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THE ARISTOTELIAN CONTEXT OF THE EXISTENCE-ESSENCE DISTINCTION IN *DE ENTE ET ESSENTIA*

There is a substantial body of research in contemporary academic philosophy which addresses the real distinction between existence and essence in Thomas' *De Ente et Essentia* as well as broader interpretive issues in the text. These range from Gilson's existential Thomist reading,¹ Cornelio Fabro's seminal writings on Neo-Platonism and participation,² through to Ralph McInerny's insistence that Aristotle's philosophy is an important dimension of the arguments in the text.³ Twentieth century scholarship on *De Ente et Essentia* largely focussed on two questions: a) whether the real distinction is grounded in theology or philosophy,⁴ and b) the corresponding question of which argument in *De Ente et Essentia* actually establishes the real distinction between existence and essence, i.e., before, during, or after ascertaining that God's existence and essence are identical.⁵ Some, such as Walter Patt, contribute to this debate by asking what is meant by 'real' in the real distinction, and

¹ See: Etienne Gilson, *Elements of Christian Philosophy* (New York: Doubleday & Co, 1959); Etienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers* (The Hague: Europe Printing, 1961)

² See: Cornelio Fabro, 'The Transcendentality of Ens-Esse and the Ground of Metaphysics', *International Philosophical Quarterly*, Volume 6, Issue 3, September 1966; Cornelio Fabro, 'Platonism, Neo-Platonism and Thomism: Convergencies and Divergencies', *The New scholasticism*, Volume: 44, Issue: 1, 1970; Cornelio Fabro and B. M. Bonansea, 'The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy: The Notion of Participation', *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 27, No. 3, Mar., 1974; John F. Wippel, 'Cornelio Fabro on the distinction and composition of essence and esse in the metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas', *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol.LXVII, No.3, March, 2015

³ Ralph McInerny, *Praeambula Fidei: Thomism and the God of the philosophers* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2006); See also: David B. Twetten, 'Really distinguishing essence from esse', *Proceedings of the Society for Medieval Logic and Metaphysics*, Volume 6, 2006

⁴ See: Gilson, Fabro, and McInerny (above); Leo Sweeney, 'Existence/Essence in Thomas Aquinas's Early Writings', *Proceedings of The American Catholic Philosophical Association*, 1963

⁵ See the debate between Joseph Owens and John Wippel (and various journal articles which comment on or add to this debate): John F. Wippel, 'Aquinas' Route to the Real Distinction: A Note on *De ente et essentia*', *Thomist*, 1979; Joseph Owens, 'STAGES AND DISTINCTION IN DE ENTE*: A REJOINDER', *Thomist*, 1981. A more recent contributor to this debate – coming down on the side of Joseph Owens – is John F. X. Knasas, 'The Intellectual Phenomenology of *De Ente et Essentia*, chapter four', *The Review of Metaphysics*, 68:1, 2014. See also: Gaven Kerr, *Aquinas's Way to God: The proof in De Ente et Essentia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015)

point to the need to interpret the real distinction as an internal distinction within composite substances rather than a dualist distinction implying distinct realities.⁶

Within this substantial body of contemporary research there is often mention of the sources Thomas borrows from or refers to in making his argument, especially Avicenna, Boethius, Pseudo-Dionysius, Neo-Platonism (*liber de causis*) and Ibn Gabirol.⁷ In the same vein, there is often discussion of these sources as a means to understand Thomas' arguments and use of concepts. However, more contemporary scholarship tends to avoid or overlook, in a way that earlier commentaries do not, e.g., Cajetan's *Commentary on De Ente et Essentia*,⁸ one of the most basic features of the text, i.e., that *De Ente et Essentia* and almost all of its arguments operate within a generally Aristotelian context and in response to various potentially contradictory medieval interpretations of Aristotle account of *ousia* as the primary meaning of being.

This paper will attempt to make some headway into addressing this gap in recent scholarship by testing whether Thomas' existence-essence distinction in *De Ente et Essentia* can be unpacked and explained via Aristotle's account of *ousia* in the *Metaphysics*. In doing so, I will argue that: a) *On Being and Essence* is first and foremost a work inspired by Aristotelian metaphysics focussed on the intelligibility and reality of *ousia*, b) that Thomas' distinction between existence and essence is rooted in Aristotle's arguments about *ousia* in relation to

⁶ Walter Patt, 'Aquinas's Real Distinction and Some Interpretations*', *New Scholasticism*, 1988, Volume 62, Issue 1, pp.25-27. In many respects, this entire article is intended to be based upon and a development of Walter Patt's argument that the real distinction between existence and essence is primarily a distinction between kinds of explanations.

⁷ See especially: Kevin Corrigan, 'A Philosophical Precursor to the Theory of Essence and Existence in St. Thomas Aquinas', *Thomist*, 48, 2 (1984), pp.219-240

⁸ Cajetan, *Commentary on St Thomas Aquinas' On Being and Essence*, Kendzierski and Wade (trans.,) (Milwaukee, Marquette University Press, 1964). Cajetan's commentary constantly refers the reader back to the Aristotelian context of the various debates and concepts in Thomas' work.

matter-form and potency-act, and c) that it is possible to unpack and explain Thomas' existence-essence distinction in *On being and essence* via Aristotle's account of *ousia* in the *Metaphysics*. The argument of this paper is not intended to contradict recent scholarship nor to argue that Thomas was simply an Aristotelian, but rather, to draw out Thomas' reading of Aristotle as an important source of inspiration for the existence-essence distinction.

1. The distinction between the individual and Essence in composite substances as posited by Aristotle in the *Metaphysics*

There have been various excellent pieces of research in recent Aristotelian scholarship on Aristotle's conception of *ousia* (generally translated as substance) and particularly the role that potency, activity, and fulfilment play in the *Metaphysics* which marks a movement away from interpreting Aristotle as either essentialist or a hylomorphic holist.⁹ This recent research often draws conclusions about Aristotle's notion of *ousia* that are in accord with Thomas' interpretation of Aristotle, and further, appear to point towards a more dynamic 'Thomistic' conception of *ousia* and being. This all appears to have occurred in Aristotelian scholarship without explicit reference to Thomas Aquinas or Thomas' commentaries on Aristotle's works. At the same time, the view that Thomas Aquinas' philosophy is fundamentally Aristotelian appears to be becoming less prominent in recent Thomistic research, so that whilst some Aristotelian scholars are moving towards a kind of Thomistic reading of Aristotle some

⁹ See for example: *Aristotle's Theory of Substance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Aryeh Kosmah, *The Activity of Being* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2013)

Thomists are themselves apparently attempting to distance Thomas' philosophy from its Aristotelian context.¹⁰

It seems worthwhile, then, to begin this paper on the Aristotelian context of Thomas' distinction between existence and essence with a brief overview and discussion of Aristotle's general approach to investigating *ousia* in light of some of the more recent Aristotelian scholarship. The basic problem of *ousia* in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* is generally accepted to be that the concept of *ousia* must bridge the gap between two basic foundations of philosophical investigations of reality, namely: that we can only know things inasmuch as they have a particular identity (they are a determinate subject of thought), and at the same time, that the identity is intelligible to us via universals.¹¹ In short, and as Aristotle notes, *ousia* is both a 'this' (*tode ti*) and a what (*ti esti*).¹² *Ousia* in the first sense refers to substances as they are treated in the *Categories* and is the subject of investigation as the primary sense of being in the *Metaphysics*.¹³

The *Metaphysics* does not merely posit *ousia* as the primary sense of being, but also has the goal of investigating the first principles and causes of *ousia*. Thus, in some respects, the whole of the *Metaphysics*, but in particular books 7-9, can be thought to investigate in various ways first principles and causes in general and the first principles and causes of *ousia*. The first principles of *ousia* will be universal concepts that enable a substance to be experienced,

¹⁰ See: Ralph McInerney, 'Introduction', *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Writings* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), xxviii-xxxiv.

¹¹ Michael V. Wedin, *Aristotle's Theory of Substance*, 134; Terence Irwin, *Aristotle's First Principles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 207

¹² Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1003^a7-1003a21, 1017^b24-8; See also: Robert Heinaman, 'Knowledge of Substance in Aristotle', *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Vol. 101 (1981), 63; Michael Novak, 'A Key to Aristotle's 'Substance'', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Sep., 1963), 1

¹³ Michael V. Wedin, *Aristotle's Theory of Substance*, pp.158-9; Terence Irwin, *Aristotle's First Principles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 206-7

thought about, and known. The causes of *ousia*, on the other hand, will serve to explain the unified reality of the intelligible individual substance. Aristotle must, in addition to investigating the principles and causes of *ousia*, also investigate how the two are unified, i.e., how a substance is both a 'this' and a 'what'.

Michael Wedin has recently argued that book 7 of the *Metaphysics* takes up the task of investigating the first principles of substances in the most general sense. Wedin calls this the investigation of the 'substance-of' 'categorical-substances'.¹⁴ Aristotle's conclusion that essence\quiddity (*ti en einai*) is the primary meaning of *ousia* is taken by Wedin to signify that essence is the first principle of the intelligibility of all substances (immaterial and composite). Inasmuch as *ousia* is conceived of in the most general sense, the individual substance (qua form as the cause of 'thisness') and essence as the principle of intelligibility (whatness) of the substance will be identical.¹⁵ There are, Aristotle notes, exceptions to this general conception of *ousia*. For example, an individual composite substance – inasmuch as composite substances contain specific matter – will be distinct from its 'what-ness' (quiddity).¹⁶

Aryeh Kosman has also recently argued that book 9 of the *Metaphysics* provides us with Aristotle's general solution to the real unity of the 'this' and 'what' of *ousia*. Kosman argues that we can understand the real unity of substances via the analogous relation of potency to act\activity.¹⁷ A composite substance is an individual essential-activity or active-essence.¹⁸ The essence (in the sense of *ti en einai*) signifies the intelligible principles of the composite substance qua their potency (active capability) for fulfilment and perfection, their individual

¹⁴ Michael V. Wedin, *Aristotle's Theory of Substance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 2-5

¹⁵ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book 7, Chapter 11, 1032^a5-7, 1037^b5-7

¹⁶ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book 7, Chapter 11, 1037^b1-7

¹⁷ Aryeh Kosman, *The Activity of Being* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 78-81

¹⁸ Kosman, *The Activity of Being*, 81

being-in-act towards essence. Even though Kosman argues that composite substances are really substances, i.e., they are unified identities, there is, nonetheless, a real distinction between a composite substances' being-in-act and their essence.¹⁹ There must be, insofar as potency and specific matter cannot be considered part of the essence of a substance properly speaking, as composite substances always have further capacity for the exercise of activity, and, insofar as a composite substance – by definition – will never be perfect activity or a perfect act (perfect act excludes potency).²⁰

Kosman then goes on to address the notion of the divine in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, in particular drawing out the way in which the essential nature of the divine is activity and in which the divine nature is essentially substantial activity without distinction. The divine is pure act (without potency).²¹ This pure act is a kind of perfection of activity (pure *entelechy*) exemplified in the perfection of thinking.²² This argument is produced by Aristotle through the method of phenomena-endoxa and via analogy (proportion) and is said to follow logically from his analysis of the relationship between act (*energeia*) and potency (*dunamis*) in composite substances.²³

Thus, there are – following from these interpretations of Aristotle – at least three primary ways that Aristotle's investigation of *ousia* could be argued to be a general context to Thomas' positing of a real distinction between existence and essence in *On Being and Essence*:

¹⁹ Angus Brook, 'Substance and the Primary Sense of Being in Aristotle', *The Review of Metaphysics*, March 2015, Vol.LXVIII, No.3, Issue 271, 529

²⁰ Kosman, *The Activity of Being*, 181-2

²¹ Kosman, *The Activity of Being*, 205

²² Kosman, *The Activity of Being*, 214

²³ Kosman, *The Activity of Being*, the whole of chapters 7-8 are intended to evince this claim.

- (i) Aristotle clearly posits in the *Metaphysics* that there is in composite and some immaterial substances a real individual-essence distinction;
- (ii) The distinction is posited on the basis of a difference between the principle of intelligibility (essence) and the causal explanation of individuality (*dunamis-kinesis-energeia*) in composite substances;
- (iii) Aristotle uses his investigation of the meaning of being as substance, especially the conclusion that *energeia* (act\activity\actuality) is the primary unifying causal explanation of substances to infer that entities are divided by an analogous relation of potency-act (not primarily matter-form) and further, that the divine should be properly conceived of as pure act (without potency) and thus a being whose individual determinate act and essence are identical.

2. The general Aristotelian context of 'De Ente Et Essentia'

Ralph McInerny notes, in his historical preface to Thomas' earliest writings, that it is generally thought that Thomas wrote *De Ente Et Essentia* (alongside *On the Principles of Nature*) for his fellow Dominican students in Paris to assist them in understanding Aristotle's philosophy.²⁴ It is not much of a stretch to suppose that this was for the purpose of providing them with an overview or summary of the key themes and arguments of Aristotle's *Physics* and *Metaphysics*. It should come as no surprise, as such, to find *De Ente et Essentia* following Aristotle in a number of crucial areas: in defining the basic problem to be addressed, in

²⁴ Ralph McInerny, *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Writings* (London: Penguin Books, 1998) 3-4

methodological approach, and in the analysis of key metaphysical terms associated with the question of the meaning of being and essence.

The basic problem to be addressed in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* is ostensibly that of first causes and principles. It becomes evident by book four of the *Metaphysics* that the central problem to be addressed (as the basis of acquiring knowledge of first principles and the first cause) is the primary sense of being, and with respect to knowledge of reality, being in the sense of *ousia*. As noted earlier in the paper, this follows from Aristotle's realisation that all human knowledge rests on two basic principles: first that thinking requires a real subject of thought, and additionally, that subjects are only knowable insofar as they are intelligible. In addition to these two basic principles of intelligibility, Aristotle will also look for a causal explanation which explains the reality (or existence) of individual intelligible substances. At the beginning of book 6 of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle then goes on to specify the primary subject matter of metaphysics, in contrast to all of the positive sciences, as the science concerned with being qua being (or being in general) and *ousia*.²⁵ Aristotle's *Metaphysics* is concerned with being as the principle of intelligibility in general, and *ousia*, as the principle of the intelligibility of individuals. The claim that the primary subject matter of what gets called metaphysics is the question of the meaning of the concept of being (*ti to on*) and its primary sense – *ousia*, is reiterated on numerous occasions throughout the *Metaphysics*.

It is worth noting at this point, as Thomas does in Chapter 2 of *De Ente Et Essentia*, that the Latin term *essentia* is a translation of the Greek *ousia*,²⁶ and that the cases of the terms *ente* and *ens* are variations of a translation of 'to on', 'on', or 'onta'. One point of confusion that

²⁵ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, book 6, 1025^b9-11

²⁶ Joseph Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence: A translation and interpretation* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965), paragraph 19, 70

arises for contemporary readers here is that whilst the Latin terms Thomas uses are intended to be direct and literal translations of the key terms to be found in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, the term '*to on*' has tended to be translated into English as entity or being and *ousia* as substance,²⁷ thus giving the appearance that the title and subject matter of *De Ente Et Essentia* (in English – *on Being and Essence*) is quite different in subject matter to the *Metaphysics*. What it really is about is quite clear: it is an introduction to and overview of the central arguments and concepts in the *Metaphysics*. The very title '*De Ente Et Essentia*' indicates that the subject matter of the text is precisely that of Aristotle's question of the primary sense of being: 'The question that has, both in ancient times and now, always been asked and always been the source of perplexity, the question, what is being (*ti to on*)? Is just the question, what is essence (*tis en ousia*)?'²⁸ The question of the *Metaphysics* is therefore (in the Latin) nothing other than the question of the meaning of *ente\ens* and *essentia*: *De Ente Et Essentia*.

If we take the intent of *De Ente Et Essentia* to deal with the question of *ente\ens* (*to on*) and *essentia* (*ousia*) as the primary sense of being, then paragraph 2 of the introduction makes sense as a clear and coherent overview of the primary questions dealt with in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, namely: the meaning of being in general, the meaning of essence (*ousia*), how both concepts can be used in diverse ways, how they are both used in logical intentions, and how these concepts relate to 'secondary *ousia*': genus, species, and difference. The subject matter of *De Ente Et Essentia* outlined in the second paragraph is, I would suggest, a synopsis of the crucial problems and concepts addressed by Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, particularly those

²⁷ See: Aryeh Kosman, 'Translating Ousia', in *Virtues of Thought: Essays on Plato and Aristotle* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 275-276

²⁸ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book 7, 1028^b1-5.

covered from books 4 through to 9 (although there is a clear argument for the inclusion of the subject matter of books 11 and 12 of the *Metaphysics* also). That the subject matter and basic problem of *De Ente Et Essentia* is the same as that of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* is confirmed in the second paragraph of chapter one, with immediate reference to the definition of *ens (to on)* provided by Aristotle in Book 5, Chapter 7, that being properly speaking is divided into being in the sense of truth and being in the sense of the categories. It is clear, therefore, that with respect to subject matter Thomas' *De Ente Et Essentia* closely follows the primary subjects of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.

We also find a clear accord between Thomas' *De Ente Et Essentia* and Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (and Aristotle's philosophy more generally) with respect to philosophical method. The parallels in Aristotelian philosophical method and the method taken in *De Ente Et Essentia* include: a focus on getting first principles right; Aristotelian induction, in the sense of moving from what is most evident to more difficult (complex to simple); and finally, the use of the Aristotelian phenomenon\endoxa methodology as a means of getting to the truth.

The very first sentence of *De Ente Et Essentia*, 'quia parvus error in principio magnus est in fine', reminds the reader of the fundamentally Aristotelian methodological argument that first principles are crucial to any investigation of reality and, in an analogous fashion, that the point of origin for our investigation is crucial for getting to the truth. The principle, in this respect, can be interpreted in at least two interrelated ways. In the first way, the wise person of book 1 of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* knows all things without necessarily knowing particulars because of their knowledge of first principles.²⁹ A mistake with respect to first principles, because first principles are the foundations of all of our thinking, will lead to serious and

²⁹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 982^a6-8

significant misunderstandings of reality with regard to our particular judgments. In the second way, this principle can be read as a reminder that – with respect to the subject matter of metaphysics – we need make sure that we get to the truth of the point of origin of all metaphysical investigations, that is, the need to get to the truth about the two basic principles of intelligibility: the concept of being in general (*ens*), and *ousia\essentia* as the principle of the intelligibility of individuals.

The second parallel in methodological approach can be found in paragraph three with the assertion of the methodological principle of moving from what is composed to the simple, from the posterior to the prior, and from the easier to the harder.³⁰ This methodological principle, of course, is what most scholars call ‘Aristotelian Induction’ – the means by which Aristotle moves from particulars to the universal and therein to knowledge of first principles.³¹ Given that Thomas’ *De Ente Et Essentia* (in the way I am interpreting it) has the task of providing a concise, clear and coherent overview of the basic problems and concepts of Aristotelian metaphysics, it comes as no surprise that Aristotelian induction will be a basic methodological approach used by Thomas here in paragraph three and at various other points in the text.³²

The third methodological parallel in *De Ente Et Essentia* is more implicit than explicit, but nonetheless arguably pervades the entirety of the text. One of the most generic aspects of Aristotle’s philosophical method is his use of *phenomena* and *endoxa* together as basic foundations of philosophical investigation.³³ There have been various claims about what the

³⁰ Joseph Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence: A translation and interpretation* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965), paragraph 3, 21

³¹ See for instance: Terence Irwin, *Aristotle’s First Principles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 32-33.

³² Joseph Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence: A translation and interpretation* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965), paragraph 13, 49.

³³ Terence Irwin, *Aristotle’s First Principles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 29-32.

phenomena\endoxa method involves and how it works (or does not work),³⁴ but this is not of vital importance here. What is important to note is how Aristotle uses phenomena\endoxa in his investigations and the fact that this same use can be found in Thomas' *De Ente Et Essentia*. In the most general sense, Aristotle uses *phenomena\endoxa* as two fundamental criteria for investigating, analysing, and establishing the truth about principles. I take phenomena in this sense to signify Aristotle's basic trust in our experience of reality as composed of real individuals which are intelligible, i.e., his moderate realist account of reality. As such, the concept of phenomena serves as a kind of methodological trust in experience of the unity and order of reality and also at the same time serves as a kind of methodological evaluative technique, i.e., that we can determine or evaluate the truth of our definitions and judgments about concepts inasmuch as they correspond to our experience of the unity and order of reality.

In a similar fashion, I take endoxa in this sense to signify a basic methodological principle that all reasoned or thoughtful opinions about reality are in some sense true, or at the very least partially true. We find a fairly explicit statement of this methodological principle in book two of the *Metaphysics*, in which Aristotle suggests that the truth is in one sense difficult and in another easy, difficult because it is hard for an individual to get to the truth as a whole,³⁵ e.g., the truth about first principles and the first cause, easy inasmuch as the accumulation of various partial truths enable us to get closer to the truth as a whole. For this reason, almost all of Aristotle's discussions of the various senses of principles, causes, being, and *ousia* in the *Metaphysics* begin with a discussion of *endoxa*, the arguments of his predecessors, which are

³⁴ See: Owen McCleod, 'Aristotle's Method', *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, Volume 12, Number 1, January 1995; M.V. Dougherty, 'Aristotle's Four Truth Values', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 12(4) 2004: 585 – 609

³⁵ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, book II, 993^a30-31.

then evaluated within the general framework of the reality of the phenomena at stake, i.e., the meaning of being and *ousia*.

It is immediately apparent, in any close reading of Thomas' *De Ente Et Essentia*, that Thomas is using the phenomena\endoxa method of philosophical investigation to come to terms with the primary subject matter of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Thomas will usually follow a pattern of quoting Aristotle on basic methodological principles and with respect to the basic subject matter of the text. At the same time, we also consistently find Thomas citing arguments from a diverse range of philosophers, particularly those who have tackled the key problems of metaphysics, as the content of *endoxa* to be used as a basis of his own philosophical investigation of being and essence. Finally, we also find in Thomas' *De Ente Et Essentia* appeals to reality or reason (to the phenomena) as a crucial criteria for interpreting and evaluating the arguments of his predecessors. It seems fairly clear then that Thomas follows Aristotle here in utilising the general philosophical method of phenomena\endoxa in his investigations of being and essence.³⁶

De Ente Et Essentia is nowhere near as structurally complex or as difficult to read as Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Nor does the text follow Aristotle's arguments in sequence. However, I would suggest that a careful reading of the text, keeping in mind the hypothesis that it was intended to help students understand the *Metaphysics*, or at least Aristotelian metaphysics, reveals that *De Ente Et Essentia* covers the primary concepts and arguments offered by Aristotle in a clear and coherent way. This is not to say that there is nothing new or innovative in Thomas' account of the basic concepts of metaphysics, but rather, that whatever is new is grounded

³⁶ The point here is that Thomas is utilising Aristotle's phenomena-endoxa method. This point is compatible with claims that Thomas is also at the same time using these sources for other reasons, e.g., in relation to his audience, his vocation, the current philosophical and theological debates, and the Catholic Tradition.

in an attempt to explain Aristotle's metaphysical position. There are a few examples of this in the chapters leading up to the discussion of the existence-essence distinction which are worth mentioning briefly. The first is to note the clear parallels between the arguments offered by Thomas in chapter 1 of *De Ente Et Essentia* (paragraphs 3-11) and the discussion of being (*to on*) in Book 5 of the *Metaphysics*. In this case, the chapter begins by quoting Aristotle on being (*to on*) from book 5 and ends with an analysis of Aristotle's discussion of essence (*ousia*) in relation to quiddity (*ti en einai*) – again from book 5 of the *Metaphysics*.

A second example of parallels in argumentation can be found in chapter 2 through 4 of *De Ente Et Essentia*. Here, Thomas' arguments and the concepts analysed in depth (and with reference to the arguments of other philosophers) provide the reader with a clear and coherent overview of Aristotle's discussion of substances and the concept of *ousia* articulated over books 7 and 8 of the *Metaphysics*. The chapter begins with a paraphrase from Aristotle that essence is found in simple and composite substances, and then follows up with Aristotle's methodological claim that we should move from the more complex (and easier) to the simpler (and harder).³⁷ Chapters 2, 3, and 4 then proceed to provide a clear and concise overview of books 7 and 8 (as well as some arguments from other parts of the *Metaphysics*) including: a discussion of essence (*ousia*) as the focal point or locus of the essential or proper meaning of being (book 6 and 7 of the *Metaphysics*); essence as the unified composite (book 8 of the *Metaphysics*), and essence in relation to genus and species (primarily book 7 of the *Metaphysics*). These examples suffice as justification of the claim that – at least in the lead up to the existence-essence distinction posited in chapter 5 – Thomas' *De Ente Et Essentia* is

³⁷ Joseph Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence: A translation and interpretation* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965), paragraph 13, 49

focussed on covering the primary concepts and arguments offered by Aristotle in the *Metaphysics* regarding being and essence (*ousia*) in a clear and coherent way.

It seems evident from the analysis and interpretation of the text that the subject matter, methodology, and argumentative structure of *On Being and Essence* is clearly Aristotelian and operates within the context of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Furthermore, it is also evident that *De Ente Et Essentia* is embedded in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and is intended to be an explanation and interpretation of the crucial question of the meaning of being (*to on*) and essence (*ousia*). Herein lies the general and pervasive Aristotelian context of the text as a whole.

3. Re-reading the esse-essentia distinction posited in 'On Being and Essence'

The *esse-essentia* distinction posited in *De Ente Essentia* takes place in chapter four within the context of a discussion of essence in separated substances. The nature of separated substances, primarily dealt with in book 12 of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, would have been particularly fraught for a student of metaphysics who was also at the same time a Christian theologian. Making this subject even more difficult is the fact that at the time of writing *De Ente Et Essentia*, it is highly likely that most students of metaphysics, including Thomas himself, would have also believed that Aristotle was the author of the *Book of Causes*.³⁸ Any discussion of separated substances in Aristotelian metaphysics would need to try to somehow not only resolve the integration of Aristotelian natural theology within the context of Christian

³⁸ Vincent A. Guagliardo, O.P., 'Introduction', in Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), p.ix. Guagliardo asserts that Thomas was not ever completely convinced that Aristotle was the author of the *Book of Causes*, but that he was fairly certain that Aristotle was not the author after reading a translation of Proclus' *Elements of Theology* which was only made available in 1268, at least 10-15 years after Thomas wrote *De Ente Et Essentia*.

theology grounded in Revelation, but also the contradictions between the Aristotelian arguments provided in the *Metaphysics* and the apparently Aristotelian (but actually neo-Platonic) arguments about separated substances in the *Book of Causes*.

This suggests a set of serious hermeneutic difficulties and questions with regard to understanding the existence-essence distinction as it is posited in chapter four of *De Ente Et Essentia*: (i) Is the distinction one derived solely from a notion of creation ex nihilo, and if so how could it be compatible with Aristotle's notions of being and *ousia*? (ii) Is the distinction primarily derived from the inherently neo-Platonic distinction between the essence of things and their added contingent existence, or (iii) is the distinction intended to be made on genuinely Aristotelian grounds, albeit with due fidelity to the authority of Revelation and whilst also acknowledging the partial truth of the neo-Platonic arguments? I would suggest that the third possibility is most likely, given Thomas' use of the phenomena\endoxa method, and best explains the structure of the arguments in chapter four of *De Ente Et Essentia*. In the discussion that follows I will not cover the entirety of Thomas' arguments in detail, but rather, will focus on the Aristotelian context or an Aristotelian interpretation of the main features of the existence-essence distinction.

Once the subject matter of chapter four is introduced, Thomas immediately turns to a problem concerning separated substances other than the first cause and of whether intelligences and the soul are composed of matter to some extent or in some fashion. Thomas acknowledges the source of this position to be Ibn-Gabriel, but this problem is a possibility for any monotheist attempting to make sense of Aristotle's complex discussions of the human soul and eternal substances. The problem is complex, in part because Aristotle does not – in the texts we have remaining – clearly or coherently articulate how a substance can be

composed or individuated except through matter. There are hints that Aristotle did think that an immaterial substance could be individuated via a potency-act relation rather than by matter, but these hints are never argued for in depth or with great clarity. Thus, it would seem to many metaphysicians reading Aristotle that the only way to explain individuation of the separated substances (aside from the Divine qua first and final cause) is to posit material composition of some kind. Indeed, there seems some justification for doing so on the basis of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* inasmuch as he admits of immortal substances composed of some kind of matter and it is not clear at all in book 12 of the *Metaphysics* how there might be more than one immaterial substance.³⁹

Thomas resolves the problem via an appeal to the intellect of separated substances and the intelligibility of forms. He concludes, on this basis, that '...it is necessary that there be in any intelligent substance a total freedom from matter, such that the substance does not have matter as part of itself, such too that the substance is not a form impressed on matter, as is the case with material forms.'⁴⁰ This conclusion is consistent with Aristotle's argument in book 12 of the *Metaphysics* that the divine and eternal movers (causes) are immaterial inasmuch as they must cause movement without being moved or changed, movement and change being a capacity of material substances.⁴¹ Moreover, the conclusion that separated substances must be immaterial is consistent with Aristotle's claims earlier, in book 7, that essence (*ousia*) in non-physical substances excludes by necessity a material substrate.⁴² Finally, the argument that intellectual substances (the intellectual soul) is entirely immaterial

³⁹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, book XII, 1089^a30-35

⁴⁰ Joseph Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence: A translation and interpretation* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965), paragraph 69, 135-6.

⁴¹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, book XII, 1071^b20-25

⁴² Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, book VII, 1037^b1-5

follows from Aristotle's discussion of the human intellect in book 8 of the *Metaphysics* and in the *De Anima*.⁴³

Having warded off the argument that separated substances are composed of and individuated by matter, Thomas is still left with the problem of providing an alternative explanation of how separated individual substances are composed and exist (or how they are real individuals). Immediately, Thomas appeals to the claim in the *Book of Causes* that separated substances are composites of form and existence.⁴⁴ This is the point at which many readers would assume that Thomas has brought a strongly Neo-Platonic view to bear on separated substances, and thus, that we should read this claim to suggest that existence is added to form (or essence). However, rather than doing so, Thomas immediately appeals to Aristotle's claim that form actualises matter – that is – Thomas immediately appeals to Aristotle's notion of the potency-act causal relation in which form (*qua essentia*), causes matter (*qua dunamis*) to become actual (*energeia/esse*). In this context, it is clear that the argument that separate substances are composites of form and existence refers us back to Aristotle's claim in the *Metaphysics* that immaterial substances are essential unities (in which form and essence are identical) composed of a potency-act causal relation: 'there is no cause other than whatever initiates the development from potency to act.'⁴⁵ It is worth noting two things here: first, that the argument is causal, which has importance for the later development of the existence-essence distinction, and secondly; that the term existence (*esse*) is used in this particular context by Thomas as a translation of Aristotle's term *energeia*.

⁴³ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, book VIII, 1043b1-5; *On the Soul*, book III, 429^a22-25

⁴⁴ Joseph Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence: A translation and interpretation* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965), paragraph 72, 136.

⁴⁵ See for example: Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, book VIII, 1045b15-25.

If separated substances are not composed of or individuated by matter, the problem remains: how are separated substances composed and how are they individuated? Thus far, all Thomas has asserted in this respect is that separated substances are composed of form and existence. The subject matter of this chapter is not primarily about the composition and individuation of separated substances (although this is key to dealing with the subject matter), but rather, the question concerning essence in separated substances. At this point (paragraph 73) Thomas concludes by distinguishing between material and separated substances with regard to their essence: the essence of a material substance is the composition of matter and form, the essence of a simple or separated substance is form alone.

The next problem Thomas faces in trying to explain the essence of separated substances is how they can be identical with their own essence without being pure act.⁴⁶ It is in this context that Thomas provides the initial distinction between essence and existence (in paragraph 77). The initial distinction, interpreted from an Aristotelian point of view, provides us with a formal definition of the distinction between intelligibility and causal explanation. Essence signifies the principle of the intelligibility of a substance and thus only refers to the essential content of the substance qua intelligible. Essence does not explain the reality or individuality ('thisness') of the substance. This explanation can only be achieved by appeal to causal explanations of the substance. Essence (qua principle of intelligibility) is in this sense really different from existence.⁴⁷ In a formal sense, with regard to essence, the reality or existence of an individual (qua caused) is not included in the substances' intelligibility.

⁴⁶ Joseph Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence: A translation and interpretation* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965), paragraph 76, 159.

⁴⁷ I take existence here to signify act in the sense of *energeia*

Essence in this sense can be thought of initially as a formal definition and therein genus-species differentiation separable from individual existence. A formal consideration of essence necessarily excludes the individual existence of a substance, otherwise it could not be the essence of multiple individual existents or the explanation of the intelligibility of individuals. The point of this argument is not that we can arrive at or think about real essences independently of the existence of individual substances, but rather, that we can offer a proper or essential definition of something (qua genus-species) without referring to any particular substance. In short, this argument is about the nature of essence as proper definition (which does not include individual substances)

Essence is also really distinct from the existence of the individual substance in another sense. This is clearly the case inasmuch as essence, properly speaking, does not contain any specific or determined potency, whether material or otherwise, whilst real individuals do. This is particularly important when Thomas later considers the specific potency-act causal relations inherent in separate or immaterial substances other than the first cause.

It is absurd to claim, as some do in their interpretations of *De Ente et Essentia* at this point, that there can really be substances with essences that do not exist (are not in act), and it is likewise absurd to think that there are a whole set of essences waiting around to be given existence. This kind of reading not only runs counter to the problem Thomas has set himself, i.e., explaining how a substance which is its essence is nonetheless a composite of potency-act, but also runs counter to Thomas' philosophy in a general sense. As Ralph Masiello notes, reading this particular argument as a claim that we can know essences without any awareness of individually existing substances with that essence is clearly contrary to Thomas' moderate realist position and his methodological procedure of induction from real existing individual

substances.⁴⁸ The distinction between essence and existence is introduced by Thomas at this point as a way of formally distinguishing between intelligibility and act, and in doing so, setting the context for an explanation of how and in what sense the intelligibility of all separated substances aside from the first cause is really distinct from the causal explanation of their composition and individuality.

The next phase of Thomas' investigation of separated substances aims to demonstrate that there can only be one pure act, one substance in whom existence and essence are identical. The argument Thomas provides is again for the most part formal (rather than causal), but nonetheless takes as its basic presupposition Aristotle's argument in book 12 of the *Metaphysics* that 'there must be a principle of this kind whose essence is actuality (*energeia*)' (without potency) – a pure act.⁴⁹ Thomas' main focus here is not providing a causal framework for unpacking and explaining the first cause as pure act in the way that Aristotle's arguments develop. Rather, he focusses on the implications of considering the intelligibility of a substance that is pure act. Thomas' argument is quite straightforward in this sense: the very intelligibility of 'pure act' signifies the impossibility of separation or addition. If there is a pure act, then it cannot be multiplied in any way at all. Thus there can only be one substance which is pure act.

This argument about the formal intelligibility of 'pure act', and even the argument that there can be only one 'pure act', is not primarily a proof of God's existence and is not primarily a theological claim based upon Revelation. This is not to say that it cannot be used or function

⁴⁸ Ralph J. Masiello, 'A Note on Essence and Existence', *The New Scholasticism*, 45 (1971), 491-494.

⁴⁹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book XII, 1071^b20-21. Arguably, Thomas paraphrases this argument from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* in the last sentence of paragraph 77: 'It is clear, therefore, that existence is other than essence or quiddity, unless perhaps there exists a thing whose **quiddity is its existence**'. Again, this would suggest that Thomas is using the term 'esse' as a translation of Aristotle's '*energeia*' at key points in the text.

as a proof of God's existence, or that it is not in any way inspired by or consistent with Revelation, but rather that in this context the argument is ordered towards explaining the distinction between essence and existence in separated substances aside from God (having already taken the necessity of a pure act\first cause in an Aristotelian sense for granted). Indeed, paragraph 79, which serves as a the entry point to the next step in resolving the problem of separate substances other than God uses the argument that there can only be one pure act as a premise in reaffirming the argument that it is necessary in every substance (other than God) that there is a distinction between existence and essence.

At this point in *De Ente Et Essentia* (beginning paragraph 80) Thomas turns to the causal explanation of the difference between essence and existence. In this context, the meaning of the distinction between essence (as the principle of intelligibility) and existence (as the causal explanation of the individual substance) becomes quite clear. Thomas provides two primary causal arguments by way of demonstrating the real distinction between intelligibility and the caused individual: the first refers to the necessity of an efficient external cause (a prior substantial-act) of all individuals that are not pure acts; the second demonstrates how separate\immaterial substances other than God have potency for act, wherein essence signifies the potency for act (the act is received from God as their efficient cause).⁵⁰

The first of these arguments clearly locates Thomas' conception of existence (*esse*) firmly within the framework of Aristotelian causal explanation and corresponds fairly closely to Aristotle's question regarding why substances are 'a this' (*tode ti*).⁵¹ When we ask the question: why is this substance individuated and composite, our answer must refer to a causal

⁵⁰ Joseph Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence: A translation and interpretation* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965), paragraph 81, 161.

⁵¹ Joseph Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence: A translation and interpretation* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965), paragraph 80, 160-161.

explanation. When the substance is immaterial the main reference point of our causal explanation is necessarily the efficient cause, at least in the first instance.

In the second argument, Thomas refers us to the potency-act relation as a causal explanation of the unity of immaterial\separate substances as individuals.⁵² In immaterial substances (other than God) we are able to explain the real unity of an individual substance inasmuch as essence signifies potency (delimited and separable intelligibility, limited power and capacity), the existence of which can be explained only by reference to its efficient, formal, and final cause.

In this second argument Thomas argues that ‘...esse is related to form as act to potency...’.⁵³ This argument also implies that the distinction between essence and existence is intrinsically causal in nature inasmuch as the potency-act relation is intrinsically teleological. This would suggest that ‘existence’ is really distinct from ‘essence’ inasmuch as the existence of an individual is not merely really different from its essence (qua intelligible principles), but also causally-teleologically distinct – an individual exists with potency for perfection, and moreover, the ultimate final cause is distinct from the essence of the substance. The reality of this distinction, in a teleological sense, would then suggest that an existing entity has potency for some end distinct from its act, either the perfect actualisation of its essence or God as the end towards which it has an act. Whenever a substance exists composed with potency, or where the existence intrinsically includes potency in any way, there is a real teleological-causal distinction between the individual act (existence) and what the substance has potency for (essence). The perfection of the individual act (existence) is proportionally

⁵² Joseph Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence: A translation and interpretation* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965), paragraph 81, 161.

⁵³ Walter Patt, ‘Aquinas’s Real Distinction and Some Interpretations’, *The New Scholasticism*, 62 (1988), 3

related to the degree of potency of the individual qua essence, the greater the potency, the less perfect (and further from perfection) the act of existence.

The crucial point to note here, I would suggest, is that the existence-essence distinction operates within an Aristotelian framework and in this respect offers a brilliant synthetic interpretation of the fundamental problems of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Giovanni Reale argues that we can only understand the unity of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* if we focus on the way that the whole work, in various ways, attempts to gain knowledge of first principles and causes.⁵⁴ The question of first principles comes down to the question of 'what' a substance is (its essence). The question of causality comes down to the question of 'why' a substance is a 'this' (an individual that is in act). I would suggest, then, that Thomas uses the term '*essentia*' as the means to answer the question of first principles, *essentia* or essence in this part of *de ente et essentia* signifies what something is. Likewise, Thomas uses the term '*esse*' (or existence) here to signify the causal explanation of individuals. Essence and existence are as such self-evidently really different because they are really different ways of knowing real substances. As Walter Patt notes, the existence-essence distinction does not primarily signify a merely conceptual distinction, but rather – in agreement with Aristotle's position – a distinction between the conceptual and the non-conceptual,⁵⁵ a fundamental distinction between the intelligible nature of substances and the explanation of their individual existence.⁵⁶ The esse-essentia distinction, in this sense, does not divide the real substance internally (and is not a form of dualism), but rather provides an explanation of the unity of the individual inasmuch

⁵⁴ Giovanni Reale, *The Concept of First Philosophy and the Unity of the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, John R. Catan (Trans. & Ed.) (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1980), Conclusions, 349-363.

⁵⁵ Walter Patt, 'Aquinas's Real Distinction and Some Interpretations', *The New Scholasticism*, 62 (1988), 4

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 5

as all individuals with potency are caused (the this) and are at the same time intelligible (the what).⁵⁷

It is worth acknowledging at this point that although Thomas' use of the term (*esse*) existence is, at least in this context, embedded in Aristotle's question of why substances are individuals and is at points in *De Ente Et Essentia* a direct translation of Aristotle's term '*energeia*', the term and concept also signifies more than *energeia* and is arguably a solution to a problem that Aristotle could not himself articulate adequately.

In this respect, it is worthwhile to note, in agreement with Joseph Owens, that there is no explicitly equivalent term to 'esse' or existence (in the full extent to which it is used by Thomas) in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Further, it is also worth conceding that Owens' argument that existence is not a distinct matter for philosophical investigation in Aristotle's philosophy is true.⁵⁸ Owens is also correct, at least in his implicit assumption, that it would be impossible for existence in the medieval philosophical\theological sense to be constituted as the primary sense of being for any of the Ancient Greek philosophers, including Aristotle.⁵⁹ However, Owen's claim that the implicit notion of existence is completely foreign to Aristotle's *Metaphysics* is contentious,⁶⁰ and the claim that there is no equivalent to the medieval notion of existence as 'asserting that it actually is present in the real world'⁶¹ is under serious

⁵⁷ Walter Patt, 'Aquinas's Real Distinction and Some Interpretations', *The New Scholasticism*, 62 (1988), 6

⁵⁸ Joseph Owens, *Aristotle's Gradations of Being in Metaphysics E-Z* (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2007), 7-8

⁵⁹ See: Charles H. Kahn, 'The Greek Verb 'to be' and the Concept of Being', *Essays on Being* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012)

⁶⁰ Charles H. Kahn, 'On the Terminology for Copula and Existence', *Essays on Being* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). It is clear from the argument in this chapter that Aristotle does use equivalent terms to existence in a logical sense.

⁶¹ Joseph Owens, *Aristotle's Gradations of Being in Metaphysics E-Z* (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2007), 8

academic scrutiny,⁶² just as it is clear that Aristotle would not agree with those who deny the reality of (existing) individuals.⁶³ For this reason, I would suggest that the claim that the notion of existence in the sense Thomas uses it only emerged out of the Judeo-Christian notion of creation ex nihilo is not as strong an argument as it first appears to be.⁶⁴

What, then, does Thomas' concept of existence add that is new and cannot explicitly be found in Aristotle? Let's take for granted, for the moment, that 'esse' is for the most part equivalent to 'energeia'. When we do so we soon note that Aristotle's discussion of 'energeia' in book 9 of the *Metaphysics* tends to struggle to come to terms in a coherent way with how an ordinary sensible substance or an immaterial but composite substance can both be in act (*energeia*) and nonetheless at the same time have potency except by appealing to matter. In particular, Aristotle's use of the concept of being in act (*energeia*) is difficult to distinguish from his conception of perfection (*entelechy*) such that they often appear to be synonyms. It is very difficult, for this reason, to articulate the subtle, but important distinctions, between a substance that exists (*energeia*) which also is at the same time in transition (*kinesis*) from potency to *energeia* and a substance which has achieved or is in its activities a limited kind of complete *energeia* (*entelechy*). Put simply then, what Thomas' conception of existence achieves, that Aristotle could not, is – in my reading at least - to clearly articulate and explain the reality of individuals as being-in-act-with-potency (existence), which is a certain kind of

⁶² Charles H. Kahn, 'Why Existence does not Emerge as a Distinct Concept in Greek Philosophy', *Essays on Being* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 65-6.

⁶³ Ralph J. Masiello, 'A Note on Essence and Existence', *The New Scholasticism*, 45 (1971), 493.

⁶⁴ This is an objection made by various contemporary scholars of Thomas Aquinas, but is made particularly with respect to the subject matter of this article most prominently by Joseph Owens. See for example: Joseph Owens, 'Aquinas on Knowing Existence', *The Review of Metaphysics*, 29:4, 1976, 676; Joseph Owens, *Aristotle's Gradations of Being in Metaphysics E-Z* (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2007), 7-8.

perfection in and of itself, and the teleological causal framework of that same existence for the sake of attaining further perfection (entelechy).

Conclusion: Aristotle's Metaphysics as the context of the existence-essence distinction in *On Being and Essence*:

This paper has attempted to achieve two things: first, to provide a demonstration that the existence-essence distinction in *De Ente Et Essentia* is embedded in an analysis, interpretation, and explanation of Aristotelian metaphysics and specifically the primary problems and concepts of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, i.e., the question of first principles and causes and the meaning of *ousia* as the focal point of answering the question of the meaning of being. Thomas' *De Ente Et Essentia* can legitimately be read as a work operating within the general context of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, and further, could perhaps also be read as a defence of Aristotle's notion of *ousia* contra various medieval misinterpretations. This reading of *De Ente Et Essentia* fits comfortably with Thomas' later *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics* and also with various recent reinterpretations of Aristotle's account of *ousia*. In this respect, I hope that the analysis and interpretation provided in the paper is a timely reminder that Aristotle's philosophy is crucial to understanding Thomas' philosophical arguments.

The paper also attempted to test out whether Thomas' existence-essence distinction in *On being and essence* can be unpacked and explained via Aristotle's account of *ousia* in the *Metaphysics*. In this respect, an Aristotelian reading of the existence-essence distinction suggests the following:

- a) The concept of essence in *De Ente Et Essentia* is a direct translation of *ousia* and the subject matter of *De Ente Et Essentia* is the same as Aristotle's *Metaphysics*;
- b) The term existence (*esse*) in the text appears, in many instances, to be used as a synonym of Aristotle's '*energeia*' – and is therefore a crucial concept in providing a causal explanation of the individuation of separate or immaterial substances. The concept of existence also allows Thomas to clearly and coherently articulate the way in which composite substances possess 'being-in-act' as a kind of limited perfection which is brought about by an external efficient cause and yet also at the same time have potency. This use of the concept of existence allows Thomas to develop Aristotle's notions of potency and act as a causal explanation of individuation and composition that is broader and more encompassing than the matter-form distinction and even the potency-kinesis-act distinction posited in the *Physics* and *Metaphysics*;
- c) The real distinction between *essentia* and *esse* is in the first instance a distinction between the intelligibility and causal explanation of real individuals, i.e., the explanation of an individual act of a composite substance is really different from the explanation of its intelligibility;
- d) The real distinction is not merely a distinction between intelligibility and causality, but is also in some respect a real teleological-causal distinction between essence and existence (wherein essence and existence are analogues of potency and act);
- e) It is not necessary to discuss God's nature theologically to posit God as pure act. Nor does the essence-existence distinction require a prior proof of God's existence. It appears, rather, that the essence-existence distinction presupposes Aristotle's conclusion in book 12 of the *Metaphysics* that the divine qua first cause is pure act (without potency).

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