preface, v)

He also describes what he is doing as “writing about a philosopher at his weakest” (x). The book takes the form of a chronological survey of Thomas's works beginning with *De ente et essentia* and ending with the *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*.² Kenny looks at some key texts on being, and ends with the judgment he indicated at the beginning. I hope, here, to offer some ray of hope for the student of St. Thomas, that things may not be quite as bad as Kenny thinks. To do so, I must follow him somewhat in his visits to texts, and indicate not only where I think he is mistaken but also what other texts he might have considered, and, more fundamentally, why he might have trouble with Thomas's teachings.

It would be absurd to deny that there are disagreements about the meaning of Thomas's doctrine of being. Without going outside the classical

¹ Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas on Being* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Reference to this text will be in the body of the article, simply indicating the page number.

² Actually, a given chapter is named for the work mainly considered in it, but there are small supplementary considerations, as, e.g., in the chapter on the *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics* there is a very brief consideration of *De substantiis separatis*.

Thomist school, one thinks of the complaint of Banez so heavily insisted upon by Gilson, that when Thomas proclaims that “*esse* is the act of all acts and the perfection of all perfections” “*Thomistae nolunt audire!*”: The Thomists do not wish to hear it! As regards the doctrine of being, the Thomists have not agreed among themselves.³ Gilson himself assures us that *nobody* has ever demonstrated the real distinction between essence and *esse*. That suggests that one of those who “most admire” Thomas (to use a “Kenny-ism”) has considerable difficulty with his doctrine of being.⁴ It would also be absurd to deny that Thomas has had, outside the school of his interpreters, many doctrinal adversaries.

Moreover, there is certainly development in Thomas’s presentations, considering his views in morals, ontology, and elsewhere, whether that bears witness to a change in theory or to a change in pedagogical context. The nature of the development has to be judged instance by instance. In general, it has seemed to me that Thomas was always fundamentally Aristotelian, and that, if anything, he became more thoroughly so as he went along; that he benefited from the work of Avicenna and Averroes in this respect, and that he exercised critical discernment about them all. In his earlier work, Avicenna is very prominent: He notably criticizes Avicenna in *De potentia* in favor of Averroes, as to some creatures having absolutely necessary being;⁵ but while Avicenna is criticized as regards the accidentality of the act of being in *Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics*,⁶ he is praised in the same *Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics* regarding the inclusion of matter in the essence of material things, and thus as having the authentic view of Aristotle.⁷ Averroes, while he is praised for his view of the existence of necessary beings in *De potentia*, is

³ Banez, *Scholastica commentaria in primam partem Summae Theologiae s. Thomae Aquinatis*. P. 1, Q. 3, a. 4; ed. Luis Urbano, Editorial F.E.D.A. Madrid-Valentia, 1934 (Biblioteca de tomistas espanoles, v. 1. Valentia, 1934), 141a.: Et hoc est quod saepissime D.Thomas clamat, et Thomistae nolunt audire: quod *esse* est actualitas omnis formae vel naturae, sicut in hoc art. in ratione secunda dicit, et quod in nulla re invenitur sicut recipiens et perfectibile, sed sicut receptum et perficitur id in quo recipitur: ipsum tamen, eo ipso quod recipitur deformitur, et ut ita dixerim imperficitur.

⁴ Cf. my paper “Etienne Gilson and the Actus Essendi” (revised version of 1999 publication), *International Journal of Philosophy* [Taipei] 1 (2002): 65–99. At one moment in his career Gilson thought Cajetan was someone who had truly seen the light, but later, Cajetan fell out of favor with him: cf. Gilson, “Compagnons de route,” in *Étienne Gilson, Philosophe de la Chrétienté* (Paris: Cerf, 1949), 275–95, at 293. Gilson is not mentioned in Kenny’s book.

⁵ *De potentia* 5.3.in corp. and ad 12.

⁶ *Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics* 4.2 (556 and 558).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.9 (1469).

criticized in *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics* for his failure to understand Aristotle on the cause of being as being.⁸

We must certainly ask ourselves why the line of argument concerning essence and *esse* so famously present in *De ente et essentia* and *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard* is not repeated in later works, and notably not in *Summa contra Gentiles* 2.52.⁹ In short, we do not have the ideal presentation we all (who are in metaphysics) would like Thomas to have provided. He was not, after all, primarily a metaphysician, but rather a professor of Christian theology, "*sacra doctrina*."¹⁰ What I do not think for a moment is that Thomas was "confused" about being.

Form as Cause of Being

Kenny's first chapter concerns the *De ente et essentia* prior to its discussion of immaterial substances. One can hardly fault Kenny for beginning with the *De ente*, which has been used by some prominent Thomists to present Thomas's doctrine of being.¹¹ It is only after his two chapters on the *De ente* that Kenny comes to speak of the *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*. It is regrettable that he completely ignored such fundamental presentations as the probably earlier *Commentary on*

⁸ Ibid., 8.2 (ed. Maggiolo, no. 974 [4]–975 [5]); cf. also *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics* 8.21 (1154 [14]). Cf. also In *De caelo* 1.6.5, where Averroes is seen to misunderstand the potentiality that belongs to form with respect to being.

⁹ This most remarkable text is never alluded to by Kenny! I quote it in the next section.

¹⁰ Kenny's book is not a place to find out about Thomas's history or the nature of his works. Thus, we have the statement that the *Summa contra Gentiles* is "a work not of revealed theology, but of natural theology, and natural theology is a branch of philosophy" (81). Even if we limit this, as Kenny presumably intended, to the first three books, it is quite untrue. Of course, the reasons for its being an untrue description are not of the sort that interest Kenny, but they are solid nevertheless. The title "On the Truth of the Catholic Faith" is quite truly appropriate. Kenny, after translating the words "*Summa contra Gentiles*" as "summary or synopsis against unbelievers" and mentioning that the most frequently used English translation bears the title "On the Truth of the Catholic Faith," opts to keep the Latin. He tells us he will be referring in the notes to the Pera edition (81n1), but he does not mention that that edition bears the primary title: "*Liber de Veritate Catholicae Fidei contra errores Infidelium*," i.e., "Book concerning the truth of the Catholic faith, against the errors of the unbelievers" (it adds "*seu 'Summa contra Gentiles'*" in smaller print). Thomas is only interested in the truth that the Catholic faith professes, i.e., the revealed truth. This truth, he tells us, includes two modes: truth that the faith professes and reason can investigate, and truth professed by the faith but beyond the investigatory power of human reason.

¹¹ I think especially of Joseph Owens.

the *Sentences of Peter Lombard* 1.8, which, in my judgment, could have saved him some difficulties.

What I notice first of all about Kenny's presentation of the *De ente* is that he fails to comment on the introductory passage, which speaks of the hierarchy of being to be discussed. Thomas explains:

But because "*ens*" is said absolutely and primarily of substances, and posteriorly and in a somewhat qualified sense of accidents, thus it is that *essentia* also properly and truly is in substances, but in accidents it is in a certain measure and in a qualified sense. But of substances, some are simple and some are composite, and in both there is *essentia*; but in the simple in a truer and more noble degree [*ueriori et nobiliori modo*], inasmuch as they also have more noble *esse*; for they are the cause of those which are composite, at least [this is true of] the first simple substance which is God.¹²

This picture of "truer and more noble" essence in separate substance, and "more noble *esse*" as related to causal hierarchy, should have been noted. We will eventually see Kenny puzzle over Thomas's Fourth Way (of proving the existence of a God), claiming that it cannot be about hierarchy of *existence*. But, indeed, that is just what it is about, just as it is here what the *De ente et essentia* is speaking of.

I will begin with the doctrine that form is the cause of *esse*. Kenny expresses puzzlement about this already in his chapter 1, and it is repeated in chapter 2.

In chapter 1, Kenny raises a question concerning the following:

[I]t is necessary that the essence, in function of which the thing is called "a being," be not merely the form nor merely the matter, but both, *though the form alone, in its own mode, is the cause of such esse*.¹³

Kenny wonders why matter is omitted from the causal picture, since there is obviously such a thing as material causality. He says that surely the point cannot be that only form is the *formal* cause.¹⁴

¹² *De ente et essentia* c. 1 (ed. Leonine, lines 53–63), emphasis added.

¹³ *Ibid.*, c. 2 (lines 50–66), emphasis added:

oportet quod essentia, qua *res* denominatur *ens*, non tantum sit forma neque tantum materia, sed utrumque, quamvis *huiusmodi esse suo modo sola forma sit causa*.

¹⁴ Cf. Kenny at p. 11 *ca* n. 18. I would say that the point of the limitation, i.e., "in its own mode," is to exclude the idea that the form is the *efficient* cause of the *esse* of the thing; i.e., the form alone (excluding the matter) is the cause of being, but only the formal cause, not the efficient cause. Thomas is not saying that the matter is not a formal cause since, as Kenny says, that is too obvious to need saying. Cf. *De ente et essentia* c. 4 [lines 127–35]:

In Kenny's chapter 2, the same point seems to be at issue. Thomas, having argued (*De ente et essentia* c. 4) that the intelligences or the soul must be immaterial, explains the doctrine of the *Liber de causis*, that they are forms without matter, by the argument that since form gives being to matter, form can exist without matter (since a cause of being can exist without its effect, but not inversely). Thomas says that if there are forms that cannot exist without matter, this is not proper to form as form, but because these forms are remote from the first cause, which is pure act.¹⁵

This troubles Kenny. He does not see form as the cause of *esse simpliciter*, but only of *esse quid*, relative to the matter (cf. 31n11; the Latin is Kenny's). Already from the point of view of vocabulary Kenny's view of is alarming. Thus, in the early treatise *De principiis naturae*, c. 1, Thomas explains:

Be it known that something can be though it is not, whereas something else is. That which can be is said to "be in potency"; that which already is, is said to "be in act." But being [*esse*] is twofold: viz. *the essential or substantial being of the thing*, as for example: being a man; and this is "being" in the unqualified sense [*esse simpliciter*]. The other is accidental being, for example, that the man is white; and this is "being something."¹⁶

Omne autem quod convenit alicui vel est causatum ex principiis naturae suae, sicut risibile in homine, vel advenit ab aliquo principio extrinseco, sicut lumen in aere ex influentia solis. *Non autem potest esse quod ipsum esse sit causatum ab ipsa forma vel quidditate rei (dico sicut a causa efficiente)* quia sic aliqua *res* esset sui ipsius causa et aliqua *res* seipsam in *esse* produceret, quod est impossibile. . . . [Everything which belongs to something either is caused by the principles of its own nature, as capability of laughter in man, or comes from some extrinsic principle, as light in air from the influence of the sun. Now, it cannot be that being itself be caused by the form itself or quiddity of the thing (*I mean as by an efficient cause*), because thus some thing would be cause of its very own self, and some thing would launch itself into existence; which is impossible.]

¹⁵ The first cause itself is not termed "pure form" here in the *De ente et essentia*, which is indebted here to the *De causis*; however, in the *Summa theologiae* I, q. 3, a. 2, Thomas has no qualms about presenting God as "through his own essence, form" [*per essentiam suam forma*].

¹⁶ *De principiis naturae*, c. 1:

Nota quod quoddam potest *esse* licet non sit, quoddam vero est. Illud quod potest *esse* dicitur *esse* potentia; illud quod iam est, dicitur *esse* actu. Sed duplex est *esse*: scilicet *esse* *essentiale rei, sive substantiale ut hominem esse, et hoc est esse simpliciter*. Est autem aliud *esse* accidentale, ut hominem esse album, et hoc est *esse* aliquid. [emphasis added]

And we see this in many texts throughout Thomas's career. Cf. *ST* I, q. 5, a. 1, ad 1:

For Thomas, “being a what” and “being unqualifiedly” go together: That is, *esse quid* is *esse simpliciter*. I would say Kenny fails to grasp the existential importance of generation and hylomorphism; a thing that is corrupted ceases to *be*. Yes, matter is “incorruptible,” but only in the way that matter “is” at all.¹⁷

The question for me is what Kenny means by “*esse simpliciter*,” such that he distinguishes it from “*esse quid*.” In the main text, which his note 11 complements, Kenny writes:

When Aquinas says that form gives *esse* to matter, all that he can mean is that form makes matter to be the kind of thing it is; he cannot mean that it brings matter into existence. When a substantial change takes place, no new matter enters the world, but matter that already existed under one form begins to exist under another. (31)

What this suggests to me is that Kenny’s word “existence” really refers to the answer to the question: “Does it exist?” rather than to the act of being (*actus essendi*).¹⁸

Thomas’s word “*esse*,” though it does the work of signifying the answer to the question: “does it exist?” (thus signifying the truth of propositions),

cum ens dicat aliquid proprie *esse* in actu; actus autem proprie ordinem habeat ad potentiam; secundum hoc simpliciter aliquid dicitur ens, secundum quod primo discernitur ab eo quod est in potentia tantum. Hoc autem est *esse* substantiale rei uniuscuiusque; unde per suum *esse* substantiale dicitur unumquodque *ens simpliciter*.

And *ST I*, q. 76, a. 4:

forma substantialis in hoc a forma accidentali differt quia forma accidentalis non dat *esse* simpliciter, sed *esse* tale, sicut calor facit suum subiectum non simpliciter *esse*, sed *esse* calidum. . . . *Forma autem substantialis* dat *esse simpliciter*, et ideo per eius adventum dicitur aliquid simpliciter generari, et per eius recessum simpliciter corrumpi.

¹⁷ Indeed, while Thomas appeals to the incorruptibility of matter when arguing that God will not annihilate things (cf. *ST I*, q. 104, a. 4), it is also part of that picture that matter can only be incorruptible as participating in actuality through a form: cf. *ST I*, q. 46, a. 1, obj. 1 (if you have matter, you must have form and a world), and *De potentia* 5.7.in toto and ad 11.

¹⁸ Cf. *ST I*, q. 3, a. 4, ad 2. I notice in the above-mentioned review by J rgen Vjgen that at p. 217 he criticizes Knasas for insufficiently distinguishing “between *esse* as actual existence and *esse* as the intrinsic act of being (*actus essendi*).” Without making any judgment here about Knasas, I would insist that the word “existence” is ambiguous, and must be used at times not only for the answer to the question “does it exist?” but also for the intrinsic act of being. My point is that Kenny uses the word “existence” exclusively for the answer to the question “does it exist?”

also signifies the thing's own act which is "to be," as meaning the perfection which terminates a thing's generation.¹⁹ It is what characterizes, we may also say, the effect of an efficient cause, which, in giving form to matter, gives the thing its peculiar existence. Thomas speaks of the situation, for example, in *Summa contra Gentiles* 2.54 (a most prominent ontological text never referred to by Kenny), as follows:

Now, the composition out of matter and form is not of the same sort as that out of substance and being: though each is out of potency and act.

Firstly, this is because matter is not the very substance of the thing: for [if that were so] it would follow that all forms were accidents: just as the ancient natural philosophers opined; but rather, matter is a part of the substance.

Secondly, because *the very act of being is not the proper act of the matter*, but rather of the substance as a whole: for being is the act of that concerning which we can say: "it is"; now, "being" is not said of the matter, but of the whole; whence, *matter cannot be called "that which is,"* but rather the substance itself is that which is.

Thirdly, because neither is form the very being [*esse*], but they [viz. form and *esse*] stand related in an order: for the form stands related to the very being as light [the quality] stands to illuminating, or as whiteness stands to being white.

Then again, because the very being [*esse*] has the role of act relative even towards the form itself; for it is *through this* that in things composed out of matter and form the *form* is said to be *the principle of being* [*principium essendi*], viz. because it is the completion of the *substance* whose act is being itself: just as the transparent is for the air the principle of being actually illuminated, in that it makes [the air] the proper subject of light.

Hence, in things composed out of matter and form, neither the matter nor the form can be called the very "that which is"; nor also [can] the very *esse* [be called "that which is"]. Nevertheless, the *form* can be called "that by which it [viz. the substance] is," inasmuch as it is *the principle of being*; but the substance as a whole is "that which is"; and the very being [*ipsam esse*] is that in function of which the substance is called "a being."²⁰

¹⁹ Cf. *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard* 1.33.1.1.ad 1 on meanings of "*esse*." For the connection of the act of the essence with terminus of generation, cf. e.g., SCG 2.52 and 1.26.

²⁰ SCG 2.54 [in part]:

[1287] Quod non est idem componi ex substantia et esse, et materia et forma.

Non est autem eiusdem rationis compositio ex materia et forma, et ex substantia et esse: quamvis utraque sit ex potentia et actu.

The substance as a whole has the act of being. It has it from an efficient cause which confers a new form on matter: In that way, a new mode of substantial existence, that is, a new mode of unqualified existence, for example, being a dog, is conferred on the matter, which previously had some other mode of unqualified existence, as the matter of a quite other substance. The matter in itself is only that which receives unqualified existence from an agent through a form: Thus, in its “substance,” it is a pure receptive potency for unqualified existence. Indeed, it is never unqualifiedly true that the matter “is”: It participates in the act of being only through form.

Because of its precise ontological status and role, the matter cannot exist save as under form. No miracle could bring about “pure matter.”²¹ If Kenny thinks of the matter as something having its own act of being, its own existence, he is returning to the error of the ancient naturalists. This is not surprising since, as Aristotle says concerning his notion of primary matter, it is the answer to a most difficult problem. In *De generatione et corruptione* he shows how difficult it is to conceive of unqualified coming to be, precisely because of the difficulty of conceiving of primary matter, that which is potentially a substantial actuality.²² Only when it is realized that such matter

[1288] Primo quidem, quia materia non est ipsa substantia rei, nam sequeretur omnes formas *esse* accidentia, sicut antiqui naturales opinabantur: sed materia est pars substantiae.

[1289] Secundo autem quia ipsum *esse* non est proprius actus materiae, sed substantiae totius. Eius enim actus est *esse* de quo possumus dicere quod sit. *Esse* autem non dicitur de materia, sed de toto. Unde materia non potest dici quod est, sed ipsa substantia est id quod Est.

[1290] Tertio, quia nec forma est ipsum *esse*, sed se habent secundum ordinem: comparatur enim forma ad ipsum *esse* sicut lux ad lucere, vel albedo ad album *esse*.

[1291] Deinde quia ad ipsam etiam formam comparatur ipsum *esse* ut actus. Per hoc enim in compositis ex materia et forma dicitur forma *esse* principium essendi, quia est complementum substantiae, cuius actus est ipsum *esse*: sicut diaphanum est aeri principium lucendi quia facit eum proprium subiectum luminis.

[1292] Unde in compositis ex materia et forma nec materia nec forma potest dici ipsum quod est, nec etiam ipsum *esse*. Forma tamen potest dici quo est, secundum quod est essendi principium; ipsa autem tota substantia est ipsum quod est; et ipsum *esse* est quo substantia denominatur ens.

²¹ Cf. *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard* 4.11.2; *ST* I, q. 66, a. 1; *Quodl.* 3.1.1 (a full discussion).

²² Aristotle says:

it is extraordinarily difficult [*thaumasten aporian*] to see how there can be “unqualified coming-to-be” (whether we suppose it to occur out of what

never does and indeed cannot exist separately is there a satisfactory solution to what Aristotle describes as the "wondrous difficulty." Primary matter exists only as part of the composite of form and matter.²³

On the other hand, the peculiar ontological role of form, as the principle of actual being, includes in itself no obstacle to its existing by itself. Its role of formal cause is all that is needed to make the argument that the cause of being *can* exist without its effect.²⁴

Kenny asks what about material causality and its role as cause of being? The answer to this, I would say, one sees in Thomas's *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics*. Matter has a causal role as regards the being of the resulting generated thing inasmuch as that thing must preexist in something else. However, speaking of the resulting thing, just in itself, only the form is the cause of its being. We read:

It is necessary that the causes be four. Because, since a cause is that upon which the being of another follows, the being of that which has a cause can be considered in two ways: *in one way, absolutely*, and thus *the cause of being is the form, through which something is in act*; in the other way, according as from potentially a being there is brought about what is actually a being. And because everything which is in potency is reduced to act by that which is a being in act, on this account it is necessary that there be two other causes, viz. the matter, and the agent which reduces the matter from potency into act. Now, the action of the agent tends towards something determinate, just as it proceeds from some determinate principle:

potentially "is" [*ek dunameiontos*], or in some other way), and we must recall this problem for further examination. (317b18–20) [Oxford trans: Harold H. Joachim]

Thomas's paraphrase, *In De gen.* 1.6 (49 [8]), runs:

because even after the preceding determination there still looms a *wondrous difficulty* [*mirabilis dubitatio*], one must once more attempt [to determine] how unqualified coming to be occurs [*sit*], whether out of being in potency or how it comes about in any other way.

²³ Aristotle, *De gen. et corr.* 1.3 (317a32–318a27); cf. Thomas, *In De gen.* 1.6–7.

²⁴ That argument, just by itself, does not establish there does exist any separate form; it is merely about the possibility (in contrast to the case of separate matter). The actual existence of subsisting form is established, for example, by showing that the human soul must be subsistent form, on the basis of the requirements of intellection: cf. *ST I*, q. 75, a. 2 and 5, but also *De ente et essentia* c. 4 [lines 8–40], and in *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard* 1.8.5.2 and 2.17.1.2. On Thomas's use throughout his career of that argument for the possibility, cf. my paper: "St. Thomas Aquinas against Metaphysical Materialism," in *Atti del'VIII Congresso Tomistico Internazionale*, t. V, 412–434 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1982), 412–34.

for every agent brings to actuality that which is suitable for itself; and that towards which the action of the agent tends is called the “final” cause. Thus, it is necessary that there be four causes. But because *the form is the cause of being absolutely*, whereas *the others are causes of being inasmuch as something receives being*, thus it is that in immobile things the other three causes are not considered, but only the formal cause.²⁵

This, of course, as a text from the *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics*, takes a rather restricted, that is, physical, view of the final and efficient causes, and even a limited view of “immobile things,” by which Thomas seems here to mean mathematical. In the perspective of metaphysics, which considers things precisely as beings, one considers the “receiving” of being where the receiving is not a change, that is, creative efficient causality. Form has an instrumental role, under the creative cause, but matter is strictly in the role of effect. Thus, in *De veritate* we read:

God causes in us natural *esse* by creation, without the mediation of any efficient cause, but nevertheless through the mediation of a formal cause: because natural form is the principle of natural *esse*.²⁶

²⁵ *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics* 2.10.15 [Maggolo 240], emphasis added:

Necesse est autem quatuor *esse* causas. Quia cum causa sit ad quam *sequitur esse* alterius, *esse* eius quod habet causam, potest considerari dupliciter: uno modo absolute, et sic *causa essendi est forma per quam aliquid est in actu*; alio modo secundum quod de potentia ente fit actu ens. Et quia omne quod est in potentia, reducitur ad actum per id quod est actu ens; ex hoc necesse est *esse* duas alias causas, scilicet materiam, et agentem qui reducit materiam de potentia in actum. Actio autem agentis ad aliquid determinatum tendit, sicut ab aliquo determinato principio procedit: nam omne agens agit quod est sibi conveniens; id autem ad quod tendit actio agentis, dicitur causa finalis. Sic igitur necesse est *esse* causas quatuor. Sed quia forma est causa essendi absolute, aliae vero tres sunt causae essendi secundum quod aliquid accipit *esse*; inde est quod in immobilibus non considerantur aliae tres causae, sed solum causa formalis.

Cf. also *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics* 3.2 (346), 3.4 (369), and 3.4 (384), and my paper, “St. Thomas, Metaphysics, and Formal Causality,” *Laval théologique et philosophique* 36 (1980): 285–316, at 289–90.

²⁶ St. Thomas, *De veritate* 27.1.ad 3 (ed. Leonine, t. 22/3, lines 182–86). An important remark is to be found at *De potentia* 3.1.ad 17. The question is posed: Can God make something out of nothing? The objector reasons that the maker gives *esse* to the thing made. If what receives the *esse* is *nothing*, then it is nothing that is constituted in existence [*esse*]*—*and thus nothing is made. If, on the other hand, it is *something* that receives the *esse*, then this is not making something out of nothing. Thomas replies:

God, simultaneously giving *esse*, produces that which receives *esse*: and thus it is not necessary that he work on something already existing. This

And Thomas says in *Quaestiones disputatae de anima*:

In substances composed out of matter and form, we find three [items], viz. matter, and form, and, [as a] third, *esse*, whose principle is form. For matter, by the fact that it receives form, participates in *esse*. Thus, therefore, *esse* follows upon form itself, nor nevertheless is form its own *esse*, since it is its principle [*cum sit eius principium*].²⁷ And though matter does not attain to *esse* save through form, form nevertheless, inasmuch as it is form, does not need matter for its *esse*, since *esse* follows upon form itself [*cum ipsam formam consequatur esse*]; but it needs matter since [*cum*] it is such form as does not subsist by itself.²⁸

It occurs to me that another way of making my point is to stress that there is no divine idea of matter just in itself. As Thomas says:

Plato, according to some people, held that matter is not created, and so he did not posit that there is an idea of matter, but that matter is a concause [along with God]. But because we hold that matter is created by God, but not without form, it has indeed an idea in God, but not other than that of the composite: for matter, taken as regards its very self, neither has being [*esse*] nor is knowable.²⁹

allows us to see that, God being posited on high as agent, we analyse his product, a being, i.e., *ens*, in which are found together a multiplicity of intelligible ontological factors, such as *esse*, form, matter, etc., i.e., *only* by what I would call “formal analysis” does metaphysics make sense. One should not view the *esse* of the thing as something that itself *has esse* and gives it to essence; this is to view it as an agent, i.e., a subsisting thing. Least of all should matter be regarded as itself having *esse*.

²⁷ I translate “*cum*” here as “since” rather than “though” because a few lines below it twice clearly means “since.”

²⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de anima* q. 6, lines 229–40 (*Opera omnia*, t. XXIV, 1. Roma-Paris: Commissio Leonina/Cerf, 1996, ed. B.-B. Bazan). On the argument concerning form in this passage, see my paper, “St. Thomas Aquinas against Metaphysical Materialism,” in *Atti del’VIII Congresso Tomistico Internazionale*, t.V (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1982), 412–34.

²⁹ Thomas, at *ST I*, q. 15, a. 3, is asking whether all items which God knows have ideas in the divine mind. The third objection holds that whereas God knows primary matter, it cannot have an idea since it has no form. The reply is:

Ad tertium dicendum quod Plato, secundum quosdam, posuit materiam non creatam, et ideo non posuit ideam *esse* materiae, sed materiae [*read: materiam*] concausam. Sed quia nos ponimus materiam creatam a deo, non tamen sine forma, habet quidem materia ideam in deo, non tamen aliam ab idea compositi. Nam materia secundum se neque *esse* habet, neque cognoscibilis est.

Separate Entity: Form without Matter

Kenny's second chapter considers *De ente et essentia* 4, on essence as found in separate substance: the human soul, intelligences, and the first cause.³⁰ Kenny begins (25) by speaking as though we had not been told at the outset of *De ente et essentia* that essence was to be found more truly in simple substances. In fact, Aquinas does not "spring" separate substance on us at the beginning of *De ente et essentia* 4, as a reader of Kenny alone could very well think.

He notes that Thomas does not bother to prove the existence of the beings he is speaking of here, but that he does undertake to prove their substantial immateriality. In fact this amounts, in the case of the human soul, whose existence is evident,³¹ to proving that it is a subsisting form. This has its importance, since Kenny seems immediately to think of Platonism whenever form by itself is mentioned; Thomas's route to the existence of subsistent form is not at all Platonic. Opposing here Solomon Ibn Gebirol's doctrine that all beings but God must be matter-form composites, Thomas calls the argument he himself uses "the strongest demonstration" of the philosophers. Kenny questions the argument's adequacy to show that the intellective soul must be immaterial. He accuses (28) Thomas of not distinguishing between sense and intellect here, but Thomas actually does so, mentioning that the intellect considers things in

³⁰ Kenny, presumably because of the term "separate," says [p. 25] that we are discussing the human soul as in an intermediate state, between death and the final resurrection. This is not so. In fact, we are simply considering the ontology of the human soul, whether in a body or out of a body. Perhaps Thomas starts out with the expression "separate substances" because he wants to indicate the distance that exists between what Gebirol teaches and what the philosophers teach, calling spiritual beings below God "separate," i.e., from matter: cf. lines 5–11. (Thomas, at this point in the *De ente et essentia*, is using the vocabulary of the *Liber de causis*: cf. *De veritate* 5.9.ad 7, where we are told that the term "*anima nobilis*" in the *Liber de causis* will apply to any rational soul.) In the present chapter, it is clear that it is the operation of the human soul in this present life that is providing the basis for saying anything about intellectual substances: cf. *De ente et essentia* c. 4 (lines 13–22). Thus, Thomas neatly speaks in the chapter of "intellectual substances," and especially in lines 178–92, where the ontology of the human soul is focused upon.

³¹ That the existence of the human soul is evident by itself is clear from the fact that in *ST I*, q. 75, on the essence of the human soul, the first article does not address the question: "Does it exist?" Instead, it asks whether the soul is a body: Since "soul" means "first principle of life in those living things which are in our realm (of corporeal reality)," soul exists as evidently as does the distinction between living and non-living thing.

abstraction from matter *and material conditions*,³² something not true of sense.³³ Kenny also conjectures that Thomas is using some unspoken premise, such as that like is known by like. That of course is something Thomas would hold, but I would suggest that two truly relevant unspoken premises would be (1) that things are received in keeping with the mode of the receiver, and (2) that every agent produces something like itself. I say this because Thomas's extremely compact argument neatly includes the roles of both possible and agent intellects. We read:

Of this the strongest demonstration is from the power of understanding which is in them [viz. intelligent substances]. For we see that forms are not intelligible in act save according as they are separated from matter and from its conditions, nor are they rendered intelligible in act save by the power of the intelligent substance, according as they are received in it and according as they are effected by it. Hence, it is necessary that in any intelligent substance whatsoever there be complete immunity from matter, in such a way that it have neither a material part of itself nor even that it have the status of a form impressed on matter as is the case with material forms.³⁴

The separation is from matter and its conditions. The being of actual intelligibles requires reception in something entirely immaterial, in that something is received in accordance with the mode of the receiver. The coming to be of the actual intelligibles requires the sort of agent that can produce such a product: The agent produces something like itself. Thus, we have the respective roles of possible and agent intellect.³⁵

Kenny objects to the very notion of "form" as applied to the separate substances. In doing so, he says that form was introduced in this book, that is, the *De ente et essentia*, in relation to the Aristotelian categories:

³² *De ente et essentia* c. 4 (lines 13–15).

³³ Cf. the *De ente et essentia* contemporary text, *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard* 1.38.1.2. Cf. also SCG 2.82.

³⁴ *De ente et essentia* c. 4 (lines 11–22):

Cuius demonstratio potissima est ex virtute intelligendi, quae in eis est. Videmus enim formas non *esse* intelligibiles in actu nisi secundum quod separantur a materia et a condicionibus eius, nec efficiuntur intelligibiles in actu nisi per virtutem substantiae intelligentis, secundum quod recipiuntur in ea et secundum quod aguntur per eam. Unde oportet quod in qualibet substantia intelligente sit omnino immunitas a materia, ita quod neque habeat materiam partem sui neque etiam sit sicut forma impressa in materia ut est de formis materialibus.

³⁵ At p. 26 Kenny says that Aquinas is great on "mind," but his remarks here on the roles of agent and possible intellect ["the storehouse of ideas and knowledge once acquired"] do not suggest he is the best judge.

substantial forms being what corresponded in reality to true predicates in the first category, and accidental forms being what corresponded in reality to true predicates in the remaining nine categories. But it is hard to see how pure form can be explained by reference to predication. (29–30)

This is rather odd. This may have been Kenny's way of approaching substantial form, but it is clearly not Thomas's. There is no doubt that the predication considerations are helpful, but they require supplementation from more philosophical considerations, such as generation and corruption. Indeed, substantial form is first actuality relative to matter's potentiality. Thus, in the very context, Thomas speaks of form giving being to matter. When we come to Thomas's *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics* we are told that the predication approach is only a preliminary, and that when one comes to matter and form, one has introduced the real principles of things; this is done by the physical route.³⁶ Accordingly, the proper approach to form is one that gets us into being as divided by act and potency, and it is no wonder that the term "form" is used according to priority and posteriority, in order to speak of what is substantial in immaterial beings.³⁷

In the *De ente et essentia*, in fact, c. 2 begins with the statement that form and matter are *known*, and gives as example soul and body in man. Thus, it does not really explain form or soul, but takes it for granted that

³⁶ On the logical and the physical approaches to essence, form, and matter, cf. Thomas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics* 7.2 (1286–287); on the general role of these approaches in metaphysics, cf. *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics* 7.11 (1535–536), and my aforementioned paper: "St. Thomas, Metaphysics, and Formal Causality," 293–304.

³⁷ Thus in his *QD de immortalitate animae*, obj. 17 and ad 17, Thomas explains how, even though the human soul is incorruptible, the common definition of soul as "form of a natural, organized body" is verified. We read:

Ad decimum septimum dicendum, quod sicut supra dictum est (ad primum), forma non est corruptibilis nisi per accidens. Unde ex hoc quod anima vegetalis est corruptibilis, non autem rationalis, non sequitur quod aequivoce dicatur utraque: nec tamen oportet quod omnino univoce, *nam forma et actus et huiusmodi sunt de his, quae analogice praedicantur de diversis*. It is to be said that, as was said above (ad 1), form is not corruptible save through association. Hence, from the fact that the vegetative soul is corruptible, but the rational soul is not, it does not follow that they are called ["form"] equivocally, nor nevertheless need it be altogether univocally: *for "form" and "act" and the like are among those items which are analogically predicated of diverse items.* [emphasis added]

This work is to be found in Leonard A. Kennedy, "A New Disputed Question of St. Thomas Aquinas on the Immortality of the Soul," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge*, 45 (1978): 205–8 (introduction) and 209–23 (text).

there is some acquaintance with such a doctrine as one finds in Aristotle's *Physics* and *De anima*.

Kenny tells us:

Forms are forms of the entity which is the subject of predication: Socrates's wisdom is what corresponds to the predicate in the sentence "Socrates is wise," and Plato's humanity is what corresponds to the predicate in the sentence "Plato is human." In the same way, a pure form would be something that corresponded to a predicate in a sentence that has no subject; but this seems close to an absurdity.³⁸ What, we wonder, is the difference between the angelic pure forms that Aquinas accepts and the Platonic Ideas or Forms that he rejects? (30)

What I wonder is why it does not occur to Kenny that he has got things wrong somehow. It is very clear in *De ente et essentia* 4 that we are working with conceptions that pertain to the study of cognitive beings and the nature of the intellective soul, as presented in Aristotle's *De anima* and commentaries on it. Kenny's merely predicational approach will not do.

If Kenny really did wonder how Thomas's subsisting forms differ from Platonic Ideas, he might have looked at the texts where Thomas explains this. I have not found him doing so in the book. What is clear in the *De ente et essentia* is that it is on the basis of the argument for the human intellective soul as incorporeal, subsisting and pure form that he develops a discussion of such beings. It is simple enough to find him explaining his rejection of the Platonic approach to the existence of separate entity.³⁹

³⁸ This is very odd for a reader of Aristotle, let alone Thomas Aquinas. As we see in the logical or predicational treatment of a thing and its quiddity, in *Metaphysics* 7.6 (1031b28–1032a2), and cf. *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics* 7.5 (1373–375), the thing, i.e., the subject of predication, and its quiddity, i.e., the predicate, are identical, not in just any way, but even notionally. A separate entity is excellent for per se predication, precisely because of the identity of subject and predicate. Cf. *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics* 7.11 (1536), concerning pure subsistent forms; and Aristotle, 7.11 (1037a33–b4). The problem posed by Kenny reminds one of the objection made to predicating anything of God, in that, as Boethius says, pure form cannot be a subject: *ST* I, q. 13, a. 12, obj. 2; as St. Thomas says, the objector has not taken into consideration the way our minds must approach simple things.

³⁹ Of course, one thinks especially of the relatively late *De substantiis separatis* c. 2, where Thomas begins by rejecting the Platonic approach at its very root; nevertheless such texts exist at every stage in Thomas's career: cf. e.g., *In Boeth. De trin.* 5.2 and 5.4. The general criticism is best spelled out in *ST* I, q. 84, a. 1. Nevertheless, one can establish the existence of subsisting form and even of subsisting esse and goodness, and in that way can see a truth in what Plato held: cf. e.g., *ST* I, q. 6, a. 4.

Thomas, having argued that the intelligence or the soul must be immaterial, explains the doctrine of the *Liber de causis*, that it is form without matter, by the argument that since form gives being to matter, form can exist without matter (since a cause of being can exist without its effect, but not inversely, and form gives being to matter). Thomas says that if there are forms that cannot exist without matter, this is not proper to form as form, but because these forms are remote from the first cause, which is pure act, that is, pure form. We discussed the meaning of this argument earlier.

Treatment of the “Intellectus essentiae” Argument

It is true that the argument in *De ente et essentia* 4 for the distinction between the essence or quiddity of a thing and its *esse* has occasioned much argument. It is also true that it is an argument that Thomas used only in the first Parisian period (indeed, while still a Bachelor of the *Sentences*). Is this to say that it is not valid? I do not think so.⁴⁰

One source of puzzlement is the examples used, man and phoenix. In parallel texts of the period, sometimes the example is man alone.⁴¹ In one text man is omitted and an eclipse is mentioned along with the phoenix.⁴²

As I read the argument, while it clearly has a background in Avicenna (and Algazel's presentation of him), it should be seen as using the doctrine of Aristotle in *Metaphysics* 7, chapters 10 and 15. Aristotle teaches that we can know the definition of man, and yet not know whether the individual man exists.⁴³ Aristotle is speaking of the individual as an individual;

⁴⁰ Cf. my paper “St. Thomas, Joseph Owens, and the Real Distinction between Being and Essence,” *Modern Schoolman* 61 (1984): 145–56.

⁴¹ Cf. *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard* 1.8.4.2, where the argument (as to why God is not in any genus), whose subtlety Thomas notes, is traced to Avicenna. Cf. Avicenna, *Liber de philosophia prima sive scientia divina*, tr. 8, cap. 4 [S. Van Riet, ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1980), tr. V–X, 404, especially lines 97–100: There, Avicenna is arguing that the first principle is not in a genus. An objection is made, contending that the first principle is in the genus of substance: It maintains that the notion of substance is simply “being, and not in a subject.” Avicenna argues that this is not the notion of substance. That notion is rather of something having a quiddity to which not being in a subject belongs. In order to prove the difference between what he is saying and what the objector contends, he continues:

The proof that between the two there is a difference, and that one of them is a genus and the other not, is this: that concerning the individual [substance] of some man of whose existence one is ignorant it can be said that it is that whose being is that it not be in a subject; nor do you say that he now is and not in a subject. [I translate with the help of the editor's supplements from the Arabic.]

⁴² *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard* 2.3.1.1.

⁴³ Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 7.15 (1039b20–1040a7), and especially 7.10 (1036a2–8).

in the 7.10 passage, his example is the individual circle, whether physical or mathematical.

The *Intellectus essentiae* argument bears on this situation. We have encountered essence in our experience. Thus, we already know what we mean by an "essence," and what its real requirements are; and so we can formulate the premise that no essence is understandable if one omits a part of it. This should be something one can appreciate with respect to either of the two examples Thomas uses, the man and the phoenix. I generally use the approach of presenting a well-known artifact, the bicycle. We understand the operation and can appreciate what are the essential parts of the thing that make operation possible. It is this grasp of a thing as a coherent viable entity that is meant by understanding the essence. We understand what it would be for it to be missing an essential part. Our conceptions of artifacts are imitations of our conceptions of natural things. However, there is this significant difference, that what we mean by an "essence" is tied to that in a natural thing that is a principle of reproduction.⁴⁴ We also see that the sort of thing we are primarily aware of is destructible. Thus, when the individual is absent, we do not know whether it exists.

While Kenny found the argument odd when the example of the man was used, obviously because when no one else is present, still we are always present to ourselves when we are thinking about such things, I see no difficulty because I take it that the argument is about knowledge of the essence and knowledge of the existence of the individual, taken as regards such things. If one's own humanity gets in the way of making the point, then by all means substitute elephants. St. Thomas points out elsewhere that if all lions or horses were eliminated, one could still know their essences, speaking of knowledge in the mode of "what the thing is."⁴⁵

Thus, for me, the more problematic example is the phoenix. I pointed out in my paper on the *Intellectus essentiae* argument that it must be taken as at least a pseudo-essence. Kenny draws from its use, I would say, the conclusion that the argument must be about the meanings of words, not about real essence having real definition. I think the real point is that even

⁴⁴ I would say that it is crucial that our knowledge of essence, as used in the argument, arises from experience of the reproduction of natural things, and is not merely based on predication considerations. Cf. Thomas, *Expositio libri Posteriorum* 1.37 (ed. Leonine, lines 173–87, Spiazzi no. 330), commenting on Aristotle, 85b15, on the mode of being which pertains to the common nature, in contrast to the existent individual; on the reality of the form which grounds the common nature, cf. *Expositio libri Posteriorum* 2.20 (lines 183–92), concerning Aristotle at 100a7b.

⁴⁵ SCG 1.66.5.

pseudo-essences are based on our prior knowledge of real essence. We do not have to know, when we deal with the meaning of a substantial name, whether we are dealing with a real thing or not. We already understand the general sort of thing our words are meant to signify, and that is enough. That is why we can raise a question such as “does it exist?” It is because we already have words like “man,” “stone,” etc., which do not normally require an investigation to see whether there is such a thing, that we can raise such a question about some unknowns. The general situation, with respect to generable and corruptible things, on which our conceptions and language are based, is that we can know what they are and not know whether an individual exists in such a nature.

How was the phoenix example used by Algazel? Algazel, presenting a doctrine concerning the necessary being (that is, God), viz. that it is not called “a substance,” even though it is existent by itself and not existent in a subject, uses the *phoenix* as follows:

For just as they [the philosophers] have agreed that substance is nothing else but that which is a thing whose being is not being in a subject, that is, that when it will be, it is not in a subject, not that it has in itself being actually: of which thing let an example for you be the animal which is called “a phoenix”: it is a substance, without doubt, and nevertheless you are in doubt whether [now] it is or is not; and it is similar with many other substances.⁴⁶

Surely it is chosen because it is the sort of thing about which one is not sure of its existence; yet it is meant to illustrate the case of *every substance*.

This is obviously a reporting of Avicenna’s doctrine that the meaning of “substance,” as naming the genus, is that which has a quiddity such that being per se belongs to it, though the quiddity is other than the *being*. Such a meaning of “substance,” he teaches, should not be used concerning the Necessary Being, who has no quiddity other than being. Algazel, aiming to show that this is indeed what we think under the name of “substance,” that

⁴⁶ Algazel, *Metaphysica*, J. T. Muckle, CSB, ed. (Toronto: St. Michael’s College, 1933), part I, tract. 2 (ed. cit., 57, lines 25–30):

Sicut enim convenerunt substantia nichil est, nisi id quod *res* est, cuius *esse* non est *esse* in subiecto, scilicet quod cum fuerit non sit in subiecto, non quod habeat *esse* apud se in effectu. *Cuius rei tibi sit exemplum animal quod dicitur fenix quod quidem substantia est sine dubio; tu tamen dubitas si nunc sit vel non, similiter et multe alie substantie* [II, no. 11; 57, lines 25–30]

[In Appendix B, 222, we are told that a variant omits the word “nunc” in the last line above.]

is, that we do not include the substance's being in act in our so thinking, takes "phoenix" because it is quintessentially a case of knowing what I mean by "substance," and yet not knowing whether the thing exists.⁴⁷

Of course, with an item such as a phoenix it is not really authentic quidditative knowledge that we have, since we have never encountered such a thing, and do not know whether there is such a nature at all. But even when we have encountered a thing and seen that there really is such a nature, such as a horse, if no horses are in evidence, we do not know whether there are any (though we may have a solid opinion).

This situation is the fruit of our experience of the beings with which we live. Accordingly, it is quite in order to argue that since quiddity is a kind of completeness, if we can know one, we can be sure that what we do not know about it does not belong to the quiddity, but is a somehow adventitious associate. And this is true of the *existence* of that quiddity.⁴⁸

It is not surprising that Thomas takes this line in *De ente et essentia*, since it has already been suggested that the essences of the material things he has discussed have being in reality only in individuals.⁴⁹ However, here in chapter 4 he is no longer aiming to speak of the essences of those kinds of things. In fact, his argument has satisfied *merely for such things*, and it is only by going further that he can make his point about separate substances. Could not the essences of the separate substances be cases of pure *esse*? Accordingly, he now sets out to show that there can only be one case of pure *esse*, one *ipsum esse subsistens*. Thus, he will be able to conclude that the conclusion he has just reached applies even to the acknowledged multitude of intelligences that are below the first cause. And he will then go on to show that they must be caused by that one first cause.

This should be stressed. The *Intellectus essentiae* argument is not a general argument that proves the real distinction between essence and *esse* in *all*

⁴⁷ "Phoenix" here is playing a role similar to "centaur" in Aristotle, *APo* 2.1 (89b33), Thomas *In Post. An.* 1.2 (Leonine lines 100–108).

⁴⁸ If we put the question: "Why does Thomas not continue to use this argument?" I would suggest that it might be seen as suggesting the idea that the *esse* of things is an accident, the point on which Thomas criticizes Avicenna in *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics* 4.2 (556 and 558); instead, he subsequently tends to present the distinction in the light of efficient causality and its implications (cf. e.g., SCG 2.52 in general; and cf. *ST* I, q. 3, a. 7, ad 1). Cf. also my paper "St. Thomas and the Distinction between Form and *Esse* in Caused Things," *Gregorianum* 80 (1999): 353–70. He also begins to feature the per se relationship between the thing's form and its *esse*: cf. my paper "Saint Thomas, Form, and Incorruptibility," in Jean-Louis Allard, ed., *Être et Savoir* (Ottawa: Les Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1989), 77–90.

⁴⁹ Cf. *De ente et essentia* 3 [lines 52–72].

things other than the first. It only clearly applies to essence as known in generable and corruptible things.

Kenny says that the phoenix argument does establish something other than a merely conceptual distinction (36) and that “the doctrine, whether or not its formulation is confusing, seems to be true and important” (37). He contends that a thing’s essence and a thing’s existence provide answers to “questions of totally different kinds” (36). He then says:

The query “is there a real distinction between essence and existence?” should bring us up short like the question “In three blind mice is there a distinction between the threeness and the blindness?” (36)

Here, I take it that he means that the predicating of existence about a thing is not the predication of a real predicate (just as “blindness” names a mere absence). Thus, Kenny goes on, not to complain about distinguishing essence from existence, but about making existence the essence in the case of God (37). In so doing, he makes it plain that his recognition of a distinction between essence and existence does not bear upon the distinction meant by Thomas. Thomas was, of course, thinking of the actual existence of the human being as some positive actuality such as is found at the terminus of generation. Form gives being to matter.⁵⁰

Kenny says:

It is when the doctrine is employed to mark a fundamental difference between creatures and God that it becomes more difficult to comprehend. For it seems that, in the same way that I can have a concept of phoenix without knowing whether or not there are phoenixes, so I can have a concept of God without knowing whether or not there is a God. Atheists, after all, have a concept of God; otherwise they wouldn’t know what it was they were denying when they deny that God exists. (37)

Kenny goes right on to say that “this, no doubt, is too crude a way of disposing of St. Thomas’s celebrated thesis.” Why say it, then? Is it a bad and misleading point, or does it have some truth in it?

⁵⁰ As we read in SCG 1.26:

Generation, speaking precisely, is the road to being [*esse*], and corruption the road to not being [*non esse*]: for form would not be the terminus of generation, and privation [the terminus] of corruption, were it not that form brings about being and privation not being; for, given that some form did not bring about being, what received such a form would not be said to be generated.

Cf. also SCG 2.52, a perfect text which associates *esse* with both the terminus of generation and what is proper to the efficient cause as such.

In fact, it is a point on which Thomas himself insists when teaching that the existence of a God is not self-evident for the human mind. In other words, such meanings of the word "a God" as are actually used in the proof of the existence of a God have exactly the same status as "phoenix," as far as St. Thomas is concerned. Whether the meaning is "first origin of change, which is changed by nothing" or "something than which a greater cannot be thought," or even "something in which essence and existence are identical,"⁵¹ a thoroughgoing understanding of what is said does not, in itself, require affirmation that that thing exists. Thus, Kenny's point is not merely "crude." Mentioning it in the way he has is grossly misleading. In fact, he could only say what he says by ignoring the importance of the last line of Thomas's argument: "unless perhaps there is some thing whose quiddity is its very own being; and this thing can only be one and first,"⁵² that is, he is about to undertake to *prove* that such a thing exists.

Or should we speak of it as the "last" line? In fact, what Thomas has set out to prove is that in beings, which are forms subsisting without matter, other than God, there is a composition out of form and *esse*. At the present point in his argument, he has brought forward beings that are composites of quiddity and *esse*, yet there is apparently still room for a being to be its own *esse*; only by showing that such a being can only be one and first can he conclude that the multitude of intelligences, spoken of by the philosophers, must be composites of form and *esse*.

Treatment of the One-Only Status of *Ipsium esse subsistens*

In any case, Kenny proposes to follow the steps by which Thomas establishes that in God essence and *esse* are identical. He first comes to the contention of Thomas that a thing in which essence and *esse* are identical would *necessarily be one only*. (This will serve as the key premise for concluding that the intelligences, whose multiplicity is taken for granted, fall under the judgment of the just seen *Intellectus essentiae* argument.) We have the passage in which the modes of multiplication of something are examined:

unless perhaps there be some thing whose quiddity is its very *esse*; and this thing can only be one and first; because it is impossible that multiplication

⁵¹ Of course, assuming the proper stance of supernatural faith, which looks at things from God's own point of view, one can say, with the *sed contra* of ST I, q. 2, a. 3: *Sed contra est quod dicitur Exodi III, ex persona dei, ego sum qui sum*. [But on the contrary, there is what is said in Exodus 3 [14], [speaking] in the very person of God: I am Who Am.], i.e., God so truly exists that his very name is "I am." Cf. ST I, q. 13, a. 11 (the first argument in the body of the article).

⁵² *De ente et essentia* c. 4 (lines 103–5).

of something be effected save through the addition of some difference, the way the generic nature is multiplied in species; or else by the fact that the form is received in diverse matters, the way the specific nature is multiplied in diverse individuals; or else by the fact that one is all by itself and another is received in something, the way that, if there were a separate heat, it would be other than non-separate heat by virtue of its very separation.

Now, if some thing be posited which is *esse* alone, such that *esse* itself be subsisting, this *esse* will not receive the addition of any difference, for then it would not be *esse* alone, but rather *esse* and besides that some [particular] form; and much less could it receive the addition of matter, for then it would not be subsisting *esse*, but rather material [*esse*]. It remains, then, that such a thing which is its *esse*, can only be one.⁵³

Kenny uses a variant reading that speaks of a separate “color” [Latin: *color*] rather than a separate “heat” [Latin: *calor*]. He says he does this only “to facilitate discussion in translation,” and that the variation does not affect the argument. However, he then gets into discussions of “the color of the sky” as a modern example of “a color that is not the color of anything.” He says:

The blue of the sky is not the property of any substance: yet it is a distinct entity from the blue of this thrush’s egg, even if it is exactly the same shade. So we can, for the time being at any rate, accept Aquinas’s schema of three types of multiplicity. (38)

Now, I am sure that Thomas would not accept the example. The point is that even the blue of the sky is taken as *extended*. Thus, for Thomas, it is a quality received in a quantitative base. Such a base provides multiplication. The blue of one part of the sky is distinct from the blue of another part of the sky. Kenny has not understood Thomas’s hypothetical exam-

⁵³ Ibid., c. 4 (lines 103–21):

nisi forte sit aliqua *res*, cuius quiditas sit ipsum suum *esse*; et haec *res* non potest *esse* nisi una et prima, quia impossibile est, ut fiat plurificatio alicuius nisi per additionem alicuius differentiae, sicut multiplicatur natura generis in species, vel per hoc quod forma recipitur in diversis materiis, sicut multiplicatur natura speciei in diversis individuis, vel per hoc quod unum est absolutum et aliud in aliquo receptum, sicut si esset quidam calor separatus, esset alius a calore non separato ex ipsa sua separatione. 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; et multo minus reciperet additionem materiae, quia iam esset *esse* non subsistens sed materiale. Unde relinquitur quod talis *res*, quae sit suum *esse*, non potest *esse* nisi una.

ple, and so his understanding of the third mode of multiplication is skewed from the start.

Thus, when Kenny reads the rest of the argument, applying the modes of multiplication to the case of *esse subsistens*, he cannot understand the result. Kenny rightly says that the third case of multiplication will make possible that there be created and uncreated being. He says that if one asks: "More than one *what?*" the answer will be "*ens*," which he translates as "being" (that is, "that which is"). This is accurate inasmuch as what we are attempting to multiply are the instances of *esse*, the act of being; and "*ens*" signifies "*esse habens*." Thus, the point is: If *esse* must be multiplied on the "all by itself" (on the one hand) and "in a receiver" (on the other hand) model, then obviously there can only be one *ipsum esse subsistens*. (*Ipsum esse subsistens* is "*esse habens*," we may concede, with the proviso that God is whatever he *has*.)⁵⁴

However, Kenny has misunderstood the application to the third sort of multiplication, as we see in his complaint:

[I]n the first premise the third kind of multiplicity came about because one of the items to be counted was an instance of a property in the abstract, belonging to nothing.⁵⁵ In the application to *esse*, the first item to be counted is not at all abstract; it is not *esse* with no owner, but *esse* identical with its owner. So the parallel with color, however charitably interpreted, does not provide the parallel that is needed for Aquinas's conclusion. (39)

Now, this is quite wrong. In the first premise, what is posited in the third case is merely an item taken all by itself. The example is a "separate heat" (or, if one will, a "separate color"). That is not supposed to be something "abstract" at all, if by "abstract" one is speaking of the abstraction proper to the first act of the intellect.⁵⁶ Rather, we are speaking of an actually existing separate heat or color. One sees such a hypothetical entity discussed in one of Thomas's early quodlibets:

[B]y a miracle, therefore, it could be brought about that *the nature of whiteness subsist without any quantity*; nevertheless, that whiteness would

⁵⁴ Cf. SCG 1.23. So also, in ST I, q. 2, a. 3 (the Fourth Way), God is "*maxime ens*."

⁵⁵ Does Kenny thus mean that the blue of the sky is an abstraction?

⁵⁶ On the two senses of "abstract," as pertaining to the first ("absolute consideration") or the second operation ("composing and dividing") of the intellect, cf. ST I, q. 85, a. 1, ad 1.

not be like this sensible whiteness; rather, it would be a particular intelligible form, along the lines of the separate forms that Plato posited.⁵⁷

This is the sort of thought experiment Thomas is proposing. In the quodlibet it is indeed compared to a Platonic separate form, but it is also proposed on the basis of a miracle whereby God bypasses secondary causes, such as the quantity which naturally is the immediate subject of color. It should also be noted that it is not the same thing as proposing that there exist the Platonic idea of a material substance: that is the sort of Platonic Idea that Thomas holds is intrinsically impossible.⁵⁸ As the quodlibetal discussion makes plain, Thomas gives careful consideration to questions of intrinsic impossibility, especially in that he is in the context of the possibility of miracles.

Thus, Kenny's contention that the argument of Thomas is invalid is wrong. As I have argued elsewhere, the argument for there being only one *ipsum esse subsistens* works only if "*esse*" names something known as *intrinsically common*, after the manner of a form. It is of this sort of thing that Thomas is providing a list of modes of multiplication: A generically common nature such as "animal" must have added to it some particular form, such as "rational" or "irrational," and thus one would seem to have the common *esse* plus form.⁵⁹ A specifically common nature such as

⁵⁷ *Quodl.* 7.4.3, emphasis added:

Posset ergo fieri miraculo ut *natura albedinis subsisteret absque omni quantitate*; tamen illa albedo non esset sicut haec albedo sensibilis, sed esset quaedam forma intelligibilis ad modum formarum separatarum, quas Plato posuit.

⁵⁸ Cf. *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics* 7.11 (1535–536) and 7.9 (1469–470); also *De veritate* 3.1, ad 4. It is still another point that, if *per impossibile* there were many Platonic Ideas, they would have to be composed of essence and *esse*. Thomas makes this point in lect. 2 of his *In De Hebdomadibus*. At p. 80, in concluding his extremely inadequate discussion of Thomas's *In DH*, Kenny makes the complaint: "what are those of us who are not Platonists to make of the notion of subsistent immaterial forms?" He completely omits reference to the fact that Thomas there explicitly says:

it makes no difference, on this score, if we posit those immaterial forms at a higher level than are the natures of these sensible things, as Aristotle maintained: each of them, inasmuch as it is distinguished from the others, is some special form participating in being itself [*ipsum esse*]; and so none of them will be truly simple. [nihil differt quantum ad hoc, si ponamus illas formas immateriales altioris gradus quam sint rationes horum sensibilium, ut Aristoteles voluit: unaquaeque illarum, in quantum distinguitur ab alia, quaedam specialis forma est participans ipsum esse; et sic nulla earum erit vere simplex.]

⁵⁹ That the logical considerations such as genus and species require the backing of the real distinction between form and matter I also discuss in my paper "St. Thomas,

"man" must be multiplied by material individuals, such as "Peter" and "Paul," and thus, if *esse* were so multiplied, it would be *esse* in the material mode. The last possibility of retaining a subsisting *esse* and yet multiplying *esse* is to have a subsisting *esse*, on the one hand, and *esse* received in something other than *esse*, on the other. All of this supposes that "*esse*" names something that is somehow common to all.

Now, this is already a point that separates Thomas from Kenny. Thomas is thinking of the sort of act or perfection that the things we most immediately know have by virtue of an efficient cause. An efficient cause has *esse* and it communicates *esse* when it produces its effect.⁶⁰ Indeed, as Thomas implied at the beginning of *De ente et essentia*, the *esse* of the cause is more noble than the *esse* of the effect (the *esse* of separate substance is more noble than the *esse* of material substance). To a hierarchy of essences there corresponds a hierarchy of acts of being. Let us repeat the passage from the beginning of *De ente et essentia*:

[O]f substances, some are simple and some are composite, and in both there is *essentia*; but in the simple in a truer and more noble degree, inasmuch as they also they have more noble *esse*; for they are the *cause* of those which are composite, at least [this is true of] the first simple substance which is God.⁶¹

I would say we need everything that Thomas deploys in such a text: causal hierarchy, hierarchy of *esse*, hierarchy of essence. A causal hierarchy is understood in terms of grades of natures. And a hierarchy of *esse* is an integral part of the same picture.

Kenny is working with an idea of "*esse*" as merely expressing our awareness that an item is found outside of thought. Trees "exist" and God "exists" and blindness "exists"; thus, not a predicate expressing a formal reality in the thing.

Joseph Owens, and the Real Distinction between Being and Essence," *Modern Schoolman* 61 (1984): 145–56.

⁶⁰ Cf. SCG 2.52: "Since every agent activates [agat] inasmuch as it is in act, therefore it belongs to the first agent, which is most perfect, to be in act in the most perfect way. . . . Now, the most perfect act [*ipse actus perfectissimus*] . . . is *esse*, at which all generation and all change has its terminus: for every form and every act is in potency until it acquires *esse*. Therefore, to God alone does it belong that he be being itself [*ipsum esse*]: just as [to him] alone does it belong that he be the first agent."

⁶¹ *De ente et essentia* c. 1 (lines 58–63), emphasis added.

***Ipsum Esse Subsistens* Must Exist and Be Causally First,
Since an Efficient Cause Is Needed for All Else**

Kenny already mentions his question as to whether “*ipsum esse subsistens*,” the subsisting act of being, expresses a coherent notion (40). And we immediately think: No wonder!—given what he means by “*esse*.” However, he proposes to put that issue off until after examining the argument for saying that *Ipsum esse subsistens* must be first causally. (The argument is not just for the causal primacy of *Ipsum esse subsistens*; it is primarily an argument for the existence of *Ipsum esse subsistens*.)⁶² Kenny looks through the argument, and notes that “*esse*” here must mean “existence.” He says that it depends on the point that nothing can be the efficient cause of its own existence, but he adds in parentheses that the *Intellectus essentiae* phoenix argument “implied that nothing could be the formal cause of its own existence.”⁶³ Here again, Kenny is in error. The phoenix argument merely implies that if the phoenix is to exist, its essence cannot be the *efficient* cause of its existence. A formal causality on the part of the essence is quite conceivable if the thing depends on an outside efficient cause. Thus, as we saw, Thomas teaches in the *De veritate*:

God causes in us natural *esse* by creation, without the mediation of any efficient cause, but nevertheless through the mediation of a formal cause: because natural form is the principle of natural *esse*.⁶⁴

Thus, God being the efficient cause, formal causality can be seen as the role of form vis-à-vis the thing as a whole. Kenny should have said that the phoenix argument implies the need for the phoenix, if it is to exist, to have an efficient cause.⁶⁵

The Coherence of *Ipsum Esse Subsistens*

It is at this point that Kenny begins his discussion of the coherence of the notion of *Ipsum esse subsistens*. He has not really questioned the validity of

⁶² I agree with Joseph Owens here, against Gilson, that there is a proof of the existence of *Ipsum Esse Subsistens* in *De ente et essentia*; cf. my paper “St. Thomas and the Existence of God: Owens vs Gilson, and Beyond,” in *God and Argument*, William Sweet, ed. (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1999), 115–41.

⁶³ Page 41. Could Kenny mean, here, that there could never be absolute identity between the formal cause and its effect? Thomas would not agree with that, as we see in *ST* I, q. 39, a. 2, ad 5.

⁶⁴ St. Thomas, *De veritate* 27.1.ad 3 (ed. Leonine, t. 22/3, lines 182–86).

⁶⁵ I take it that it is the generability and corruptibility of the things we most readily know that is at once the evidence that they need an efficient cause and the reason why we do not know whether they exist when they are absent.

the argument of the need for a God. He rather questions the possibility of conceiving of the God it proves as *Ipsum esse subsistens*. "There seems to be an absurdity in saying of anything that its essence is pure existence" (41). One cannot reasonably say: "There is a God, that's what God is."

Now, of course, so put, the point holds. But should it be put that way? Do we not have ample answer in Thomas's writings as to why it should *not* be put that way? The statement: "There is a God" is the normal expression of the conclusion of a human argument answer to the "does X exist?" question.⁶⁶ On the other hand, suppose that we prove that there exists a first efficient cause, and we say that that is what we mean by "a God." Obviously such a being is going to have to have an essence and an act of being. It turns out by subsequent argument that they must be identical. We in fact conclude that such an essence is beyond our comprehension. As for existence itself to be the essence of something, while we can see that the proposition is necessarily true, we cannot comprehend such an act of being, such an "existence." Thus, we say that both God's essence and his existence are beyond our mode of knowing. Of this, we are sure, just as we are sure that they are identical. We can even draw the conclusion that this is the highest mode of identity.⁶⁷

As for "there is a God," if one wishes to envisage God himself considering his own existence, then the same act by which he grasped it would

⁶⁶ Of course, it would also be the expression of a human conviction by someone saying that no argument is needed by the human being in this matter. I have heard Peter Van Inwagen take such a stand.

⁶⁷ This is well explained in both *SCG* 1.12 and *ST* I, q. 3, a. 4, ad 2, both extremely prominent texts. *SCG* 4.11 is a passage from St. Thomas that shows the ineluctable variety of intelligible roles of the various items in the metaphysical analysis:

it has been shown in the First Book (ch. 31) that those things which in creatures are divided are unqualifiedly one in God: thus, for example, in the creature *essence* and *being [esse]* are other; and in some [creatures] *that which subsists* in its own essence is also other than its essence or nature: for this man is neither his own humanity nor his being [esse]; but God is his essence and his being.

And though these in God are one in the truest way, nevertheless in God there is whatever pertains to the intelligible role [*ratio*] of [1] the subsisting thing, or of [2] the essence, or of [3] the being [*esse*]; for it belongs to him not to be in another, inasmuch as he is subsisting; to be a what [*esse quid*], inasmuch as he is essence; and being in act [*esse in actu*], by reason of being itself [*ipsius esse*].

On the highest mode of identity, cf. *ST* I, q. 11, a. 4, and ad 3.

be the act by which he grasps what he is. But we cannot really “tune in” on that, at least in the present life.⁶⁸ As Thomas says:

to know being itself subsisting [*ipsum esse subsistens*] is connatural to the divine intellect alone, and . . . it is beyond the natural power of any created intellect whatsoever.⁶⁹

Kenny presents his case as one already made by Peter Geach. Kenny says that he believes it “is effective in disposing of the notion of subsistent existence” (41). In what follows, then, he is merely seeking alternative ways of understanding “that God is his own *esse*,” ways that “do not involve the nonsensicality just exposed.”

My contention is that no nonsensicality has been exposed—merely the inability of Kenny and Geach⁷⁰ to cope with the real doctrine of the text. When one considers the centrality of this point for the entire doctrine of being of St. Thomas, it gives one pause.

We need not follow out Kenny’s effort to offer an alternative doctrine.⁷¹ He eventually contends that to say that God’s essence is existence sounds like saying that one knows what the essence of God is. It would “sound more respectful, as well as more plausible” (45) to say that his essence entails existence. This again is quite misleading. As Kenny must know, Thomas affirms that we know neither what God’s essence is nor what his existence is. That is part of the same doctrine that his essence is his existence.⁷²

Kenny suggests reducing the doctrine to “for God to exist is for God to continue to be God,” but then observes that this applies to anything. What then happens to the distinction between essence and *esse* in creatures? Quite so. The real doctrine is that God is *Ipsum esse subsistens*. Kenny has simply failed to grasp it. He has failed to consider *esse* as we know it: the perfection of the efficient cause and of its effect.⁷³

⁶⁸ On the question whether Paul in his rapture saw the divine essence and whether he was in his body, cf. *ST* II–II, q. 175, a. 1, and 5.

⁶⁹ *ST* I, q. 12, a. 4:

cognoscere ipsum *esse* subsistens, sit connaturale soli intellectui divino, et quod sit supra facultatem naturalem cuiuslibet intellectus creati.

⁷⁰ Supposing that Kenny has understood him.

⁷¹ We should note the Kretzmann link concerning IES as “thin,” and the absurd contention on Kretzmann’s part that Thomas “prefers” “God being his own existence.”

⁷² *ST* I, q. 3, a. 4, ad 2.

⁷³ An excellent place to see this as the approach to *esse* is *Quaestiones de quolibet* 12.4.1 [6], in Leonine ed., t. 25–2 (Rome/Paris: Commissio Leonina/Cerf,

Did Thomas Posit Essences of Non-Existent Beings?

Kenny, in puzzling over the doctrine that God's essence is identical with his existence, is led, at page 45, to wonder about the doctrine of the real distinction between them as applied to dogs. We read:

Can we say that Fido's essence and Fido's existence are distinct? If a real distinction between A and B means that we can have one without the other, then it seems that the answer must be in the negative. For a dog to continue to exist is simply for it to go on being a dog, and for a human being to continue to exist is for it to go on possessing its human nature or essence. . . . But would Aquinas agree with the statements we have just made? (45)

Thomas would certainly agree with Kenny's statement about a dog continuing to exist and continuing to be a dog; and so also for the case of man.⁷⁴ This is to say, as we said earlier, against Kenny, that *esse quid* and *esse simpliciter* are identical. What Thomas would not agree with is Kenny's premise that "a real distinction between A and B means that we can have one without the other."⁷⁵ Anyone thinking that would clearly rightly go on to conclude that essence and existence cannot ever be really distinct.⁷⁶ However, anyone thinking that would not have arrived at the sort of ontological analysis one finds in Thomas Aquinas. By a "real" distinction, here, we do not mean one such that each (or even one) of its members is a thing, a subsistent being, or in Latin, a "*res*." Rather, we mean that the distinction is one to be found within the thing and not merely within our minds considering the thing (a mere "distinction of reason"). Thus, the distinction is called real, that is, pertaining to things themselves. It was not said, in presenting the distinction between a thing's essence and its act

1996), 403–4. See my paper "St. Thomas and the Distinction between Form and *Esse* in Caused Things," *Gregorianum* 80 (1999): 353–70.

⁷⁴ So true is this that, as Thomas teaches, when a man dies, even though the soul is immortal, the individual man does not exist; the person does not exist: The ceasing to exist of the complete nature is the ceasing to exist of the person. Cf. e.g., Charles De Koninck, "La personne humaine et la résurrection [part 1]," *LTP* 10 (1954).

⁷⁵ Thus, though we say that God is the subsisting act of being, we do not say that he is existence without essence; we rather say that in him the two are identical. In fact, as we have noted, at the very outset of the *De ente et essentia*, Thomas makes it clear that essence and *esse* are both found *most truly of all* in God.

⁷⁶ Indeed, this is a classical wrong-headed argument against the real distinction between essence and existence; cf. for example, the attempts to argue against it by Peter Aureol, which I present in my paper "St. Thomas, Capreolus, and Entitative Composition," *Divus Thomas* 80 (1977): 355–75.

of being, its *esse*, in *De ente et essentia*, that I can have a real phoenix or man, and not have that thing's actual existence. The distinction was not proposed on the basis of having the one reality without the other reality. The argument was rather based on the discerning of distinct targets of intelligible necessity within the thing. One may object to such a procedure as such, but one should at least recognize that it was that which was at stake.⁷⁷

Does that procedure reduce ultimately to finding one of the items without the other? How is essence as completeness discerned, and how does its discernment stand with respect to the existence of individuals? Essence, or its principle, namely form, is seen as that in generable and corruptible individuals whereby the individual maintains itself in being and causes the reproduction of something similar, that is, another self-maintaining and reproducing individual. It is on the basis of the success in carrying out such operations that we form the conception of the essence, and what it is for the individual to be "all there." All of this is recognized even though we also see the perishability of the individual. We thus see what it is to be an essence, and that it is something with a completeness that constitutes its intelligibility: As such, it "makes sense" (like seeing that a bicycle without one of its wheels needs that other wheel). However, the essence is seen to exist only in the "larger context" of the perishable individual: Existence is the actuality of the whole individual. It is, indeed, the fact that one distinguishes the essence from the existence only inasmuch as one appreciates the thing's need for *outside* help in order to *exist*. The essence is a principle of existence, but in a generable and corruptible thing it is obviously an inadequate principle of existence: The thing only comes to be through something prior, which is an efficient cause, and one even needs the contribution of outside efficient causes to maintain the thing in existence. All this I would maintain is wrapped up in the experience that I can know what a man is, and not know that this or that man exists. One can very well say that the real distinction of essence and existence within the thing is grounded in the

⁷⁷ No one who had given the least consideration to the argument regularly used by Thomas to establish the incorruptibility of the rational soul could think that a real distinction implies that one can have one of the components without the other; on the one hand, the form is other than the act of being; on the other hand, the form and the act of being are inseparable: cf. *ST* I, q. 50, a. 2, ad 3, and I, q. 50, a. 5; I, q. 75, a. 5, ad 4, and I, q. 75, a. 6, and my paper "Saint Thomas, Form, and Incorruptibility," in Jean-Louis Allard, ed., *Être et Savoir* (Ottawa: Les Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1989), 77–90.

real distinction between the efficient cause and its effect, and there, indeed, the one can be without the other.⁷⁸

Kenny has quite another reason for suggesting that Thomas might not agree with what he has just said. Here Kenny becomes a master of suspicion. He tells us that Avicenna, whose *influence* is apparent in Thomas's *De ente et essentia*,

may perhaps have believed that there were individual essences of non-existent beings; that long before Adam and Eve were created there were already such things as the essence of Adam and the essence of Eve, and that the creation of Adam and Eve consisted precisely in God giving existence to these essences, actualizing these potentialities. This was an error which Aquinas, later in life, would explicitly reject as mistaken; but it is not clear whether at this stage he had seen through its confusions. Someone who thinks in this way will regard the relation of existence to essence as being *exactly parallel* to that of form to matter or accident to substance—all three cases will be in the same way instances of the actualization of a potentiality. And that is indeed how Aquinas speaks in this context. (45–46, emphasis added)

Leaving Avicenna aside,⁷⁹ it is easily seen that in the period when Thomas wrote the *De ente et essentia*, he was quite clear concerning the ontology of creation as it touches the remarks of Kenny. Kenny is clearly referring to a preexistent passive potency. However, in the *Sentences* presentation of creation we read:

⁷⁸ Cf. my paper "St. Thomas and the Distinction between Form and *Esse* in Caused Things," *Gregorianum* 80 (1999): 353–70. In the above I have limited myself to speaking about essence as the other member of the composite; eventually one must speak of the matter-form composition of such essence. In that discussion it is clear that the essence itself is a real composite, one of whose members does survive the ceasing to be of the composite; the matter remains, though this is only possible inasmuch as it is under another form. As we have said, the matter is not, in itself, the subject of the act of being.

⁷⁹ I leave him aside only for simplicity. Thomas, as we see, refers to Avicenna in making the very point we are about to show. While I have myself often seen this claim of Avicenna proposing essences as possibles, which are "out there," so to speak, awaiting actual existence, I notice that as anti-Avicennian a Thomist as Beatrice Zedler, following A. Forest, says: "in Avicenna the possibles are offered eternally to the divine action because they are not constituted as such by his will. God necessarily thinks his own nature; his liberality is only his acquiescing to this universal order of things that he does not constitute." Cf. my paper: "St. Thomas and the Possibles," *New Scholasticism* 53 (1979): 76–85, at p. 76. In that picture, the possibles would have more the role of active potency in God than passive potency awaiting the coming of existence. The difference from Thomas would be rather in the conception of God and his freedom with respect to his ideas.

[A]ccording to Avicenna there are two sorts of agent: the one natural, which is an agent by means of change, and the other divine, which [is an agent as] giving being [*esse*], as has been said. And similarly it is necessary to recognize two sorts of product of action or of making: one is through change [effected] by the natural agent: and in the case of all such making it is necessary that a potency precede temporally, and not merely an active potency, *but also a passive [potency]*: because change is the actuality of what exists in potency. But there is another [sort of] made item, inasmuch as it receives being from the divine agent without [there being involved any] change: and if this made item is new, then it is necessary that an active, *not a passive*, potency precede, as to both nature and duration, its *esse*: and from the active potency such a made item is said to be “possible with respect to being made.” But if it is not new, then the active potency does not precede durationally, but only by nature.⁸⁰

There is, of course, throughout Thomas’s career, the doctrine that every nature pre-exists in the potency of the divine nature and in the divine ideas (and also an infinity of natures that never will exist in their own being outside the divine essence).⁸¹

Thus, it is clear that Thomas already rejects the sort of pre-existing potential essence that Kenny conjured.⁸² However, since the entire basis for the Kenny suspicion seems to be Thomas’s use of the word “receive” to describe the relation between the essence of the creature and its *esse*,⁸³

⁸⁰ *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard* 2.1.1.2, ad 1. The distinction within this text between newness of the product of creative causality and non-newness is simply the distinction between a doctrine of the production of an eternal creature and that of a creature with a beginning of duration.

⁸¹ At *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard* 1.36.2.3, ad. 3 and ad. 2, we see that particulars (“Peter,” “Martin”) have divine ideas, but not as perfectly as do the composites in function of the *form*: “man,” “horse.”

⁸² And so, as Thomas reads him, does Avicenna.

⁸³ Kenny continues the passage I quoted from pp. 45–46, illustrating Thomas’s way of speaking with the following text:

Everything which *receives* something from another is in potency with respect to that, and the item which is *received* in it is its act. Therefore, it is necessary that the quiddity itself or form, which is the intelligence, be in potency with respect to *esse*, which it *receives* from God, and that *received esse* has the role of act. And thus one finds potency and act in the intelligences, though not matter and form, *save equivocally*. Hence, it is clear that “to be affected by,” “to *receive*,” “to be subjected” and all like [expressions], which seem to belong to things by reason of matter, belong *equivocally* to intellectual substances and to corporeal things, as the Commentator says in *De anima* 3. And because, as has been said, the quiddity of the intelligence is the intelligence itself, therefore its quiddity or essence is the very

we should note the following passage from very early in Thomas's *Sentences*, speaking of the ontology of angels (and the human soul):

But if it is not *esse* itself, it is necessary that it have *esse* acquired from another, which is the case for every created quiddity. And because this quiddity is posited not to subsist in matter, *esse* would not be acquired for it in another, as with composite quiddities; rather, it will be acquired for it in itself; and thus the quiddity itself will be the thing which is, and its own very being will be that in function of which it is. And because *everything that does not have something from itself is possible with respect to that*, this sort of quiddity, since it has *esse* from another, will be possible with respect to that *esse*, and with respect to that from which it has *esse*, in which no potency is to be found; and thus in such a quiddity potency and act will be found, according as the quiddity itself is possible and its *esse* is its act. And in this way I understand a composition of potency and act in angels, and of "by which it is" and "that which is"; and similarly with the soul.⁸⁴

Thomas here uses a slightly more vague "acquire" rather than "receive," but the reason I cite this text is the doctrine of "having" and "not from itself," which are the ontological grounds of the use of such words as "acquire" and "receive" in this context. No pre-existence of the essence is envisaged in such usage. Kenny is a victim of failure to abstract from matter and change.

This failure on Kenny's part is important. On its basis, he conjures a change in Thomas's doctrine, as we move from the *De ente et essentia* to such later texts as he mentions on page 116. Kenny stresses that later in life Thomas insisted against Avicenna

that there can be no individuation without actualization (only what actually exists can be identified, individuated, counted). But once this is made clear, then the real distinction between essence and existence appears unintelligible, or at best vacuous. (46)

thing which is, and its *esse*, *received* from God, is that by virtue of which it subsists in natural reality. And for that reason such substances are said by some people to be composed out of that by which it is and that which is, or out of that which is and being, as Boethius says. [emphasis added]

The translation of the passage is my own, as are the stresses. Kenny in fact quotes *only to just before the words "save equivocally."* Thomas himself goes on to note that the word "receive" here is not to be taken in the way that matter receives form. Kenny should have noted this, instead of proposing an *exact parallel* between essence/existence and matter/form as Thomas's thinking.

⁸⁴ *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard* 1.8.5.2.

Here he refers us to page 116, but there we find Kenny finding no trace of a doctrine we have found he merely dreamt up here on page 46. Kenny's Aquinas is far from the real Aquinas.

He has exhibited so far no understanding of the real distinction, so it is understandable that he calls it "unintelligible." His conception of a necessary *separability* of one from the other of essence and existence for the distinction to be real is mistaken.⁸⁵

What does he mean by "no individuation without actualization" as constituting the change in doctrine? He imagines Avicenna as positing preexistent possibles that are individuals. (This comes out more clearly on page 90, where, in connection with the conception of generables and corruptibles as in themselves possibles with respect to being and not being, and needing a cause in order to be actually, Kenny posits as the generable and corruptible being being discussed "my dog Stigger.") Thus, in note 13, page 89, he says that there is no need to discuss merely possible individuals in presenting Thomas (presumably because of what he finds later, at page 116). All of this I find rather odd, since obviously Thomas has a doctrine of the preexistence of the individual in the divine ideas, just as Avicenna had a doctrine of the preexistence of things in the divine being. Thus, at *ST* I, q. 15, a. 3, and ad 4, it is clear that there are ideas, in the sense of exemplars, in God of all individuals that are created. Taken as merely in the power and cognition of God, they are possible individuals. The possibility is quite definite and real.

The question is why Kenny thinks that the doctrine of *De ente et essentia* on the distinction between essence and existence involves the preexistence of individuals as possibles. Is it merely the word "receive"? It would seem so, since it was on the basis of this mistake that Kenny saw the supposed exact parallelism between matter and form, essence and existence. Both of course pertain to the analogy of potency and act, but the parallel is not "exact" in the Kenny sense. Kenny thinks that a real distinction means that one can have one without the other. That this is not the case with essence and existence should be clear.

⁸⁵ As I have said, we see the unsuitability of Kenny's conception of the essence-existence composition from the way that Thomas argues for the incorruptibility of the human soul. In his *Quaestiones Disputatae de immortalitate animae*, ad 5, he distinguishes carefully between matter-form composition and form-*esse* composition. *Esse* and form are distinct but *inseparable*. Moreover, as I have shown in my paper on this, the argument actually derives from the much-maligned (in this respect) Avicenna. I date this text around the beginning of Thomas's first teaching in Italy. For the Avicennian background, cf. my paper "Saint Thomas, Form, and Incorruptibility," in Jean-Louis Allard, ed., *Être et Savoir* (Ottawa: Les Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1989), 77–90, at p. 87 and n. 37.

One can understand the desire to have a text which makes it clear that the composition out of essence and *esse*, a potency and act composition, involves no pre-existence outside of God of the potency in question. And it is entirely possible that one will find such a text later that was merely presupposed earlier. Thus, I certainly value such a text as *QD de anima* 6. ad 10: The topic is whether the human soul is composed out of matter and form. The tenth objection runs:

Besides, an agent is necessary for this, viz. that it reduce something from potency to act. But to be reduced from potency to act belongs solely to those things in which there is matter and form. If, therefore, the soul is not composed out of matter and form, it does not need an efficient cause: which is clearly false.

And the reply is:

[I]t is to be said that a thing acting by virtue of change reduces something from potency to act; but a thing acting without change does not reduce something from potency to act, but rather it makes to be in act that which according to [its own] nature is in potency with respect to being [*esse*], and this sort of agent is creating.⁸⁶

However, attentive reading of the earlier texts, such as that I have indicated from *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard* 1.8.5.2, gives the same understanding.

It is remarkable that Kenny ignores the end of the chapter, in which we have the conception of the hierarchy of separate entity, a hierarchy in terms of act and potency and proximity to the first cause, together with the *grades of esse* and form, right down to the mere perfecting of primary matter by the most material of forms. Investigating this would have suggested more readily the meaning of "*esse*" as the effect of the highest efficient cause on lower things through efficient causality and form. The

⁸⁶ *QD de anima* 6.obj. 10:

Praeterea, agens ad hoc necessarium est ut reducat aliquid de potentia in actum. Sed reduci de potentia in actum competit solum illis in quibus est materia et forma. Si igitur anima non sit composita ex materia et forma non indiget causa agente; quod patet *esse* falsum.

And the ad 10:

Ad decimum dicendum quod agens per motum reducit aliquid de potentia in actum; agens autem sine motu non reducit aliquid de potentia in actum, sed facit *esse* actu quod secundum naturam est in potentia ad *esse*, et huiusmodi agens est creans.

creator uses form as his instrument in giving being to things. This is hardly a part of the doctrine of being to be neglected.

God Is Not in a Genus

Kenny does consider what is said of God in the next chapter. He says that Thomas, in reporting that there are philosophers who have said that God has no essence, is saying that “this is correct if all it means is that he does not have an essence that is distinct from his *esse*” (46). In fact Thomas says nothing about their being “correct.” He simply reports what leads some people to make such a statement. I think it is a good moment to repeat that at the very outset of *De ente et essentia* Thomas taught that *essence* is found *most truly and nobly* in God (just as *esse* is so found there).⁸⁷

Kenny devotes only one sentence to the point that God is not in a genus. Oddly, he even provides a different argument than the one found in the text he is reading, mentioning Thomas’s argument only in a footnote. Kenny in his main text says: “God does not fall under any genus; no doubt God and creatures are both beings, but ‘being’ does not denote a genus” (46–47). Here Kenny is touching upon the second of three arguments given in the *ST* I, q. 3, a. 5.⁸⁸ However, the argument that Thomas uses here in the *De ente et essentia* and that is still given as third argument in the same *ST* article (and in fact comes first and second in the *Summa contra Gentiles*) he finds “puzzling.”⁸⁹

The actual text of Thomas runs:

And from this [viz. the fact that God’s essence is his very own *esse*] it follows that he is not in a genus, *since the quiddity or nature of a genus or species is not distinguished in function of the intelligibility of the nature in those things whose genus or species it is, whereas esse is diverse in diverse things.*⁹⁰

Kenny quotes in a footnote only the part of the text I have blackened. His comment, in the footnote, is this: “But surely two different species of

⁸⁷ This is worth pointing out when one is dealing with a critic who seems utterly incapable of appreciating that in God the act of being or existence could be such as to verify in the maximal way what one here calls “essence.”

⁸⁸ It is the last of four arguments given on the point in *SCG* 1.25.

⁸⁹ Kenny, 47, n. 29. The *De ente et essentia* argument is related to the point made in the entire *Summa contra Gentiles* 1.24, that a thing in a genus exists in act only as designated by an essential difference, and in 1.25, the first three arguments of four.

⁹⁰ *De ente et essentia* 5, emphasis added, Leonine lines 8–14:

Et ex hoc sequitur quod ipse non sit in genere; quia omne quod est in genere oportet quod habeat quiditatem preter esse suum, cum *quiditas uel natura generis aut speciei non distinguatur secundum rationem nature in illis quorum est genus uel species, sed esse est diuersum in diuersis.*

animal—cats and dogs, for example—*do* differ in nature and not just in *esse*.” Kenny again has failed to cope with the text. Thomas is not denying that cats and dogs have different natures. If anything, he is affirming it! Take a genus, viz. “animal”; it is said of both cats and dogs, and if one asks for its meaning, the *same* reply is given for both. Thus, the nature of the genus, as such, does not differ in those admittedly diverse things, cats and dogs. Again, take a species: “cat”; it is said of both Sylvester and Krazy Kat. If one asks what is meant by their being “cats,” the answer is the same for both, yet the two cats are different as to the actuality of being. In short, Thomas is not saying that the specific natures do not differ from each other; he is saying that the species is said in common of the individuals of that species, which individuals differ from each other; and the genus is said in common of the diverse species, which indeed are diverse from each other. *To take the genus as divided by its species is to take the genus as it actually exists.*

The *De ente et essentia* argument is beautifully spelled out already in the earlier *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard* 1.8.4.2, and attributed to Avicenna:

The third argument [to prove that God is not in the category of substance], more subtle [than the two previous] is that of Avicenna. Everything which is in a genus has a quiddity differing from *esse*: for example, a man: for humanity by the mere fact that it is humanity, does not necessitate existing actually [*esse in actu*]: for humanity can be conceived and nevertheless it remain unknown whether some particular man exists. And the reason for this is that the common item which is predicated of those which are in the genus predicates the quiddity, since the genus and the species are predicated as to what the thing is; but being [*esse*] is not owed to that quiddity save inasmuch as it is received in this or that. And therefore the quiddity of the genus or the species is not had in common in function of one *esse* for all, but only in function of one common intelligibility. Hence, it is clear that its *esse* is not its quiddity. But in God, his *esse* is his quiddity; otherwise it would happen to the quiddity, and thus would be acquired for him from another, and he would not have *esse* through his own essence. And therefore God cannot be in some genus.⁹¹

⁹¹ *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard* 1.8.4.2:

Tertia ratio subtilior est Avicennae. 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 hujus 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

Notice how thoroughly this chimes in with the *De ente et essentia* setting. And Kenny finds it “puzzling” (47n29)!

God is not common being

Next Kenny comes to the point about God’s *esse* not being *esse commune*. In the *De ente et essentia* we read:

Nor need it be, if we say that God is being alone [*esse tantum*], that we fall into the error of those who say that God is that universal being [*esse universale*] by which any being whatsoever formally is; for this *esse* which God is is of this condition, viz. that no addition can be made to it; hence, by virtue of its very own purity it is *esse* which is distinct from every [other] *esse*. For this reason it is said in the *Book of Causes*, proposition 9, that the individuation of the first cause, which is being alone, is through its pure goodness. On the other hand, the common *esse*, just as in its notion it includes no addition, so also in its notion it does not include exclusion of addition; if that were not so, nothing could be understood to *be* in which, besides *esse*, something would be added.⁹²

Kenny’s problem now (47) is that he cannot see how “*esse*” here, as said of God, can mean “existence,” as the context would seem to require. This is because he focuses on the divine *esse*, as that to which no addition can be made. He does so because he attempts to formulate what we mean when we say that “God exists.” Our question must be: Does he distinguish two meanings of “God exists”? as, for example, we see in *Summa contra Gentiles* 1.12.7 and in *ST I*, q. 3, a. 4, ad 2. In fact, he does not, and that is why he has so much trouble here. He is talking about “*esse*” as

suum non est quidditas sua. In deo autem esse suum est quidditas sua; aliter enim accideret quidditati, et ita esset acquisitum sibi ab alio, et non haberet esse per essentiam suam. Et ideo deus non potest esse in aliquo genere.

Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard 1.8.2.3: expositio primae partae textus, [Mandonnet, 209–10] also includes the *Intellectus essentiae* argument. It even has God in a genus all by himself! (explaining Hilary).

⁹² *De ente et essentia* 5 [Leonine lines 15–29]:

Nec oportet, si dicimus quod deus est *esse tantum*, ut in illorum errorem incidamus, qui deum dixerunt esse illud *esse universale*, quo quaelibet res formaliter est. Hoc enim esse, quod deus est, huius condicionis est, ut nulla sibi additio fieri possit; unde per ipsam suam puritatem est *esse* distinctum ab omni *esse*. Propter quod in commento IX propositionis *Libri de causis* dicitur quod individuatio primae causae, quae est *esse tantum*, est per puram bonitatem eius. *esse* autem *commune* sicut in intellectu suo non includit aliquam additionem, ita non includit in intellectu suo praecisionem additionis; quia si hoc esset, nihil posset intelligi *esse*, in quo super *esse* aliquod adderetur. [emphasis added]

related to the truth of a proposition, and Thomas here is speaking of God's act of being as identical with his essence. In fact, Thomas makes this clear when speaking of the "esse" said commonly of things here: He speaks of it as "by which formally every thing is." He is speaking of something formal within the thing itself, and not merely of the "esse," which is used in replying to the question: "Does it exist?"⁹³

The Individuation of the Human Soul

Kenny takes a quick look at the doctrine of the individuation of the human soul, as presented in *De ente et essentia* at this point, which passage of *De ente et essentia* reads:

[there is no multiplication of individuals within one species in created intellectual substances] save in the human soul, on account of the body to which it is united. And though its individuation depends on the body as the *occasion* for its beginning, because individuated *esse* is not acquired by it save in the body whose act it is, nevertheless it is not necessary that, the body being taken away, the individuation perish, because *since* [the human soul] has absolute *esse*, by the very fact that individuated *esse* has been acquired for it inasmuch as it has been produced as the form of this body, that *esse* remains always individuated. And therefore Avicenna says that the individuation or multiplication of souls depends on the body as far as its beginning is concerned, but not as concerns its end.⁹⁴

Kenny suggests that Thomas is referring to the idea that "the effects of a cause may remain after the cause has disappeared" (48). The reason for this judgment is clearly that Kenny is mistranslating. He quotes only part of the argument, and he translates:

cum habeat *esse* absolutum, ex quo acquisitum est sibi *esse* individuum
ex hoc quod facta est forma huius corporis, illud *esse* semper remanet
individuum.

⁹³ The distinction in meanings of "esse" is discussed in more detail than in the *De ente et essentia* c. 1 in *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard* 2.34.1.1, on the existence of the bad.

⁹⁴ Emphasis added. *De ente et essentia* 5 [Leonine lines 58–71]:

nisi in anima humana propter corpus, cui unitur. Et licet individuatione eius ex corpore occasionaliter dependeat quantum ad sui inchoationem, quia *non* acquiritur sibi *esse* individuum nisi in corpore, cuius est actus, non tamen oportet ut subtracto corpore individuatione pereat, quia *cum* habeat *esse* absolutum, ex quo acquisitum est sibi *esse* individuum ex hoc quod *facta est forma huius corporis*, illud *esse* semper remanet individuum. Et ideo dicit Avicenna quod individuatione animarum vel multiplicatio dependet ex corpore quantum ad sui principium, sed non quantum ad sui finem. [emphasis added]

as:

Though it has absolute esse by acquiring individuated esse as the form of this body, its esse always remains individuated.

Though he uses a capital letter to begin (both in his translation and in the Latin in footnote 31), in fact he is breaking into the sentence. The *whole* argument is needed so as to stress, first of all, the fact that the body is the mere “occasion” for the soul’s acquiring its individuated being. Thomas obviously carefully chose the word “*occasionaliter*” to characterize the role of the body in this situation. It *is* the occasion because the soul only acquires individuated *esse* by coming to be as the act of the body; but St. Thomas then hastens to add that this does not entail that its individuation perishes if the body is removed. The reason this is so is:

because, *since* it has *absolute esse*, once that individuated *esse* is acquired for it inasmuch as it is made as the form of this body, that *esse* will always remain individuated.

that is, the insistence is on the *absoluteness* of the *esse* that has been acquired.⁹⁵

Accordingly, Thomas is not making a reference to the idea that an effect can remain after *its cause* has disappeared (like a house after the builder leaves?).⁹⁶ The reason that the soul remains individuated is that the individuated *esse* it has obtained in being made as the form of this body is an absolute act of being.⁹⁷ Thus, the soul remains in its own

⁹⁵ Armand Maurer, in his translation, *On Being and Essence* (Toronto: PIMS, 1949), 52, has:

Although the soul’s individuation depends on the body for the occasion of its beginning, since it comes into possession of its individuated act of existing only in the body of which it is the act, it is not necessary that the individuation come to an end when the body is removed. *Since* its act of existing is independent, once it has acquired an individual act of existing from its being made the form of this particular body, that act of existing always remains individuated. [emphasis added]

⁹⁶ In fact, as is well-known, Thomas’s conception of causality is such that the effect cannot remain if the cause is removed. That the builder can leave and the house remain means that the builder is not the cause of being of the house, but only the cause of its coming to be: cf. e.g., *ST I*, q. 104, a. 1.

⁹⁷ Notice that translation of St. Thomas can require some adaptability. At *De ente et essentia* 5, lines 47–48, he uses the adjective “*absolutum*” in contrast to “*receptum*” in order to distinguish the *esse* of creatures from that of God: God’s *esse* is “all by itself,” not received in something. At line 65, he uses “*absolutum*” concerning the human soul’s *esse*, in order to deny any *dependence* on the body for its existence.

being, with a relation to a body. Kenny should have paid more attention to the word "*occasionaliter*." Union with the body is the occasion for the individuation of the soul; the body is not a sort of physical cause of the individuation of the soul.

I make this last remark because Kenny says:

This [the idea that the body is the cause of the individuation, but the effect can remain when the cause is no longer there] seems to involve an insouciant passage from one kind of causation to a very different kind. Individuation is surely something logically prior to relationships between physical causes and effects. (48)

Kenny is the one who has introduced the whole system of causes and effects he is placing individuation before. He is simply not coming to grips with the text (having taken the "*cum*" for a "though" instead of a "since"). He should have looked at such a text as the earlier *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard* 1.8.5.2, ad 6, as well as the whole article. The individuation of the human soul is not "*ex corpore*," that is, is not *caused* by the body, though it is acquired "*in corpore*," in the body.⁹⁸

This concludes our look at *De ente et essentia*. There really seems no hope for much better from Kenny, but I will touch a few other points just to be sure.

A Visit to the *Summa contra Gentiles*

The Anselmian Argument

Already, in the remarks on Thomas's treatment of the Anselmian argument, we see the Kenny weakness as to Thomas's doctrine concerning God as *Ipsium esse subsistens*. On page 84, concerning Aquinas's presentation of Anselm's *Proslogion* 2 argument, firstly, I do not agree with the Kenny criticism of the presentation of the Anselmian argument. While it is true that Thomas, in formulating the argument, does not use the literal form of the self-contradiction that is involved in saying that "that than which a greater cannot be thought does not have being outside the mind," he does use the very meaning of "God" to say that one cannot say it exists only in the mind and not in things. The argument is the same. I would concede that Anselm's own formulation is more arresting or dramatic.

⁹⁸ Of course, later texts are also clear: cf. SC 9.ad 4; and DA 1.ad 2. I would grant that in *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard* 1.8.5.2, ad 6 there appears to be a minor textual difficulty. Near the beginning the text speaks of the individuation as "*ex corpore*," but this is clearly rejected in the detailed explanation.

Most of all I disagree with what Kenny says about Thomas's view of the meaning of the name: "that than which a greater cannot be thought." He claims Thomas is saying it is *intrinsically incoherent*, and Kenny says it is probably the case, like "the greatest possible natural number." If Kenny thinks Thomas means this, Kenny is quite wrong. For Thomas, the Anselmian formula has nothing wrong with it, and rightly is said of God (though not as the meaning of the word "God"). However, the God so characterized is not available to the human mind as an immediately evident existent. The human being needs a demonstration that there is a "that than which a greater cannot be thought."

When he comes to Thomas's point about the existence of God being *per se nota* in itself but not to us, he accuses Thomas of confusing being with existence (85), but it is he himself who is confused as to the ambiguity of "existence." That it be the same item by which one answers the question "does he exist?" and "what is he?" is true in the unique case of God. It is also true that we cannot know God's *esse* any more than his quiddity. We know his effects and can conclude to the *truth* that there *is* a God. And, of course, such a cause must be an extra-mental existent, not a privation, etc. What we know is the truth of the conclusion that couples God and real existence. Eventually we can even conclude that in God there must be identity of essence and existence.

Ipsium Esse Subsistens Revisited

Kenny rightly spends time on *Summa contra Gentiles* 1.22, that in God there is no essence other than his *esse*. Let us examine his discussion of one of the arguments, described by Kenny as Thomas's "longest argument." He is referring to Pera edition no. 207, the third of the six arguments, based on God being the first cause, itself having no cause.

Thomas's argument is actually very simple and one that he often uses. Since the divine essence is simple, if the *esse* is other than it, it cannot be a part of the essence; it must be a sort of attachment. Such an attachment belongs to a thing only through a cause. If the cause is other than God himself, he will not be the first cause, itself uncaused. But if the cause is the essence itself, what follows? *The essence is [that is, "exists"] in virtue of that esse*. Thus, the essence will be cause of its own existence, something obviously impossible since it would have to be prior to itself.

I put the one sentence in italic letters because I notice immediately (100) that Kenny has once more mistranslated the text. The text has: "*Essentia autem est secundum illud esse*." Kenny translates it as "The essence is determined by the *esse*." Obviously, the proper translation is: "The essence *is* in virtue of that *esse*." And it thus continues: "it follows that something is for

its own self the cause of being." The argument itself should have suggested the translation.⁹⁹

Now, Kenny's problem with the argument has to do precisely with this mistranslation. He asks what is meant by saying that the essence is "determined by *esse*." He interprets it to mean "not, clearly, that essence is determined by existence, but that to have a certain essence is to have a certain kind of being, to be in a certain way." Now, again, this is not what Thomas means, even though it is true. This interpretation of Kenny's comes down to saying that the essence determines the act of being, something Thomas teaches,¹⁰⁰ but that is not his point here. His point here is that through *esse* the essence *is*, that is, exists. This is not merely the "exists" that answers the question "is it?" This is the actuality of the essence, and is the "most perfect act"; thus, in *Summa contra Gentiles* 2, we read:

Since every agent activates [*agat*] inasmuch as it is in act, therefore it belongs to the first agent, which is most perfect, to be in act in the most perfect way. . . . Now, the most perfect act [*ipse actus perfectissimus*] . . . is *esse*, at which all generation and all change has its terminus: for every form and every act is in potency until it acquires *esse*. Therefore, to God alone does it belong that he be being itself [*ipsum esse*]: just as [to him] alone does it belong that he be the first agent.¹⁰¹

It is the very contribution proper to an efficient cause that is meant by "*esse*." It is the *existence* of the nature. (On the other hand, the "exist" that answers the question "does it exist?" can apply even to blindness and other privations, even though they have no essence and so no act of being or existence.)

Kenny read the "determination" of the essence by *esse* as "not, of course, one of efficient causality; it is a conceptual determination." On the contrary, the *esse* here is the proper effect of the efficient cause. A thing whose essence is not its *esse* is a thing that requires an efficient cause in order to be or exist. In fact, the argument Kenny is discussing here, though he does not

⁹⁹ The sentence is correctly translated by Anton Pegis: cf. *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith: Book One: God* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955), 1.22 (para. 6): "the essence is through that being."

¹⁰⁰ Cf. e.g., SCG 2.52:

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. [The [act of] being, precisely as such, cannot be diverse; but it can be diversified by something which is other than [the act of] being: the way that being a stone is diverse from being a human being.]

¹⁰¹ SCG 2.52 (1279).

know it, really is a repeat of the argument in the *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, where Thomas is explicit about it being a matter of efficient causality:

Everything that belongs to something either is caused by the principles of its own nature: as capability of laughter in man, or else comes to it from some extrinsic principle: as light in air from the influence of the sun. However, it cannot be the case that being itself [*ipsum esse*] be caused by the very form or quiddity of the thing (*I mean, as by an efficient cause*), because then some thing would be cause of its own self, and some thing would produce itself in existence [*esse*]: which is impossible.¹⁰²

This is the argument again given in first place in the *ST* I, q. 3, a. 4 (*corpus articuli*), absolutely central to Thomas's doctrine of being.

Thus, once more Kenny has failed to understand the argument. He has not made contact with Thomas Aquinas on this at all. Indeed, after reading the section on *Summa contra Gentiles* 1.22, I have concluded that Kenny does not understand it at all. His rejection of the arguments is worthless.

We now come to c. 23, the topic of which is that in God there is no accident. In it God is spoken of as "*ipsum esse*" [that is, *Ipsum esse subsistens*]. Kenny contends that the thesis has been changed here. Previously (here in *Summa contra Gentiles*), we were saying that God is "*his esse*," whereas now God is said to be "*esse itself*." It is certainly true that the thesis of the previous chapter was expressed almost entirely as "in God the *esse* and the essence are identical" or that "God is his *esse*." We notice there, nevertheless, that the confirmation of the thesis at the end of the chapter, with the citation of Boethius, is that God is "*ipsum esse*" and that from him is "*esse*" (1.22). Still, does any argument in 1.22 lead one to expect that God is "*esse itself*"? If there is one that prepares the reader for this, it is the last, not discussed by Kenny:

Every thing *is* through this, that it has *esse*. Therefore, no thing whose essence is not its *esse* *is* by its very *essence*, but rather by participation in something, viz. in *esse itself* [*ipsius esse*]. But that which *is* through participation in something cannot be the first being [*primum ens*], because that which something participates in order to *be* is prior to it.

¹⁰² *De ente et essentia* 4 (lines 127–35) [my stress]:

Omne autem quod convenit alicui vel est causatum ex principiis naturae suae, sicut risibile in homine, vel advenit ab aliquo principio extrinseco, sicut lumen in aere ex influentia solis. Non autem potest *esse* quod ipsum *esse* sit causatum ab ipsa forma vel quidditate rei (*dico sicut a causa efficiente*) quia sic aliqua *res* esset sui ipsius causa et aliqua *res* seipsam in *esse* produceret, quod est impossibile.

But God is the first being, to which nothing is prior. Therefore, the essence of God is his *esse* (1.22).

Even though this merely concludes that God is “his *esse*,” it is obvious that “*esse*” is here being taken along the lines of a common nature that can exist either in its purity, that is, as an essence, or as something participated. Thus, it emerges that the *esse* of God is “*ipsum esse*,” that is, that it is *esse* as having the status of an *essence*.

Quite explicitly, this depends on God being proved to exist as the first being, something established in an argument in 1.13, which Kenny left out of the discussion. There God was seen as *maxime ens*, that is, the being having most of all the status of a being.

Of course, we will get further information about God being “*ipsum esse*” as we go along, but it is not true that it did not get into 1.22.

Here in 1.23 the point is that there can be no accidents in God. The argument that leads off, and on which Kenny is focusing, is as follows:

Esse itself cannot participate in something which is not of its essence, though that which is can participate in something else. [The reason is] that nothing is more formal or more simple than *esse*. And thus *esse itself* cannot participate in anything. But the divine substance is *esse itself*. Hence, it has nothing that is not of its own substance. Therefore, no accident can inhere in it.¹⁰³

This is practically a quotation from Boethius's *De hebdomadibus* or Thomas's commentary on it (already discussed by Kenny).

Kenny asks about the meaning of this argument. He says, “It cannot mean that God is pure existence, as is widely recognized by philosophers” (105). In support of this, seemingly, Kenny refers us to Christopher Hughes, and Norman Kretzmann approving of Hughes. He adds that the reason for this impossibility is not that “pure existence” would be “too thin a predicate” (the reason given by the other two), but that it is not a predicate at all.

Thomas himself means something which Kretzmann, Hughes, and Kenny have not caught sight of.¹⁰⁴ I would again stress the ambiguity of “existence,” which can mean either the answer to “whether it exists” or signify the act of the essence. “Existence” as truth sign is, indeed, too thin.

¹⁰³ SCG 1.23.

¹⁰⁴ I criticize Kretzmann and Hughes in “Review of Norman Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Theism*,” in *EIDOS* 14 (1997): 97–121. I will return to them in a forthcoming article in *Nova et Vetera*, “St. Thomas, Norman Kretzmann, and Divine Freedom in Creating.”

It expresses no essence at all. That is why it is said of blindness. On the other hand, the act of existence is the actuality of the essence, and is the “most perfect act,” as we saw above.¹⁰⁵

Kenny says “pure *esse*”; this is his translation of “*ipsum esse*,” which more literally is “*esse* itself.” Still, there is nothing wrong with saying “pure *esse*,” provided it is clear that it can be identical with “pure essence” (and indeed with essence at its most authentic). The expression “*esse purum*” does occur once, at least, in Thomas’s writings, in his *Super librum de causis expositio*, lect. 9. where the *esse* of the first cause is said to be pure rather than participated. Kenny is wondering how to conceive of it. The way, I would say, is to develop a hierarchical picture starting from below (actually, this is already underway with a distinction between potency and act: Act “has more of the nature of *esse* than potency has”).¹⁰⁶ In fact, an efficient causal hierarchy involves lower and higher modes of *esse*. Thus, one eventually develops a “trajectory” toward an act of being that is not received in anything, but rather is pure. One is not supposed to be able to imagine it, as such; it is not an object of imagination. Indeed, as the essence of God, the constant lesson is that it is humanly inconceivable. We know that there is such a thing, but we do not know it in the mode of knowing “what a thing is.”

Thomas presents the overall project of climbing to *Ipsum esse subsistens* time after time in his writings, from beginning to end of his career. Thus, at the very beginning of the *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*, asking whether there is one God, Thomas presents the following argument:

It is necessary that every nature which is found in many instances according to priority and posteriority descend from one first in which it is had

¹⁰⁵ SCG 2.52. On the “*esse*” had by that which has no essence, and so is “thin” and no “predicate” in Kenny’s sense, cf. ST I, q. 48, a. 1, and 2, ad 2. Cf. SCG 3.7 and 9.

¹⁰⁶ *De substantiis separatis* c. 7:

the more something has of the nature of being [*de ratione essendi*], the higher it is among beings. But it is evident that, while being [*ens*] is divided by potency and act, act is more perfect than potency and has more of the nature of being: for we do not say of that which is in potency: “it is,” unqualifiedly; [we say that] only of that which is actually. Therefore, it is necessary that that which is higher among beings attain more to act, but that which is lower among beings be closer to potency. (tanto aliquid in entibus est altius, quanto magis habet de ratione essendi. Manifestum est autem quod cum ens per potentiam et actum dividatur, quod actus est potentia perfectior, et magis habet de ratione essendi: non enim simpliciter esse dicimus quod est in potentia, sed solum quod est actu. Oportet igitur id quod est superius in entibus, magis accedere ad actum; quod autem est in entibus infimum, propinquius esse potentiae.) [emphasis added]

perfectly: for unity in the effect attests to unity in the source: as all heat originates in one thing which is hottest, which is fire. But entity [*entitas*] is found in many according to priority and posteriority. Therefore, it is necessary that there be one first most perfect being [*ens*] from which all beings have being [*esse*]; and this is God. Therefore, there is one God.¹⁰⁷

This is repeated at the beginning of book 2, where the topic is creation, and it is asked whether there is one first principle of all things.¹⁰⁸ One sees it again in the presentation of the overall metaphysical project in another youthful work, Thomas's *Commentary on Boethius's De trinitate*. Thomas is explaining that metaphysics is about things that are without matter or change. In order to present a hierarchy of more and more universal causes, he says:

the principles of the accidents are reduced to the principles of substances, and the principles of corruptible substances are reduced to the incorruptible substances, and thus by a stepwise order all beings are traced back to certain principles. And because that which is the principle of all beings must be maximally a being, as is said in *Metaphysics* 2, therefore such principles must be most complete, and for that reason they must be maximally in act, such that they have nothing or little of potency: because act is prior and more powerful than potency, as is said in *Metaphysics* 9. And for that reason they must be without matter, which is in potency, and without change, which is the act of what exists in potency. And such are divine things, because if the divine exists anywhere, it exists most of all in such an immaterial and unchangeable nature, as is said in *Metaphysics* 6.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard* 1.2.1.1.sed contra 1 [Mandonnet, 59–60]:

omnis natura quae invenitur in pluribus secundum prius et posterius, oportet quod descendat ab uno primo, in quo perfecte habeatur. Unitas enim principiati attestatur unitati principii, sicut omnis calor originatur ab uno calidissimo, quod est ignis. Sed entitas invenitur in pluribus secundum prius et posterius. Ergo oportet *esse* unum primum ens perfectissimum, a quo omnia entia habent *esse*, et hic est deus. Est igitur unus deus.

In the context the arguments *sed contra* are approved by Thomas.

¹⁰⁸ *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard* 2.1.1.1 (Mandonnet, 12–13): It is the second of three arguments in the body of the article.

¹⁰⁹ *In De trin.* 5.4:

principia accidentium reducuntur in principia substantiae et principia substantiarum corruptibilium reducuntur in substantias incorruptibiles, et sic quodam gradu et ordine in quaedam principia omnia entia reducuntur. Et quia id, quod est principium essendi omnibus, oportet *esse* maxime ens, ut dicitur in II metaphysicae, ideo huiusmodi principia oportet *esse* completissima, et propter hoc oportet ea *esse* maxime actu, ut nihil vel

In short, there is no shortage of presentations of ontological hierarchy based on efficient causal hierarchy in Thomas. I generally begin such discussion by considering how the “being up high” of a book depends on the “being up high” of my hand, holding the book on high. The one existence flows from, depends on, the other. This relates to the nature of the book and of the hand, as regards being sources of efficient causality.

Kenny, in footnote 32, page 109, concerning *Summa contra Gentiles* 1.30, on the words we use about God, speaks of Thomas speaking of “Platonic subsistent forms.” In fact, there is no mention of such beings in the chapter. One must assume that any reference to subsisting form is “Platonic” for Kenny. Kenny speaks of Thomas ruling out the subsistent form Kenny is speaking of only because of “the imperfection of sublunar entities.” All this is very hard to make correspond to the discussion in chapter 30. Thomas does say there that our minds have a way of understanding and speaking that is suited to things composed of form and matter. This, of course, is not merely “sublunar entities,” since for Thomas the heavens were matter/form composites. Thomas teaches that the human soul is a subsistent form, and so are the angels. Thomas certainly is affirming the existence of wisdom, goodness, and being, just in themselves subsisting. This is his doctrine concerning God. Such an entity is not necessarily “Platonic.” What is rejected by Thomas is the Platonic way of establishing the existence of immaterial reality, whether secondary or supreme. Now, how a thing’s existence is established has a great deal to do with what one ends up talking about. This is presented especially in *De substantiis separatis*, one of St. Thomas’s most mature and thorough presentations of ontology. Thomas there rejects the very root of the Platonic approach to separate entity. This is not discussed by Kenny.

Obviously, Thomas thinks there is much to commend in Plato, even though he criticizes him.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, he takes an Aristotelian approach to separate entity, including God. Aristotle, in the *Metaphysics*, teaches that there is one principle of the entire universe, and that it is

minimum habeant de potentia, quia actus est prior et potior potentia, ut dicitur in IX metaphysicae. Et propter hoc oportet ea *esse* absque materia, quae est in potentia, et absque motu, qui est actus existentis in potentia. Et huiusmodi sunt *res* divinae; quia si divinum alicubi existit, in tali natura, immateriali scilicet et immobili, maxime existit, ut dicitur in VI metaphysicae.

¹¹⁰ Thus, in *De potentia* 3.5 Plato is presented along with Aristotle and Avicenna as among those philosophers who attained to a consideration of universal being and its need of a cause; we see the same thing in *ST* I, q. 44, a. 1, in *Commentary on Aristotle’s Physics* 8.2 [5], and in the *De substantiis separatis* 3.

good.¹¹¹ Its simplicity and primacy certainly would merit it being designated linguistically by the abstract form, as discussed in *Summa contra Gentiles* 1.30: that is, that it need not merely be called “good” or “the highest good,” or “the source of all good,” but indeed could well be called “goodness itself.” Thomas’s general appeal to a philosophical predecessor as regards climbing to being itself subsisting is Aristotle, as presenting a hierarchy of being as being, especially in *Metaphysics* 2.¹¹²

Kenny ends his chapter on the *Summa contra Gentiles* with 2.28, comparing *esse* to whiteness, with the idea that whiteness, if separately subsisting, would have all the power of whiteness. Kenny sees this whiteness as a “Platonic Idea” and concludes that for Thomas *esse* is a Platonic idea. This is not true. It is certainly true that Thomas sees some truth in Plato speaking about the highest Ideas. However, Thomas does not think that one arrives at the existence of *esse* subsisting by a Platonic route. One cannot make an adequate judgment of the meaning and suitability of Thomas’s doctrine of *esse* without considering how it is arrived at. There is little sign of Kenny ever having done so.

As we come to the end of the treatment of *Summa contra Gentiles*, I repeat that it is amazing that Kenny chose to omit 2.52–55, which bear on the most important and fundamental ontological issues. It is interesting that there is no mention of the *Qq. de anima*, with their many interesting ontological considerations. We also have from this period the *Divine Names* commentary, of which nothing is said.¹¹³

¹¹¹ On the first principle as immaterial and pure act, cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 12.6 (1071b17–22); 12.7 (1072a24–26); Thomas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics* 12.5 (2495–99) and 12.6 (2518); on the first principle as both end and agent, good and unique, 12.10 (1075a38–b1; b8–10; 1076a3–4); Thomas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics* 12.12 (2644–5; 2648 and 2662–63).

¹¹² Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 2.1 (993b19–31); Thomas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics* 2.2 (289–98).

¹¹³ Thomas’s *Divine Names* is notable, besides the more important reasons, for using the vocabulary of “*existentia*” for “*esse*” at many points. This is simply because of options exercised by the translation of Dionysius that he is using. It would not be of any significance were it not that Kenny has trouble understanding that “existence” can name a formal perfection in things themselves. Cf. for example, DN 5.1(628):

Thirdly, to the note of being [*essendi*] pertains generation, which is change [terminating] at being [*esse*]; and so [Dionysius] adds that God is generation, [speaking] causally, for all items generated in whatever degree: because he confers generation on all, as is said in Isaiah 66 [verse 9]. And thus it is clear that from the first existent itself [*ex ipso primo existente*], which is God, are caused perpetuity [*aevum*], which is the measure of being, and also substance, which is that which exists through itself [*per se existente*], and

A Visit to the *De potentia*

In his chapter on *De potentia*, Kenny again comes to the argument for God not being in a genus. In *De potentia* 7.3 it is the first of the three arguments that interests Kenny, and which he thinks presents *esse* in a way contrary to what we have been seeing. It runs:

[God cannot be in a genus] because nothing is located in a genus in function of its *esse*, but by reason of its quiddity; this is clear on this basis, *that the esse of each thing is proper to it, and distinct from the esse of any other thing*, whereas the intelligibility of the substance can be common; for that reason, also, the Philosopher says that being [*ens*] is not a genus. But God is his very *esse*; hence, he cannot be in a genus.¹¹⁴

Now, what bothers Kenny is that we have seen *esse* presented as most common of all, and the above has *esse* as diverse in diverse things. Is it common or individual?

In fact, the doctrine being presented is not new in the *De potentia*. It harkens back to *De ente et essentia* 5, that God cannot be in a genus because his essence is *esse*, and things in a genus or species must have diversity of essence and *esse*; this is because “*esse* is diverse in diverse things,” whereas a generic or specific quiddity is not distinguished as regards the intelligibility of the nature in the things of which it is predicated.¹¹⁵ And Thomas repeats this in *ST I*:

All those things which are in one genus have in common the quiddity or essence of the genus, which is predicated of them as to what they are. However they differ in function of being [*esse*]: *for the being of a man and of a horse are not the same, nor of this man and of that man*. And thus it is necessary that for whatever things are in a genus, there differs in them being and “what it is,” that is, essence. But in God these do not differ, as has been shown.¹¹⁶

everything which exists in whatever way [*omne existens quocumque modo*]; and again, by God is caused that which is the measure of change, and generation itself and that which is generated, and not only are existents themselves [*ipsa existentia*] caused by God, but also whatever are in existents [*in existentibus*], such as parts and natural properties and those which in any ways either inhere, as accidents, or have the role of subject, as substances.

¹¹⁴ *De potentia* 7.3: quia nihil ponitur 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: propter hoc etiam philosophus dicit, quod ens non est genus. Deus autem est ipsum suum esse: unde non potest esse in genere. [emphasis added]

¹¹⁵ *De ente et essentia* 5 (lines 8–14). We saw earlier that Kenny, 47, n. 29, misunderstood this text.

¹¹⁶ *ST I*, q. 3, a. 5.

Still, the question is a good one. If both the generic nature and the *esse* are common, why is it that whereas the generic nature is the same as predicated of two individuals belonging to the genus, the *esse* of each individual is diverse from the *esse* of the other?

I believe that the answer is to be found in a contrast between particularity of form and universality of form.¹¹⁷ Even though a generic nature is universal, it is a particular nature as compared to the nature of being.¹¹⁸ Being is, as we know, the proper effect of the highest or most universal cause.¹¹⁹ Thus, its proper influence extends to everything whatsoever that is in the thing, including the matter as individuating.¹²⁰ Accordingly, *esse* is the absolutely *completive* actuality, embracing everything within a thing.¹²¹ Thus, it is *the subsisting thing as such* that is “that which itself has *esse*.”¹²² The particular form is a merely instrumental cause relative to the efficient cause’s conferring of *esse* on the thing. And the efficient cause of which we are primarily speaking is not merely the particular cause of generation, but the cause of creation/conservation.¹²³

The act of being has the mode of a nature or essence only in the first efficient cause, and thus is present only by participation in all else.¹²⁴ It is diversified by its receivers. Moreover, as the proper effect of the most universal cause, it is most *deeply* within all its recipients, and so is the proper perfection of the supposit, the thing in its totality, the “concrete” thing. In material things it thus is diverse numerically from individual to individual. In this way it stands in contrast to particular common natures such as constitute things in genera and species, and which have an intrinsic formal

¹¹⁷ Let us recall that *esse* is what is most *formal* of all, having the role of an item received in a receiver: *ST* I, q. 4, a. 1, ad 3, and I, q. 7, a. 1. This relates to the identification of form and first actuality; it pertains to first actuality to be “in” its subject [cf. *Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics* 9.5 (1828)], and *esse* is most intrinsic of all perfections: *ST* I, q. 8, a. 1: “*esse* is that which is most ‘within’ any thing, and most deeply inheres in all, since it is formal with respect to all [items] that are in a thing.”

¹¹⁸ *ST* I, q. 19, a. 6.

¹¹⁹ *ST* I–II, q. 66, a. 5, ad 3.

¹²⁰ *ST* I, q. 44, a. 2, ad 3.

¹²¹ *Quodl.* 12.5.1.

¹²² *ST* I, q. 45, a. 4.

¹²³ Another most helpful text for understanding the doctrine of *esse* is *SCG* 3.66, that nothing gives *esse* save as acting under the influence of the divine power. This might have helped Kenny.

¹²⁴ *ST* I, q. 44, a. 1 and again *Quodl.* 12.5.1.

diversity.¹²⁵ They are considered in themselves inasmuch as they are abstracted from being, and so are predicated commonly of all the relevant individuals. However, when considered according to being, they are seen as individuated by the supposit, just as the act of being is. The argument of the text we are here considering takes the common nature as predicated of the individuals: Thus, it is taken in itself absolutely, and thus is taken as abstracting from the act of being (as was explained in *De ente et essentia*).¹²⁶ This is then contrasted with the consideration of the same nature taken “according to being,” that is, as actually found in the supposit, where along with the act of being it has individual distinction from all other instances of that particular nature.

The question raised by Kenny is helpful, though it might have been raised already with the text of the *De ente et essentia*, which Kenny found puzzling. It helps to bring out the difference between the two sorts of formal and received metaphysical targets of attention, the act of being, on the one hand, and the particular forms, on the other. We nowhere experience the act of being with the kind of intellectual experience we have of particular form. It has the status of essence only in God, who is beyond our properly quidditative knowledge. It obtains diversification only in receivers. It is the proper perfection of the thing taken as complete, that is, the supposit. This, I would say, helps explain why there is the possibility of confusing what is meant by saying that blindness exists and what is meant by saying that existence is the proper effect of the efficient cause and the terminus of generation and all becoming. Both have a certain “facelessness,” but for different reasons.

A Visit to the *Summa theologiae*

Anselm Revisited

Kenny (132) declares his primary interest in questions 2 and 3. Let us then see what he does with question 2. He begins by criticizing the rejection of the Anselmian position. Kenny again fails to appreciate Thomas’s position. Thus, he now says that Thomas fails to consider that the notion of “that than which a greater cannot be thought” is incoher-

¹²⁵ I take this point from Johannes Capreolus, *Defensiones theologiae divi Thomae Aquinatis* [C. Paban and T. Pègues, ed. (Turonibus: Alfred Cattier, 1900), vol. I, 305b–306a].

¹²⁶ This was a primary teaching of *De ente et essentia* 3 (ed. Leonine, lines 26–72): The nature of man, e.g., absolutely considered, abstracts from every *esse* whatsoever, in such a way that it does not exclude its having *esse* happen to it; and it is the nature so considered that is predicated of all individuals.

ent (133). In fact, as we have already pointed out, Thomas's position is that God is indeed that than which a greater cannot be thought; that is what is demonstrated in *Summa theologiae* I, q. 7, a. 1 (the divine infinity of being). This should be clear from the approach, in *ST* I, q. 2, a. 1, in terms of "self-evidence" in itself but not to us. Just as the article looks ahead to the doctrine that God's essence is *Ipsum esse subsistens*, a point that for us requires demonstration, so also in Thomas's notion of God it is clear that he is unqualifiedly infinite (*ST* I, q. 7, a. 1), and thus is that than which a greater cannot be thought;¹²⁷ but for us, the existence of such a thing requires demonstration, not because of the notion, but because of the nature of human access to reality.¹²⁸ Thomas gives exactly the right answer for someone affirming the metaphysics he does. Admittedly, the appropriateness of his answer is better seen as one goes on to the next article, on what is involved in a demonstration of existence. If there is a genuine question of existence, one must start with "the meaning of a name," that is, with a mere verbal formula.¹²⁹ Thomas thus treats "that than which etc." as a verbal formula similar to "goat-stag"; we know what it means, but we do not know whether there is such a thing, since all we have is a verbal formula. I suggest that Kenny's criticisms of Thomas's approach here reveal his failure to take seriously the body of the article and its epistemological implications. Kenny actually notes the point about starting with the meaning of a name, not about a genuine "what the thing is," where the question is whether the thing exists (134), but he fails to see the relevance of that to the way Thomas handled the Anselmian argument.

The Third Way

Coming to *ST* I, q. 2, a. 3, the demonstrations of the existence of a God, Kenny chooses to speak about the third and fourth ways, as pertaining to the "theory of being." While we might note that he would do well to pay more attention to the metaphysics of efficient causal hierarchy (which is the very starting point of the second way), let us see what he does do.

Pages 135–138 are on the Third Way, and indeed on its first part. Kenny immediately tends to *identify* it with a *Summa contra Gentiles* 1.15 argument,¹³⁰ save that it is not as well expressed! He begins by saying that there is a *resemblance*, but then slips into identity, saying that "*this* cosmological argument is not as well presented in the later as in the earlier

¹²⁷ Cf. *ST* III, q. 10, a. 3, ad 3.

¹²⁸ Cf. *ST* I, q. 88, a. 1, and 3; *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics* 2.1 (279–86).

¹²⁹ *ST* I, q. 2, a. 2, ad 2.

¹³⁰ SCG 1.15.

Summa" (135, emphasis added). This already causes me concern, since I hold that the arguments are quite different.¹³¹ Kenny tells us that Thomas "includes material that would have been better omitted," this of course in the perspective that he is *adding* to the *Summa contra Gentiles* argument, rather than making a different argument.

The first suspected fallacious premise that Kenny mentions is: "a possible with respect to not being, at some time is not." Kenny asks why there cannot be something that has the "power not to exist" but as a matter of fact always does exist. He does not enter into any lengthy discussion about this.¹³² I believe that the answer is to be found in Thomas's *Commentary on Aristotle's De caelo*. Thomas introduces the very question that Kenny asks here, and replies that the premise is based on the intrinsic tendency of things to maintain their being with all their strength. Thus, a thing that does cease to be is of a nature that it must cease to be. Accordingly, a "possible with respect to *not being*" is not like "a possible with respect to sitting down or standing up"; those latter are neutral options, but things that cease to be reveal an intrinsic incapacity to remain in being. It should be stressed that the Third Way is asking whether intrinsically necessary *substantial* being exists, and not just generally about necessity in things. Otherwise, it could not formulate necessary premises about the natures being discussed. The premise in question is akin to "it belongs to the nature of things that what can go wrong eventually will go wrong."¹³³ It also is to be taken in the context of eternal existence. We are supposing that the thing has *always* maintained its existence if it still exists.

In any case, Kenny here merely casts doubt on that premise in passing (having said in note 6, page 134, that he has already discussed these two Ways, the third and fourth, in detail in his book on the Five Ways). His focus here is whether it follows that if everything has what he calls "the power of not being," then at some time there is nothing. It should be remarked that "power" is an odd word for someone linguistically sophisticated to choose to translate "*quod possibile est non esse*": Thomas, at any rate, does not say "*virtus*," and "power" in English normally means *active* potentiality. "Power to not be" sounds like the rational agent's ability to commit suicide.

¹³¹ Cf. my paper "The Interpretation of St. Thomas's Third Way," in *Littera, sensus, sentential: Studi in onore del Prof. Clemente J. Vansteenkiste*, OP, A. Lobato, OP, ed. (Milan: Massimo, 1991), at n. 22.

¹³² I have criticized his approach to this in my paper: "The Distinctiveness of St. Thomas's Third Way," *Dialogue* 19 (1980): 201–18.

¹³³ Cf. *ST* I, q. 48, a. 2, ad 3, "*ipsa autem natura rerum hoc habet, ut quae deficere possunt, quandoque deficiant.*"

Kenny contends that there is a logical flaw in Thomas's argument that if all beings are possibles with respect to not being, then, since a possible with respect to not being at some time is not, it follows that at some time nothing was. In order to bring out what he sees as the flaw he asks why corruptible beings should not *overlap* each other, so that each one comes to be and passes away, but there is never any time when nothing at all exists (136).

In reflecting on this, seemingly, he notes that Thomas contends that the non-being of all would *already* have occurred. Why, Kenny asks, think the time of general non-existence was in the past rather than the future? Kenny then suggests that Thomas is addressing "Aristotelian philosophers who believed that the world always existed." Thomas may be thinking, says Kenny, that "a possibility that has not been realized in an infinite time is not a real possibility." Kenny says that this too is fallacious, since one cannot argue from "each thing has the possibility of corrupting" to "there is a possibility of everything corrupting" (137).

Indeed, Thomas here is thinking of an eternal world scenario. As he says in the *Summa contra Gentiles*, the most efficacious way to prove the existence of a God is on the supposition of the eternity of the world, since that supposition makes it less evident that there is a God. If the world and its change have begun to exist, then the existence of a cause is evident, since nothing brings itself from potency to act, or from non-being to being.¹³⁴

Now, within this picture of eternal generation and corruption, Kenny is suggesting that there might be eternal "overlap." However, that is precisely to posit a "failsafe" *system*. What guarantees this eternal arrangement? That is, of course, what leads to Thomas's conclusion that there must exist a substance not subject to corruption, that is, precisely to account for such a system. As we read, for example, in a passage on quite another subject

If there are many successive agents, that is, one of which acts after the action of another, the *continuity* of action of these [agents] cannot be caused by some one of them, because none of them always acts; nor by all [of them], because they do not act together; hence, it is necessary that it be caused by some superior [agent] which always acts; just as Aristotle proves in *Physics* 8 [c. 6 (258b28–32)] that the continuity of generation in animals is caused by some perpetually [existent] superior [cause].¹³⁵

¹³⁴ SCG 1.13.

¹³⁵ SCG 3.155: Thomas is teaching that a human being needs the help of grace in order to persevere in the good. One should read all of the argument of Aristotle, right to 259a14.

This is how I read the Third Way. It bears upon the mode of substantial being we most immediately know, namely that of corruptible things. The question he is posing may thus be framed as: Can all substance be corruptible? Is it conceivable that there exist no other mode of substantial being? The law of such being is that it ceases to exist. If one posit that as the sole mode of being, it will apply to all there is. At some time, we can conclude, the “all” will have ceased to be.¹³⁶ If one posits a failsafe system, so that while all cease to be, something always exists, one must posit the adequate principle of such a system, and that can only be a necessary being. Otherwise, one must be saying that a system that clearly can fail, and indeed must fail, has eternally succeeded.

That reading is in accordance with Thomas’s argument being a rewrite of the well-known argument of Maimonides. Albert the Great wrote a version of it in his *Metaphysics*, but I think that Thomas’s is the most precise statement of the case, and expressed in terms of ontological necessities.¹³⁷ I find that the flaws Kenny accuses Thomas of committing are not applicable. It is true that if the mode of being of every substance is that of corruptible being, then the entire assembly of individuals engaged in reproduction will not have sufficed to maintain reality eternally.

Kenny goes on to speak of people suggesting that a universe of temporal beings might be everlasting. I would say, rather, that this is impossible unless one posits, for example, matter as a necessary substance. In fact, Thomas so presents it in *ST* I, q. 104, a. 4: Matter is incorruptible, in its role of subject of generation and corruption (626a27–31). However, the necessary being of primary matter seems to me less evident than the conclusion of the first part of the Third Way that we are discussing: “Therefore, there must be *something* necessary among things.” Of course, if one makes primary matter the uncaused necessary being, one assumes the position of David of Dinant.¹³⁸ And if one thinks that the existence of primary matter implies that there must be necessary *actual* being, one is moving in the right direction. In any case, I would say that Kenny has failed to grasp the power of the argument.

¹³⁶ Am I conceiving of the “all” as a *system* that is *built to fail*, or am I conceiving of the “all” as not truly a system at all, and thus whose failure is accidental? It is the latter that Thomas has in mind in the sort of argument I have indicated (see the previous note), i.e., if reality is made up of reproducers that may well “overlap,” nevertheless unless the overlap has a substantial source of guarantee, i.e., is a failsafe system, then in the eternal-world perspective it must already have failed. One has posited no cause of the continuity of the agents.

¹³⁷ See my paper, “The Interpretation,” mentioned above.

¹³⁸ Cf. *ST* I, q. 3, a. 8: David “most stupidly” identified God with primary matter.

The Fourth Way

Kenny discusses the Fourth Way at pages 139–141.¹³⁹ He tells us:

One thing is immediately clear: If we can talk about degrees of *esse*, then *esse* must be something different from existence. . . . Things either exist or they do not; there is no halfway house between existence and non-existence. Of course, things may exist for longer or shorter periods, but they cannot exist to a greater or lesser degree (139).

In a footnote to this (page 139, note 15), he claims that elsewhere in *Summa theologiae* Aquinas seems prepared to accept that there cannot be degrees of *esse*. His reference is to I, q. 5, a. 1, obj. 3, and ad 3. Here again Kenny seems unable to cope with the inevitable ambiguities, due to change of context, of metaphysical writing. In the context of 1.5.1, where the issue is whether “good” adds to “a being” some reality or a mere notion, Thomas is speaking of the situation *within one thing*, contrasting its substantial being or existence with its being good. That the substantial being or existence, in function of which a thing is called “a being” unqualifiedly, is not had *by that thing* in terms of “more and less” is clear; whereas “good” is said according to more and less because it is said more properly in function of the perfections added to substantial being. But what about the Fourth Way context, a context of *hierarchy of diverse things*? Kenny should have seen the difference.

Thus, the question is: Can *existence* be found in a hierarchy of things according to the more and the less, the more noble and the less noble? We might begin with a discussion we have already had reason to visit a few times, the well-known text early in *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*, that is, 1.8, thus before the *De ente et essentia*. Thomas is defending the text of Peter Lombard (and St. Augustine) against misunderstanding. Peter has quoted Augustine on the divine *esse*, as follows: “And who is *more [magis est]* than he who said to his servant: ‘I am who am?’”¹⁴⁰ The objector, a Kenny precursor, complains: “This seems to be

¹³⁹ I would not translate quite as Kenny does. He translates “*magis et minus*” by “more or less.” Thomas is taking his start from a vision of things actually in hierarchy, the more *and* the less (my hand is good and my head is better, i.e., has *more* of the nature of the good.). The expression “more or less” might, if only unconsciously, suggest a doubt as to whether a thing is good or not. It is better to use the more literal rendering, since it is meant. (The old Dominican translation has this right. The French translation from Editions du Cerf, that of A.-D. Sertillanges, has “ou” rather than “et.”)

¹⁴⁰ Peter Lombard here is quoting St. Augustine, *De trinitate* 5, cap. 2 [PL 8 (of Aug.), col. 912]: Augustine’s own text, taking a first step in speaking of God, runs:

said inappropriately, because “is [*esse*]” is not susceptible to the more and the less.” Thomas replies:

It is to be said that something can be spoken of as “more” and “less” in two ways: (1) either as regards the participated nature itself, which just in itself is more intense or less intense in virtue of approach to or distance from a term: and this occurs only in accidents; or else (2) in function of the measure of participating: and in this way even in essential things [*in essentialibus*] one speaks of the more and the less in virtue of diverse measure of participating: for example, an angel is said to be “more intellectual” than a human being. Now,¹⁴¹ “God purely is [*tantum est*], he who does not know ‘was’ or ‘will be’,” by experiential knowledge so to speak, such that successions of time be experienced in his own being.¹⁴²

[II 3] Est tamen sine dubitatione substantia uel si melius hoc appellatur essentia, quam graeci *ousian* uocant. Sicut enim ab eo quod est sapere dicta est sapientia et ab eo quod est scire dicta est scientia, ita ab eo quod est *esse* dicta est essentia. *Et quis magis est quam ille qui dixit famulo suo: Ego sum qui sum, et: Dices filiis Israhel: Qui est misit me ad uos?* Sed aliae quae dicuntur essentiae siue substantiae capiunt accidentias quibus in eis fiat uel magna uel quantacumque mutatio; deo autem aliquid eiusmodi accidere non potest. Et ideo sola est incommutabilis substantia uel essentia quae deus est, cui profecto ipsum esse unde essentia nominata est maxime ac uerissime competit. Quod enim mutatur non seruat ipsum esse, et quod mutari potest etiamsi non mutetur potest quod fuerat non esse, ac per hoc illud solum quod non tantum non mutatur uerum etiam mutari omnino non potest sine scrupulo occurrit quod uerissime dicatur esse. [emphasis added]

I would say that this doctrine of “*esse*” is most important. Notice that it is presented as the act whence “essence” or “substance” or “ousia” gets its name. To an objector who challenges this doctrine that wisdom gets its name from wisely knowing and essence gets its name from *esse*, Thomas Aquinas replies that Lombard (and Augustine) are speaking in terms of the order of human knowledge, which proceeds from acts to habits; the implication is that *esse*, the act of being, is the effect of essence.

¹⁴¹ I am taking this further remark as part of the explanation of the “is more” text, though it also explains the sense of the word “know” in saying that God does not know past or future.

¹⁴² *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard* 1.8.2.3.*expositio textus* [Mandonnet, 209]:

“Et quis magis est quam ille qui dixit famulo suo: ego sum qui sum?” Videtur inconvenienter loqui: *quia esse non suscipit magis et minus*. Dicendum, quod magis et minus potest dici aliquid dupliciter: vel *quantum ad ipsam naturam participatam*, quae secundum se intenditur et remittitur secundum accessum ad terminum vel recessum; et hoc non est nisi in accidentibus; vel *quantum ad modum participandi*; et sic etiam in *essentialibus* dicitur magis et minus secundum diversum modum participandi, sicut Angelus dicitur magis intellectualis quam homo. Deus autem *tantum est*, qui non novit

We see that we are already very much in the Fourth Way picture. God is being viewed as what Thomas will eventually call "*ipsum esse subsistens*," and is thus existence itself subsisting. In contrast, all else is viewed as participating in existence in a way proportionate to the thing's substantial nature, as being closer or more remote from the divine: Thus, some things "are more" and some things "are less," whereas God maximally *is*.¹⁴³

How is it that Thomas himself clearly sees existence as admitting of the more and the less? We must note, to begin with, that we are saying that the word "existence" translates both meanings of "*esse*," that is, signifying the true and as signifying the act of being. It appears to us that by "existence" Kenny really means the "*esse*" that signifies the true ("Blindness exists"). Secondly, if one is to understand the act of being as subject to the more and the less, one must view it, in things other than God, as caused by both the form of the thing whose being it is and the efficient cause of the thing whose being it is. Indeed, one must view the efficient cause as conferring existence on the thing *by* conferring form.¹⁴⁴

Within the confines of this review I will merely indicate generally the hierarchical situation in Thomas's metaphysics. Thus, if we take the presentation already quoted from *In De trin* 5.4, we see that the main hierarchy is that between generable/corruptible beings and permanent beings.

Being in act is found originally in the efficient cause, and since there can be no procession to infinity in efficient causes, most originally of all in the first efficient cause. If one thing dominates another in the line of efficient causality, this is because its proper nature has a more primary

fuisse vel futurum *esse*, notitia quasi experimentalis, ut scilicet successiones temporum in suo *esse* experiatur. [emphasis added]

¹⁴³ Here in Thomas's explanation, the defense of the Augustinian quotation makes use of a quotation from St. Jerome, one also included in the same text of Peter Lombard, i.e., the presentation of the divine *esse* as excluding "was" and "will be." Jerome, *Epist.* 15.4 (PL t. 1, col. 357). It is interesting, in this regard, to consider the presentation of Peter Lombard himself, who, having quoted a text of Augustine explaining our use of all the tenses in speaking of God, goes on to explain the statement of Jerome that excludes past and future in speaking of God. We see that he rightly speaks of the "*essentiam sive existentiam*" of God (Mandonnet, 188); he has no doubt that "*esse*" here is existence.

¹⁴⁴ Consider the way Thomas argues in *Summa contra Gentiles* 2.43, where the issue is whether the forms whereby created things have distinction from each other are caused by some angel, God providing merely the matter:

Just as *esse* is first among effects, it accordingly corresponds to the first cause as its proper effect. But *esse* is through form and not through matter. Therefore, the primary causing of forms is to be most of all attributed to the first cause.

“purchase” on actual existence than does the nature of the effect. We thus see grades of participation in actual existence. A thing’s place in the hierarchy of actual existence is proportionate to its essential nature.

We see this in *Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics* 2.2. The hierarchy presented is of (1) generable and corruptible things, (2) caused things that never cease to be, and (3) uncaused things. Thus, we read:

the principles of those things which are always, viz. of the heavenly bodies, must necessarily be truest. And this for two reasons. Firstly, they are not sometimes true and sometimes not; and by this they transcend in truth generable and corruptible things, which sometimes are and sometimes are not. Secondly, because nothing is a cause relative to them, but they are the cause of being for the others; and by this they transcend in truth and entity [*in veritate et entitate*] the heavenly bodies: which though they are incorruptible nevertheless have a cause, not only as regards their being moved, as some have opined, but also as regards their being [*suum esse*], as here the Philosopher expressly says. (295)

And we have a corollary:

Since the situation is such that those which are to others the cause of being [*causa essendi*] are most true, it follows that each thing, as it stands towards precisely this, that it is [*quod sit*], so also it stands towards the fact that it has truth [*quod habeat veritatem*]. Those things whose being [*esse*] does not always stand in the same way, neither does their truth remain always. And those whose being [*esse*] has a cause, also have a cause of their truth. And this is because the being of the thing [*esse rei*] is the cause of the true assessment [*verae existimationis*] which the mind has concerning the thing. For the true and the false are not in things, but in the mind, as is said in book 6 of this work. (298)

It is surely clear that Thomas is considering a hierarchy of measures of the act of being, that is, of existence, the perfection of the efficient cause and of its effect.

Kenny admits that we can “arrange things in hierarchies” in terms, for example, of beings having cognition and beings lacking cognition. However he says: “This provides a scale of beings, not of being. Socrates is not more real than his dog, and his dog is not more real than his cactus” (140). On the contrary, as Thomas explains in *ST* I, q. 14, a. 1, the nature that knows is more ample than the nature that lacks the ability to know, precisely inasmuch as the nature that knows “is in a way all things.” This is to say that the hierarchy is one in function of “measure of being” of the things involved. Hierarchy here also pertains to distinguishing what has more of the nature of an efficient cause from what has less of that nature. The efficient causal hierarchy is essentially divided by the members “reason” and “mere nature,” a doctrine presented by

Aristotle in *Metaphysics* 9.2, and followed by Thomas in for example, *ST* I, q. 19, a. 4 (first argument in the corpus), and I, q. 4, a. 1 (efficient causality and being in act). Kenny is simply unconscious of the existential meaning of natural being.¹⁴⁵

Kenny asks, apropos of the approaching a maximum, whether the maximum is supposed to be ideal or real. Kenny does not seem to appreciate the universality of the method used in Fourth Way. This is perhaps in part because it appeals to the doctrine of the elements, and to fire as the source of heat in all hot things. A more sympathetic reader might ask what was at the foundation of this early chemistry. I would say that it is an experience that is universal, and on which all scientific investigation is based. We see it in such devices as sonar (asdic) and radar. We see it in the etymology of "investigation" (the trailing of an animal by its footprints being deeper or shallower, the trail being "hot" or "cold"). It is the experience of the bonfire. If one is warm, one is close to the source, the maximum. If one is less warm, one is further from the source. All doctrines of "traces" follow that schema.¹⁴⁶ Thus Thomas can write:

To the extent that something is closer to the cause, to that extent it participates more in its effect. Hence, if something is all the more perfectly participated by some things the closer they get to some thing, this is a sign that that thing is the cause of that which is participated in diverse degrees: as, for example, if some things are warmer the closer they are to a fire, this is a sign that the fire is the cause of the warmth.¹⁴⁷

Now, in the Fourth Way, we are not simply dealing with *particular* natures and their derivatives. The starting point of the way is a vision of reality in terms of the more and the less in the line of goodness or truth or nobility, what Thomas on one occasion calls "universal form."¹⁴⁸ It might be as well to mention that these are all aspects of reality presented

¹⁴⁵ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 9.2 (1046a36–b24): active power [*dunamis*] is either linked to rational soul or is merely natural; cf. Thomas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics* 9.2. Efficient causal power is precisely the active *dunamis* discussed here.

¹⁴⁶ See *The Works of Aristotle*, translated into English under the editorship of Sir David Ross, vol. XII: *Selected Fragments* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), 87–88 (fr. 16): Simp. In *De Caelo* 289.1–15. Aristotle speaks of this in the work *On Philosophy*. In general, where there is a better there is a best. Since, then, among existing things one is better than another, there is also something that is best, which will [p. 88] be the divine.

¹⁴⁷ SCG 3.64.

¹⁴⁸ *ST* I, q. 19, a. 6 (136a47–b4).

by Aristotle in terms of being as divided by act and potency.¹⁴⁹ Thus, speaking of nobility, Thomas says:

Everything which *is*, whether substantially or accidentally, *is actually*, and is a likeness of the *first act*, and by virtue of this [situation] it has *nobility*. Also, what *is potentially*, by its *order towards act*, is a *participant* in nobility: for it is in this way that it is said to “*be*.” It remains, then, that each thing, considered in itself, is *noble*; but it is called “lowly” [Latin: *vile*] relative to a more noble [thing].¹⁵⁰

Of course, such a text presupposes that one has recognized the existence of a first in the hierarchy of “being in act.” This is an efficient causal hierarchy, or a hierarchy of the effects of an efficient cause.¹⁵¹ Clearly, to be a being and to be noble are one and the same thing.

There should be no doubt that Thomas is reasoning toward a real, actual maximal in the order of goodness and being and intelligibility and perfection. This means a “by nature” first, and so, given that it is the source of goodness for all that is good, it is also the ideal. We are proving the existence of an actual ideal. This pertains to the universality of the forms involved.

Kenny asks why the object occupying the maximum point on a scale should cause the other objects to occupy the place they do on the scale. Mount Everest is not the cause of all lesser mountains (141)—the asking of this question is a measure of Kenny’s remoteness from what is being discussed. Kenny is in the realm of corporeal quantity. Thomas is in the realm of quantity of power.¹⁵²

Kenny notes that Thomas refers to “a piece of Aristotle’s physics to the effect that fire is the cause of heat in objects.” However, Kenny claims that it is the Platonic doctrine of Ideas that really “fills the gap.” One wonders why Kenny does not refer to the philosophical text to which Thomas himself explicitly refers in the fourth way. Indeed, it is the only occasion in the five ways where he explicitly refers to a text. It is Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* 2. As is well-known, it is a cornerstone of Thomas’s approach to being. If we look further into the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle we see this hierarchy as pertaining to the distinction between being in act and being in potency. Thus, it is important to realize that the Aristotelian doctrine of

¹⁴⁹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 9, shows (ch. 8) that act is prior to potency, i.e., more noble; that it is better than potency (ch. 9); and that it is truer and more intelligible than potency (ch. 9 and 10).

¹⁵⁰ *Summa contra Gentiles* 1.70.

¹⁵¹ *ST* I, q. 4, a. 1.

¹⁵² On the distinction between quantity of mass and quantity of power, cf. *ST* I, q. 42, a. 1, ad 1.

being as divided by act and potency is what might well be called the "existentialism" of Aristotle.¹⁵³

A Visit to the *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*

I will note only some remarks on book 7. On pages 185–187 Kenny looks at *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics* 7.5. It concerns the question: whether a thing and its essence are identical. Kenny sees a change in terminology, and a new distinction, between the quiddity of Peter and the essence of Peter (187). He says that a new point is that in God there is no distinction between "the concrete quiddity" and "the abstract essence."

I would say that Kenny should have considered the procedure of *Metaphysics* 7 as Thomas explains it. He would then have realized that the section he is commenting on here is the pure "logical approach" to the question, and that later we will have a different presentation, fully philosophical. We see this spelled out in 7.11 (1535–1536).

As Thomas explains in 7.5 (1375), following up on what Kenny quotes at page 185, note 18, here the thing and its quiddity are one not in just any way, but one in notion [*secundum rationem*]. What that means is that, *pace* Kenny, we are not really speaking of "Peter" at all, but of "man," the subject of the definition. It is not the individual that is defined, but the species. The distinction that Thomas introduces is between "*homo*" and "*humanitas*." He is not speaking about "Peter." In 1378 it is said that the quiddity is what the definition signifies. Since the definition is predicated of the defined item, the quiddity of "man" is not "humanity," but rather "rational, mortal animal." Thomas continues in 1379 to talk precisely about "*homo*," not about "Socrates." As he says, "*homo*" does not exclude accidents but neither does it include them.

That is why he can conclude in 1380, that a thing such as God, having in it no accidents, could have predicated of it both the abstract and the concrete indifferently. Notice that he says this is *most evident of all* in the case of God. He does not here make it proper to God.

My point is that in 7.11 (1536) the passage in 7.5 that Kenny has been discussing is explained as having been about "man" as abstracting from the singular. Now, in the fully philosophical treatment at 7.11, we find out that the concrete human being, Peter or Socrates, is *not* identical with his quiddity. And in this mode of consideration, the realistic mode, the quiddity of Socrates is signified by "humanity" (1535). Also, it is pointed

¹⁵³ Here I touch on matters which I have dealt with more fully in my paper, "Aristotle as a Source of St. Thomas's Doctrine of *esse*," which can be read on the website of the Notre Dame University Maritain Centre, the "Summer Institute" papers for the year 2000.

out that “subsisting forms” (not just God) have identity of the thing and its quiddity (1536).¹⁵⁴

A Visit to *On Separate Substances*

Kenny comes to *De substantiis separatis* on pages 187–188. He focuses on the answer to Gebirol concerning universal hylomorphism. I would say that, considering all his complaints about “Platonism” in Thomas, he should have said something about the earlier chapters in which Thomas carefully explains the difference between Plato and Aristotle, what he saw them as agreeing on, and what he saw as their limits.

Kenny reads the passage he selects as saying “that the *esse* that is identical with God is the *esse* that is common to all entities” (188). This is obviously *not* what is said. In God *esse* is universally, and in creatures it is particularly. There is a unity of *ratio*, as was taught in for example, *ST* I, q. 4, a. 3, by analogy. The *De substantiis separatis* text is exceptionally clear. The very response begins by arguing that there can only be one *esse subsistens* and that is God.

What is happening here is that Kenny understands the word “universal” only as pertaining to *predication*, whereas it is clearly meant here to signify the mode of being that pertains to *causal domination*. Thus, for example, in the *ST* we read:

[I]t is to be said that something is called “general” in two ways. In one way, by *predication*, as, for example, “animal” is general relative to “man” and “horse” and to other such items; and so taken, it is necessary that the general be identical essentially with those items relative to which it is general: because the genus pertains to the essence of the species and falls within its definition. In the other way, something is called “general” as to *power*, as the *universal* cause is general relative to all effects: for example, the sun relative to all bodies which are illuminated or changed by its power. And so taken it is not necessary that it be essentially identical with those things relative to which it is general, because there is not the same essence of the cause and of the effect.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ On the distinction between the two modes of consideration, as presented in *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics* 7, cf. my paper “St. Thomas, Metaphysics, and Formal Causality,” *Laval théologique et philosophique* 36 (1980): 285–316.

¹⁵⁵ *ST* II–II, q. 58, a. 6, “Respondeo dicendum quod generale dicitur aliquid dupliciter. Uno modo, per praedicationem, sicut animal est generale ad hominem et equum et ad alia huiusmodi. Et hoc modo generale oportet quod sit idem essentialiter cum his ad quae est generale, quia genus pertinet ad essentiam speciei et cadit in definitione eius. Alio modo dicitur aliquid generale secundum *virtutem*, sicut *causa universalis est generalis* ad omnes effectus, ut sol ad omnia corpora, quae illuminantur vel immutantur per virtutem ipsius. Et hoc modo generale non oportet

For the direct application of this distinction to the study of being as being, consider again *In De trin.* 5.4. We read:

But just as for each determinate genus there are some common principles which extend to all the principles of that genus, so also all beings, inasmuch as they agree as to being, have some principles which are the principles of all beings. Now, these principles can be called "*common*" in two ways, according to Avicenna in his *Sufficientia*: in one way, by *predication*: as when I say "form is common to all forms," because it is predicated of any one; in the other way by *causality*: as we say that the numerically one sun is the principle for all generable things. Now, *there are common principles of all beings*, not only according to the first way: which the Philosopher in *Metaphysics* 11 [read: 12] calls "all beings having the same principles according to analogy," but also *according to the second way*: such that there be things remaining numerically the same and the principles of all things.¹⁵⁶

This is obviously what Thomas is saying in *De substantiis separatis*, viz. that God is being itself in the mode of the universal cause of existence. This is his doctrine from start to finish of his career. Kenny never comes in contact with it. It is a mark of the problem of the book that here, at the end, he is unable to understand the word "universal" as applied to the *esse* of God.

Kenny here also expresses his surprise at Thomas allowing that form can be called both "*ens*" and "*non ens*." He sees this as testimony to Thomas's dissatisfaction with his theory of being. That Thomas might have experimented with new modes of expression regarding being would not be surprising. Any professor who has to deal with a variety of

quod sit idem in essentia cum his ad quae est generale, quia non est eadem essentia causae et effectus," emphasis added.

¹⁵⁶ *In De trin.* 5.4, emphasis added:

Sicut autem uniuscuiusque determinati generis sunt quaedam communia principia quae se extendunt ad omnia principia illius generis, ita etiam et omnia entia, secundum quod in ente communicant, habent quaedam principia quae sunt principia omnium entium. Quae quidem principia possunt dici communia dupliciter secundum Avicennam in sua sufficientia: uno modo per praedicationem, sicut hoc quod dico: forma est commune ad omnes formas, quia de qualibet praedicatur; alio modo per causalitatem, sicut dicimus solem unum numero *esse* principium ad omnia generabilia. Omnium autem entium sunt principia communia non solum secundum primum modum, quod appellat philosophus in XI metaphysicae omnia entia habere eadem principia secundum analogiam, sed etiam secundum modum secundum, ut sint quaedam *res* eadem numero existentes omnium rerum principia.

adversarial arguments must vary his language in order to clarify. In fact, there is nothing surprising about the point that form, for example, can be called “*ens*” and “*non ens*” from two very carefully distinguished points of view. The passage is in entire agreement with what Thomas taught in, for example, *Summa contra Gentiles* 2.52–54 (key texts on being that are not discussed in this book). It merely adds considerations helpful in answering the Gebirol arguments.

Conclusion

The primary weakness of Kenny’s outlook is his failure to see the doctrine of the act of being, that is, existence, as related to efficient causality and the terminus of generation. Secondly, I would mention his failure to consider Thomas’s criticism of Plato’s doctrine, as necessary for understanding any use Thomas makes of Platonic elements.

In the matter of texts considered, it is remarkable that no use was made of *Summa contra Gentiles* 2.52–54, extremely important statements of fundamental ontology. So also, absence of consideration of the role of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* 2.1 is most surprising. All in all, Kenny seems to me to have remained rather remote from the real doctrine of being of St. Thomas.

Kenny accuses Thomas of being confused. In the above I have tried to show that, reading the texts he read, Kenny’s accusation was unjustified. Nor do I think that such an accusation would be justified by reading other texts. However, that does not mean that I do not find causes for concern about consistency in texts of St. Thomas on being. Thomas did change his techniques for making his point about essence and *actus essendi*. I am sure he had good reasons for doing so, and that some texts, compared with others, can cause difficulty.

In particular, there are some texts that speak of the act of being as providing the answer to the question: “Does it exist?” This is most especially true of *Quodl.* 2.2.1 (3).¹⁵⁷ This is also a view that might be gathered from the general line of what I have called the *Intellectus essentiae* argument in *De ente et essentia*. I will address this situation in a forthcoming paper. However, since my main criticism of Kenny is that he fails to distinguish the act of being from the “*esse*” that answers the question: “Does it exist?” I consider it only fair that I note the existence of such texts that can cause trouble. NEV

¹⁵⁷ *Quodl.* 2.2.1 [3] (Leonine ed., t. 25-2, Rome/Paris: Commissio Leonina/Cerf, 1996, at pp. 214–15). I am even led to wonder whether this text belongs with the generally considered late texts it is placed with.