

## DO ARISTOTELIAN SUBSTANCES EXIST?

The question will seem absurd. For Aristotle, it is substance which exists primarily, while other things, for example, its accidents, exist thanks to substance. In the phrase, their *esse* is *inesse*, whereas the existence of substance belongs to it in its own right, as such, in itself and not in another.

## 1. IS THERE A RADICAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ARISTOTLE AND THOMAS?

Nonetheless, questions about the existence of substance have arisen over the course of the Thomistic revival initiated by Leo XIII in 1879. But the revival was well under way before it began to be suggested that there was a fundamental difference between the thought of Aristotle and that of Thomas Aquinas. Discontent began to be expressed with the notion that there is an Aristotelico-Thomistic philosophy, since the phrase suggests that there is as good as no difference between the philosophical thought of Aristotle and the philosophical thought of Thomas. Of course, the *theology* of Thomas far transcended the thought of Aristotle, but that was theology, not philosophy.

The question nonetheless began to be asked whether the faith that governed Thomas's theology—as well as his life—was so easily separable from his philosophical thinking. Attention began to be drawn to philosophical tenets of Thomas which seemed to bear the stamp of their origin in revelation. For example, the concept of person was one that flourished only under the influence of Christianity. Furthermore, Aristotle notoriously maintained that the world of change had no beginning, that it was in that sense eternal. It was not something that, as a whole, could meaningfully be said to come into existence—or pass out of existence. For Thomas, of course, the world had been created in time and would eventually end. Aristotle's world, it began to be said, was not a created world.

The recognition of creation brought with it a sense of the contingency of things that seemed both novel and profound. A thing might not have been. Indeed, the whole realm of created things might not have been. Eventually, it would be asked why there is anything at all rather than nothing. The Boethian dictum, *diversum est*

*esse et id quod est*, called attention to this contingency. For a thing to be and what it is differ. That it exists is no part of the *account* of a thing; it does not exist because of what it is. Insofar as physical things were compounds of matter and form, which followed on the fact that they had come into being, it seemed important to speak of another composition, that between the composite essence (matter and form) and existence. Such developments led to a new look at Aristotelian substance.

If the recognition that a material substance involved two compositions —(matter + form) and ([matter + form] + existence)—, it was the latter that characterized the thought of Thomas Aquinas, and if its provenance seemed to be the Book of Genesis, Aristotelian substance was looked at with a new eye. It began to be said that existence was absent from Aristotelian substance. For Aristotle, it was said, there is no act but form, and there is no potency but matter. An Aristotelian substance was constituted when matter and form were conjoined. But where is existence? This was the origin of the suggestion that, odd as it initially sounds, Aristotelian substances do not exist.

#### *How discuss this claim?*

This sequence invites several sorts of reflection. [a] Since the new interpretation came from Thomists, one might ask if Thomas himself had ever sensed this radical difference between his thought and Aristotle's. Had Thomas ever considered the composition of essence and existence in things as an innovation of his own? Did he regard it as a high metaphysical achievement or did he, like Boethius, think that *diversum est esse et id quod est* exemplified the kind of proposition which is *per se nota quoad omnes*? Did Thomas think that the world of Aristotle was a created world? [b] The relevant texts of Aristotle could be scrutinized in the light of this suggestion and see how they would read if the accusation were true.

A thorough pursuit of either one of these possibilities would involve a vast inquiry. It is accordingly unrealistic to attempt such thoroughness within the compass of this paper. I will sample each of them with the intention of inviting a more critical attitude towards what has become received opinion as to the relationship between Aristotle and Thomas.

#### *Analysis of the claim.*

On the matter of creation, no one can be unaware of the fact that Thomas holds that for the world to be eternal and for it to be created are perfectly compatible claims. Moreover, he dismisses those who deny that separate substances other than the Prime Mover are effects of the Prime Mover. In fact, in commenting on the *Metaphysics* he displays none of the misgivings about the text which characterize many of his latter-day followers. It is the text of Aristotle, the treatment of *ousia*, provides the best occasion for developing an attitude toward the received opinion referred to. This being the case, I propose to compare what Étienne Gilson says of some Aristotelian texts with what Thomas says of those same texts. The eminence of Gilson should make it clear that I am not concerned with a momentary lapse on the part of a

Thomistic spear carrier. The equally eminent Cornelio Fabro provides similar occasions for the kind of comparison I have in mind<sup>1</sup>.

*Gilson's account of Aristotle's Metaphysics.*

Gilson published *Being and Some Philosophers* in 1949<sup>2</sup> when he was at the height of his powers. He wrote it, not as an historian, but as a philosopher, indeed a dogmatic philosopher (ix). The reader can sense the exuberance with which Gilson launches into his statement of the truth, not just historical truth, as he always had before, but the truth about the way things are. His chapter on being and substance criticizes Averroes with gusto, but he does give Averroes credit for one thing. «Averroes was right at least in this, that the origin of the notion of existence, as distinct from the notion of essence, is religious and is tied up with the notion of creation» (62). The source of this view is the Old Testament. Since Aristotle had no access to the Old Testament, things look bleak for his doctrine. Gilson develops his judgment of Aristotle by considering the case of Siger of Brabant and identifying the views he attributes to Siger with the teaching of Aristotle. «And there is no way out, which means that, however long we turn it over and over or wander through it in all directions, there is no room for existence in the metaphysical universe of Aristotle, which is a world, not of existents, but of things» (69). «The world of Aristotle and Averroes is what it is as it has always been and always will be. Wholly innocent of existence, no question can arise about its beginning or its end, or even about the question of knowing how it is that such a world actually is. It is, and there is nothing more to be said. Obviously, it would be a foolish thing to speak of creation on the occasion of such a world, and, to the best of my knowledge, Thomas Aquinas has never spoken of the Aristotelian cosmos as of a created world...» (70). Aristotle's God is not aware of other things, the things which are his effects insofar as he is their mover (71). Aristotle's is not a created universe. «There still remains in its beings, something which the God of Aristotle could not give them, because He Himself did not possess it. As a World-Maker, the God of Aristotle can insure the permanence of substances, but nothing else, because He Himself is an eternally subsisting substance, that is, a substantial act, but nothing else» (71). Of course it is not only Aristotle who is found wanting [...] at least in the present state of historical knowledge, it would be vain for us to go farther back into the past than the time of Thomas Aquinas, because nobody that we know of has cared to posit existence *in being*, as a constituent element *of being*» (154). Nor has anyone in the time since. What Gilson attributes to Thomas is *unique* to him: the key doctrine has no antecedents and, at least until 1949, no sequel. But it is the difference alleged between Thomas and Aristotle that interests us.

<sup>1</sup> E.g. in *Partecipazione et causalità secondo S. Tommaso d'Aquino* (Torino: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1960), p. 334, that Aristotle «fa coincidere l'atto con la forma senza residui...».

<sup>2</sup> Étienne GILSON, *Being and Some Philosophers*, Second Edition Corrected and Enlarged (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952). Gilson published *L'être et l'essence* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1948) the previous year. While the two books are very similar, the English took on a life of its own.

Gilson undercuts an obvious approach. One might ask if perhaps Thomas's commentary on the *Metaphysics* would exhibit the differences Gilson has in mind. After all, the science of being as being would seem to be a promising place to verify the claim that an author and his commentator have radically different doctrines of being. But Gilson wryly observes that «had we nothing else to rely on than his Commentary on the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle, we would be reduced to conjectures concerning his own position on the question» (155). But Gilson himself certainly transcends mere conjecture. One could go on adding other such *obiter dicta*, uttered, as we have been forewarned, dogmatically. Can such assertions be tied down to texts?

*The textual basis of Gilson's claim.*

The subject matter of metaphysics is being as being. But, Gilson observes, to know being as such may mean three somewhat different things. First, abstractly, the abstract notion of being. «Thus understood, being would be what will be called by later Aristotelians the formal object of metaphysics». Second, it may mean the beings that can truly be said to be «because their being answers to the true definition of being» (154). First Act, that is, and all the other Pure Acts we call gods. Metaphysics thus equals theology. Third, as science, metaphysics must know its subject through its cause, being through its first causes.

Gilson is referring to the *prooemium* of the commentary in which, he says, Thomas does little more than repeat Aristotle, «except that he clears up what was obscure in his text and puts some order into this complex problem» (155). Of course, Thomas is not directly commenting on any text in writing the *prooemium*. How are these various determinations of the subject of metaphysics to be reduced to unity? That is Gilson's question, be it noted it is not Thomas's objective in the *prooemium*. Rather, Thomas asks how three different considerations can fall to one science, and his answer is that only one of them is the subject, the others are its causes. So Gilson is off on the wrong spoor in asking how metaphysics «if it concerned with three different subjects» can fail to be three sciences. He concedes that they are all related to being, and to that extent one, but he asks to what extent they are one.

Gilson commends the *prooemium* for straightening out Aristotle. Then he assumes that the *prooemium* has an objective that it does not have. Finally, he is left with *his* difficulty at the end of his reading of the *prooemium* and creates the impression that Thomas had concluded that, while there are multiple sciences of metaphysics, somehow the fact that they are all related to being unifies them.

One has to get used to this more or less slapdash approach to texts in *Being and Some Philosophers*. Gilson professes to be talking about Aristotle. He cites the *prooemium* of Thomas's commentary as if it were the explication of some single text. He misreads it as suggesting that there are three candidates as subject of metaphysics. He then grandly excuses Aristotle from responsibility for the first understanding. But what Gilson gives as the first understanding is not taken from the *prooemium* or from any cited text in Aristotle. So what is he leaving aside? Having done so, «We then find ourselves confronted with two possible points of view on being, that of the supreme being, and that of the first causes of being. Obviously, if the supreme beings

are the first causes of all that is, there is no problem. In such a case, the knowledge of the absolutely first being is one with that of the absolutely first cause. But it is not so in the metaphysics of Aristotle» (155).

If this identification is impossible, given the logic of the passage, there will be two subjects of metaphysics and thus two different sciences of metaphysics. If the identification is possible, we have as the unified subject of metaphysics supreme beings. It is easy to agree that this is not the case in the metaphysics of Aristotle. But that is not what Gilson means.

First, he attributes to Aristotle the tenet that metaphysics can in some way be called a divine science, as Aristotle does (and for this Gilson gives the very Bekker numbers of the passage in A.2: 983a6-11). Aristotle has also said that the highest happiness lies in contemplation of divine things (*Nicomachean Ethics* X.10, no Bekker numbers). But Aristotle failed to see that the conjunction of these propositions entails «that, as a science of being *qua* being, metaphysics is wholly ordered to the knowledge of the first cause of being» (156). Well, this is conjecture, perhaps, but Gilson might have found an opposite view in Thomas's commentary, and that would seem to mean either that Thomas found it in the text or that Thomas's «own» views are not absent from the commentary. Gilson has anticipated the first alternative and goes on to speak of a text in Aristotle that Thomas uses in support of his own position. The passage (981b24-27), explains why the science we are seeking must be the science of first causes. To say that this is Thomas's position and not Aristotle's begs the question of their difference —or it would if it was clear what the difference is, on the basis of the text cited.

Gilson, having said these enigmatic things about metaphysics as the science of first causes, turns to Aristotle's four causes. «And, indeed, among the celebrated four Aristotelian causes, there is at least one, namely, the material cause which cannot possibly be reduced to the other three» (156). What does reduced mean? A formal cause can be a final cause and it can likewise be a moving cause «but it cannot well be that and, at the same time, be matter» (156). The suggestion is that the unity of metaphysics depends on something's being able to be all four causes. Gilson's conclusion from this impossibility is this: «Whence it follows that, in its own way, matter itself is a first cause in the metaphysics of Aristotle».

«It is so because it enters the structure of material substances as one of their irreducible elements. Now, if it is so, you cannot say that metaphysics is both the science of true beings and the science of all beings through their causes, for there is at least one cause, that is, matter, which does not truly deserve the title being. In short, because the God of Aristotle is one of the causes and one of the principles of all things [A.3: 983a24-27], but not *the* cause nor *the* principle of all things, there remains in the Aristotelian domain of being something which the God of Aristotle does not account for, which is matter, and for this reason the metaphysics of Aristotle cannot be reduced to unqualified unity» (156).

### *Critique of the critique.*

It may seem unkind to dwell on such passages: as exegesis, as argument, dogmatic or otherwise, they leave just about everything to be desired. We know what Gilson wants to say, he has been asserting it all along. There is a radical difference between

the metaphysics of Aristotle and that of Thomas. In order to show this difference, he needs two clear statements about metaphysics, one Aristotelian and another Thomistic. His account of Aristotle falls woefully short of clarity. Where it is clear, it is clearly wrong, or at least contestable. And, let it be noted, he might have laid Thomas's interpretation of them alongside the passages he cites to show the contrast. But he cannot do this because he holds both (a) that we can only conjecture as to what Thomas's own thought is from the commentary, and (b) that in the commentary, Thomas uses Aristotelian texts in support of his, Thomas's, doctrine, presumably different from that of Aristotle.

There are, of course, differences between Aristotle and Thomas, but such an analysis as we find in *Being and Some Philosophers* is of little help in discovering them. Gilson begins with the assumption that there is a radical difference between Aristotle and Thomas, that their notions of being must differ because of the presence of creation in the one account and its absence in the other. Perhaps he is more successful in showing us what is distinctive in Thomas's understanding of being.

*Gilson's understanding of Thomas.*

What does «being» mean for Thomas? «In a first sense, it is what Aristotle had said it was, namely, substance. For, indeed, it is true that being is substance, although it may also be true that being entails something more, over and above, mere substantiality» (158). Mere substantiality. Are there things true of substance other than that it is substance? Of course. Presumably Gilson doesn't mean accidents when he says that «Aristotle has left something out while describing being, but what he has seen is there». Now, without any concession that is radically different from previous remarks, we are told that there is a radical continuity between the metaphysics of Aristotle and Thomas. «The presence, in Thomism, of an Aristotelian level on which being is conceived as identical with *ousia*, is beyond doubt, and, because Aristotle is in Thomas Aquinas, there always is for his readers a temptation to reduce him to Aristotle» (158). But it is false to say that being is identical with substance in Aristotle. Not every being is a substance, for one thing, and in analyzing substance Aristotle will ask which of its constituents is more substance. The simplification of Aristotle leads us to imagine that, at some level, Aristotle identified being (in the sense of existence?) and substance. Yet Gilson assures us that texts without number could be found in Thomas in which he agrees with this alleged position of Aristotle. But neither Aristotle nor Thomas identifies being and substance.

«For those who identify what Thomas calls being with what is commonly called substance, there can be no distinction between essence and existence, since being and *ousia* are one and the same thing. Each time Thomas Aquinas himself is looking at being as at a substance, he thereby reoccupies the position of Aristotle, and it is no wonder that, in such cases, the distinction between essence and existence does not occur to his own mind» (158).

This text makes clear how Gilson equivocates on «being» —here it clearly must be taken for existence if the distinction between essence and existence is to be ruled out by the position assigned to Aristotle.

In any case, this claim brings us to an actual text, that of *Metaphysics* IV.2: 1003a[sic]33-1004a9<sup>3</sup>. Having said that metaphysics is the science of being, Aristotle then inquires into the meaning of the word «being». It is said in several ways, but «always in relation to one and the same fundamental reality, which is *ousia*» (158). Belatedly Gilson tells his reader of the many senses of «being» in Aristotle; the diversity of meanings is a controlled one however, and a thing will be called being either because it is a substance or relates in some way to substance. Now we find that «reality», along with *ousia*, its principles and causes, is the proper object of the science of being. Since to be and to be one are one and the same thing (*tauto kai mia physis*), metaphysics considers the one as well as being.

«Hence the oft-quoted formula which we have already mentioned: “A man”, “being man”, and “man” are the same thing. For indeed the reality signified by those various things is the same: “Just as the reality (or substance = *ousia*) of each thing is one, and is not so by accident, so also is its being (*boper on ti*)”. The intention of Aristotle in this passage is therefore clear: *Metaphysics* shall deal with “oneness”, as it deals with “being”, “because oneness and being are simply two names for reality (*ousia*) which both *is* and *is one* in its own right. If there is a doctrine of being and substance, this is one...» (159).

What does Thomas say of the text in question? He will just say what the text means, Gilson says, and do so without scruple, «as, within its Aristotelian limits, that text is absolutely right» (159). Gilson irenically itemizes its rightness. [1] What it says about being and oneness «is true from the point of view of Thomas Aquinas himself: “*One and being signify a single nature as known in different ways*”» (175). [2] «It is also true concerning the relation of essence (*ousia*) to existence itself, for, indeed, to beget a man is to beget an existing man, and for an existing man to die is precisely to lose his actual existence. Now, things that are begotten or destroyed together are one. Essence then is one with its own existence». [3] «These various words, “man”, “thing”, “being” (*ens*) and “one” designate various ways of looking at determinations of reality which always appear or disappear together». The same reality is a thing because it has a quiddity or essence; it is a man because of the fact that the essence it has is that of a man; «it is a being in virtue of the act whereby it exists (*nomen ens imponitur ab actu essendi*)». [4] To conclude, these three terms —thing, being and one— signify absolutely the same thing, but they signify it in different ways (159).

It will be noticed that the one term —«being»— is used here in various ways: it has been said to be identical with substance = *ousia*. *Ousia* is then called essence and said to be related to existence. Being sometimes stands for the Latin *ens*. Essence and

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<sup>3</sup> Gilson says that he has dealt with this text earlier, which seems a reference to his treatment in Chapter II of Averroes' remark that existence is an «accident». But he elides into a remark about Aristotle. «Having learned from Aristotle that being and substance are one [Gilson refers to Z.1, 1028b4], he was bound to conceive substance as identical with its actual reality. Now, to say that something is actually real, and to say that it *is*, is to say one and the same thing. In Aristotle's own words, “A man, an existent man, and man, are just the same”» (52). The conclusion of this chapter is worth quoting. «...the world of Aristotle has no history, it never changes and it is no one's business to change it. No newness, no development, what a dead lump of being the world of substance is!» (73).

quiddity are equivalent so both must be identical with being. Although being and one were earlier called equivalent, it is finally made clear that they are not synonyms.

In the passage, «the solid block of Aristotle's substance» is found «in its perfect integrity, and Thomas Aquinas will never attempt to break it up». This is an extraordinary thing for Gilson to say. If Aristotle taught what Gilson says he taught and if Thomas teaches something radically different, the latter can scarcely include the former. Gilson seems to have forgotten his earlier criticisms. Now, it is the something «more» in Thomas he is concerned, a «more» that is compatible with and attachable to Aristotle. We must not think that Thomas has forgotten his «own» distinction between essence and existence, «even while commenting upon Aristotle». What is the clue. Thomas reminds us that the noun being is derived from the verb to be. «But that was not the occasion for him to apply the distinction of essence and existence, because, if, in a being, its “to be” is other than its “essence”, the very being which arises from the composition of its “to be” with its essence is in no way distinct from its intrinsic oneness or from its being. «In other words, the Aristotelian substance remains intact in the doctrine of Thomas Aquinas» (160). In short, Gilson's reader must conclude, the distinction is irrelevant here and would add nothing to what is being said about the subject of metaphysics or its scope.

Gilson goes on to say that Aristotelian substance, which we have just been told enters in its perfect integrity into the thought of Thomas, «cannot enter the world of St. Thomas Aquinas without at the same time entering a Christian world; and this means that it will have to undergo many inner transformations in order to become a created substance» (160).

«In the world of Aristotle, the existence of substances is no problem. To be and to be a substance are one and the same thing, so much so that no question can be asked as to the origin of the world, any more than any question can be asked about its end. In short, Aristotelian substances exist in their own right. Not so in the world of Thomas Aquinas, in which substances do not exist in their own right. And this difference between these two worlds should be understood as both radical and total» (160).

Once more, we are confronted with an extraordinary understanding of Aristotle. There is no problem about the existence of substance because substance is existence. If substance and existence were identical then the only way a substance could cease to be would be by annihilation. But substances cease to be regularly in the world of Aristotle, they do so naturally, and when they do it is not said that existence has ceased to be. Like anyone else, Aristotle would have difficulty knowing what that is supposed to mean. Gilson's reading of Aristotle attributed to the Philosopher the view that every substance necessarily exists. Not only does it have existence necessarily—it is existence. *Ipsum esse subsistens?*

Gilson is only momentarily tempted by irenism after consulting the commentary of Thomas. His fundamental claim, incompatible with what he has just been staying about the overlap between Aristotle and Thomas—whatever we make of his way of stating it—returns with a vengeance. Once more we are assured that there is a radical and total difference between the two men. It is not just that Aristotle has neglected to conceive of the world as created. He could not so conceive it. Here is Gilson's ac-



count of Aristotle. «Because the acme of reality is substance, and in substance itself, essence, Aristotelian being is one with its own necessity. Such as its philosopher has conceived of it, *it cannot possibly not exist*» (160). The italics are Gilson's. An Aristotelian substance is a necessary being; it cannot not exist. He is of course equivocating on «substance» and «world», but in either case he is attributing necessity to both the whole and its parts. Amazingly, Gilson opines that Thomas «would have found it quite natural» to think of the world in the same way Aristotle did but for revelation.

### *Conclusion.*

So much for a fairly close look at what passes for proof that there is a radical and total difference between the metaphysics of Aristotle and that of Thomas. The only possible verdict is that this has not been proved. Not by these arguments. Not by this exegesis. Not by such soi-disant dogmatic philosophizing.

What is most dissatisfying about Gilson's effort to express what is at the heart of Thomas's metaphysics is the interpretation of Aristotle on which it is grounded. What Aristotle has said of being —substance— is sometimes said to be utterly different from what Thomas taught. Aristotelian substances necessarily exist whereas substances are contingent for Thomas. Existence does not enter into being for Aristotle, it does for Thomas. Nonetheless, Aristotle's teaching on substance enters *en bloc* into Thomas's understanding of substance. And so on. Given such antecedents, it is not surprising that the Gilsonian account of Thomas leaves much to be desired. But the inadequacies of *Being and Some Philosophers* must prompt anyone desiring to understand Thomas to turn, as Thomas did, to a sustained and sympathetic reading of Aristotle.

## 2. THOMAS ON ARISTOTLE'S METAPHYSICS

The position of Gilson on Aristotle's metaphysics is that Aristotle has left existence out of his characterization of being as being. By supposed contrast, for Thomas, *ens*, a being, is that which has existence. It is denominated from its act of existence, not from the nature or essence of the subject of existence. The term *res* denominates from the nature or essence, and «man», «horse» and «prickly pear» would be examples of things, that is, they are such that their names fall under the general description of a thing or *res*. The things denominated differ in nature or kind or essence. These distinctions recall for Gilson, as they did for Avicenna, the teaching that *diversum est esse et id quod est*, the distinction, that is, between existence and essence in everything other than God. While Gilson accepts Thomas's dismissal of Avicenna's correction as irrelevant, he does so because, while the distinction does not enter into Aristotle's characterization of the subject of metaphysics, it is at the heart of Thomas's understanding of being and of metaphysics. The suggestion is that a very different metaphysics is in the offing if we correctly understand the distinction between essence and existence.

The Gilsonian Aristotle in effect confused *ens* and *res*: he held that the nature is not the subject of existence but *is* existence, with the consequence that all Aristotelian substances necessarily exist. For Thomas, on the other hand, beings other than God are shot through with contingency.

If Aristotle did hold the things Gilson claims he held, we would expect to find some awareness of this in Thomas. Surely Thomas's commentary on the *Metaphysics* will turn up these supposed flaws. But we are cut off from this obvious recourse because Gilson tells us that Thomas does not give us his own views there, the suggestion being that they are quite different from Aristotle's. All the more reason then why we should expect Thomas to attribute to Aristotle the astounding views that Gilson says are Aristotle's. But we find nothing of the kind. Gilson will not allow us to find Thomas in the commentary; but no more do we find Gilson's Aristotle there. Aware that this weakens his case, Gilson then says that Thomas can afford to be irenic with Aristotle because, while Thomas's view of metaphysics is more commodious—his being includes existence—the whole of Aristotle's notion of being, of substance, enters unchanged into Thomas's metaphysics. But this can scarcely be the case. If all substances are for Aristotle necessary beings, as Gilson holds, they can hardly also be contingent, as they must be in Thomas's metaphysics.

Any student of Aristotle will be astounded to read that substance, as Aristotle has conceived it, cannot not exist. The corollaries of the alleged absence of existence in Aristotle are so egregious that they must vitiate Gilson's original assumption. The fact that Thomas himself nowhere mentions such an absence in Aristotle—in the commentary or anywhere else—must tell heavily against it as grounding a radically different *Thomistic* metaphysics.

The fundamental premise of Gilson's claim that there are two metaphysics, one Aristotelian, the other Thomistic, is that Aristotle's is not a created world. It is of course well-known that Thomas held that the world of Aristotle, while eternal, is created<sup>4</sup>. By that he did not mean to ascribe creation *in time* to Aristotle—that is a deliverance of revelation—but rather to underscore that, in Aristotle's world, everything other than the Prime Mover depends upon it in order to be<sup>5</sup>. Creatures are entities that owe their existence completely to another. The sublunary substances of Aristotle are beings whose existence is contingent upon a hierarchy of causes terminating in the First Cause. Moreover, Thomas explicitly asserts that, for Aristotle, the heavenly bodies, necessary entities, owe their existence to God<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> See *Aquinas on Creation*, translated by Steven E. Baldner & William E. Carroll. *Mediaeval Sources in Translation* 35 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1997). A masterful account can be found in Mario Enrique SACCHI, *Cuestiones controvertidas de filosofía primera* (Buenos Aires: Basileia, 1999), 1st Section: «La afirmación de la creación como conclusión necesaria de la silogística teológica de Aristóteles», pp. 7-23.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Mario Enrique SACCHI, *Cuestiones controvertidas de filosofía primera*, 2nd Section: «La causalidad eficiente del Dios de Aristóteles según Santo Tomás de Aquino», pp. 25-49.

<sup>6</sup> In commenting on Book Six of the *Metaphysics*, Thomas recalls that there must be a first un-generated cause of generated things, and then makes it clear that the immobile and immaterial causes involved in the causal hierarchy are the effects of the first cause. «Necesse vero est communes causas esse sempiternas. Primas enim causas entium generativorum oportet esse inginitas, ne generatio in infinitum procedat; et maxime has, quae sunt omnino immobiles et imateriales. Hae namque causae imma-

*Avicenna's Mistake.*

The text that Gilson refers to as the sole place where Thomas imports «his own» distinction between essence and existence occurs when Thomas rejects Avicenna's mention of that distinction in taking exception to Aristotle's teaching that «being» and «one» are different names of the same nature. They are not, however, synonyms because they have different accounts, «being» being imposed from the existence of the thing and «one» from its indivision. Avicenna held that «being» and «one» express something other than and added to substance, not something identical with it. «He said this about being because in anything that has existence from another, its existence is other than its substance or essence: the term «being» signifies existence itself and therefore, as it seems, signifies something added to essence»<sup>7</sup>.

Thomas rejects this as wrong. «Although the existence of a thing is other than its essence, it should not be understood as something superadded in the manner of an accident, but as constituted by the principles of the essence. Thus the term «being» which is imposed from existence signifies the same thing as the term which is imposed from essence»<sup>8</sup>.

It is because «being» is said in many ways of things outside the mind<sup>9</sup>, «with reference to some one nature», that the modes of predicating reveal the modes of being. As a term of multiple meaning, of controlled equivocation —an analogous term, in Thomas's usage— the many meanings form an ordered set with one functioning as its focal meaning —what Thomas calls the primary analogate. In the case of being, of that which has existence, the mode of existence varies with the variations in the subject of existence. That to which existence belongs in itself and not as in another, substance, is the primary analogate of «being». The other modes of being refer in various ways to this<sup>10</sup>. Thus it is that, unless otherwise specified, «being» will be understood as substance and «existence» as *esse substantiale* and «thing» as substance. The meaning of existence is controlled by the subject which receives it.

teriales et immobiles sub causae sensibilibus manifestis nobis, quae sunt maxime entia, et per consequens causaliorum, ut in secundum libro ostensum est. Et per hoc patet, quod scientia quae huiusmodi entia pertractat, prima est inter omnes, et considerat communes causas omnium entium. Unde sunt causae entium secundum quod sunt entia, quae inquiruntur in prima philosophia, ut in primo posuit. Ex hoc autem apparet manifeste falsitas opinionis illorum, qui posuerunt Aristotelem sensisse, quod Deus non sit causa substantiae caelis, sed solum motus eius» (*In VI Metaphys.*, lect. 1, n. 1164).

<sup>7</sup> «Et de ente quidem hoc dicebat, quia in qualibet re quae habet esse ab alio, aliud est esse rei, et substantia sive essentia eius: hoc autem nomen ens significat ipsum esse. Significat igitur (ut videtur) aliquid additum essentiae» (*In IV Metaphys.*, lect. 2, n. 556).

<sup>8</sup> «Esse enim rei quamvis sit aliud ab eius essentia, non tamen est intelligendum quod sit aliquid superadditum ad modum accidentis, sed quasi constituitur per principia essentiae. Et ideo hoc nomen Ens quod imponitur ab ipso esse, significat idem eum nomine quod imponitur ab ipsa essentia» (*Ibid.*, n. 558).

<sup>9</sup> As distinguished from what Aristotle calls «being as true» and «accidental being», both of which are mind dependent. Accidental being here is not the being of an accident, but the combination of subject and accident, or accident and accident, or accident or subject, which does not constitute something *per se unum*. Cf. *In V Metaphys.*, lect. 9, and *In VI Metaphys.*, lect. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *In IV Metaphys.*, lect. 1, nn. 539-543; *In V Metaphys.*, lect. 9, nn. 889-892.

“The existence that anything has in its nature is substantial; therefore, when we say “Socrates is”, if that “is” is taken in the first sense, it is a substantial predicate”<sup>11</sup>.

When existence is said to be constituted by or to result from the principles of the essence, the causality implied is formal, not efficient. When the generation of a substance is said to be a *via ad esse* and its corruption a passage *ab esse ad non esse*, it is the existence of the substance that is meant, the *esse substantiale*<sup>12</sup>. The meaning of the terms used by the metaphysician show that they begin their careers as means of talking about sensible reality. A principal task of the metaphysician will be to show how such terms can be readied for metaphysical use. The whole of Book Delta is devoted to this task<sup>13</sup>.

### *The subject of metaphysics.*

If one wishes to maintain that there is a difference, a radical difference, between the metaphysics of Aristotle and that of Thomas, this would have to be made clear in terms of the way in which Thomas distinguishes sciences. Theoretical sciences are distinguished by their subjects which are defined in formally different ways. The science that studies things in whose definitions sensible matter must be included is natural science: over its vast scope and through its divisions, a peculiar mode of defining characterizes natural science, and even in those parts of it called *scientiae mediae* the appropriate way to distinguish sciences is invoked. A science that studies things in whose definitions sensible matter does not enter, even though these things cannot exist apart from sensible matter, is mathematics. A third science is made possible by the proof within natural science that not everything that is is material. This opens up the range of «being» and grounds the possibility of a discipline whose subject will be being as being and that which belongs to it per se.

Thomas has taken over from Aristotle a quite sophisticated procedure for deciding whether two sciences are the same or different. And Thomas applied the procedure where Aristotle could not. Thomas recognizes two theologies, that of the philosopher and that based on Sacred Scripture. The first has its source in the human mind's slow ascent from the sensible to its non-sensible cause. Its subject is being as

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<sup>11</sup> «Esse vero quod in sui natura unaquaeque res habet, est substantiale. Et ideo cum dicitur “Socrates est” si ille “Est” primo modo accipiatur, est de praedicato substantiali» (*In V Metaphys.*, lect. 9, n. 896). The second way would be to understand it as meaning that the sentence is true: *ens ut verum*.

<sup>12</sup> One finds in «existential Thomists» the suggestion that, while for Aristotle there is only *esse substantiale* and *esse accidentale*, for Thomas there is beyond these an *esse* which is the act of all acts, even of forms. See Cornelio FABRO, *La nozione metafisica di partecipazione secondo S. Tommaso d'Aquino*, terza edizione riveduta (Torino: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1963), p. 30. Fabro is here interpreting Boethius. He characterizes *esse substantiale* as formal and other than the *actus essendi*, taking the distinction between *esse simpliciter* and *esse aliquid* as the basis for the claim.

<sup>13</sup> Among recent commentators, not even Giovanni Reale found this book integral to the *Metaphysics*. Thomas shows how it is and his reading reduces to absurdity that the book is merely a glossary of terms, perhaps an introduction to Aristotelian jargon. Thomas enables us to see that the terms are arranged with an eye to «the science we are seeking». Thus, some signify the principles of the subject, others the subject itself and yet others properties of the subject of metaphysics. Cf. *In V Metaphys.*, lect. I, n. 749.

common to the things that are, that is, to substance, accidents, etc. God enters into this science, not as its subject or part of its subject, but as the cause of all the things that are, things which have existence. Terms used to speak of the subject will be extended to its cause. The theology based upon Scripture has God for its subject, that is, God as he reveals himself to us.

Thus, when Thomas says that there are two theologies, he gives us the formal reason for their difference. In order for anyone to hold that there is a formal, radical, essential, difference between Aristotle's metaphysics and that of Thomas, he would have to show that they have different modes of defining or that they have different subject matters. This is a point that I have developed elsewhere<sup>14</sup>. Neither Gilson nor anyone else has done this.

### *Being as Being.*

The almost glacial pace of the *Metaphysics* is a sign of how difficult it is for the human mind to lift itself to thinking about immaterial reality. Indeed, it can be puzzling to realize that most of the discussions in the work bear on sensible reality. The range of the subject matter of metaphysics, being as being, indicates that it leaves nothing out. If sensible things are studied in metaphysics, this cannot be as they are studied in natural philosophy. Aristotle will say that First Philosophy studies them as being. The proper understanding of that formality, *as being, inquantum ens*, is essential. Some Thomists seem to understand it to mean, as existing —as if the natural philosopher did not study a kind of being. All the theoretical sciences have being as their subject: it is the formality under which they study it which makes them several rather than one science. But what would it mean to study natural things, not *ut entia mobilia*, but *ut entia*?

«Being» has more predicable range than «mobile being», but that would not suffice to make a science of being differ from the science of mobile being. It is only if «being» encompasses beings which are not mobile beings that the greater scope of «being» is more than merely predicable. As Aristotle points out, if there were no substance beyond the natural, the study of natural substance would be first philosophy. Thomas elaborates: «...if there is no other substance than those which are brought about through nature, with which physics is concerned, physics would be first philosophy. But if there is some immobile substance, it will be prior to natural substance, and consequently the philosophy considering this kind of substance will be first philosophy. And because it is first, it will also be universal, and it will fall to it to investigate being as being, both what it is and what belongs to it as being: for the science of the first being and of common being are the same, as was pointed out at the outset of Book Four»<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Boethius and Aquinas* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1990).

<sup>15</sup> «Si non est aliqua substantia praeter eas quae consistunt secundum naturam, de quibus est physica, physica erit prima scientia. Sed, si est aliqua substantia immobilis, ista erit prior substantia naturali; et per consequens philosophia considerans huiusmodi substantiam, erit philosophia prima. Et quia est prima, ideo erit universalis, et erit eius speculari de ente inquantum est ens, et de eo quod quid est, et de his quae sunt entis inquantum est ens: eadem enim est scientia primi entis et entis communis, ut in prin-

The mark of metaphysics is not to speak of physical objects more vaguely, though this is all it must seem to do when its theological *telos* is forgotten. The aim of philosophizing is to attain such knowledge of the divine as the human mind is capable of. But God, the divine, cannot be the subject of a human science<sup>16</sup>. If we are to have a science in which God can be considered, it will have as its subject a commensurably universal effect of the divine causality, being as such. Given the fact that the causality of God has already been established at the end of the *Physics*, the task of metaphysics would seem to be, not to prove that God exists, but to arrive at a less imperfect knowledge of him. Hence the painstaking analysis of substance, working off material substance, asking what in material substance is most substance — a curious question until we see that it is aimed at a use for the term «substance» beyond material substances. Immaterial substances differ from material substances, negatively of course, but they can be argued to possess what it is to be a substance more perfectly than the substances that we more easily know. Perfect knowledge of material substances is had through their proper causes; but from them knowledge of what more perfect substances and common causes must be can be learned.

One fears that many Thomists, in their eagerness to go beyond Aristotle, have yet to grasp the profundity of the Philosopher's thought. How sad that the reason for this is often the failure to make use of the magnificent commentary that Thomas wrote on the *Metaphysics*. Much of what has come to be called Existential Thomism, a movement which is marked by its animus against Aristotle, is possible largely because of a failure to appreciate Aristotle as Thomas did. The misrepresentation of Aristotle on behalf of Thomas is fueled by the failure to understand either man. Thomas was a disciple of Aristotle. To be a Thomist involves being a disciple of Aristotle. Disciples who imagine that their master abandoned his philosophical master will be odd disciples indeed. One is reminded of the ending of *Fear and Trembling*.

«Heraclitus the obscure said, "One cannot pass twice through the same stream". Heraclitus the obscure had a disciple who did not stop with that, he went further and added, "One cannot do it even once". Poor Heraclitus to have such a disciple!»<sup>17</sup>.

RALPH MCINERNEY

University of Notre Dame.

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cipio quarti habitum est» (*In VI Metaphys.*, lect. 1, n. 1169, explaining E.1, 1026a27-32). It was Werner Jaeger's misunderstanding of Aristotle's remark that such a science is universal because it is first that put Aristotelian studies on a long detour from which they are just returning.

<sup>16</sup> We are reminded of this at the end of Book Zeta and Thomas spells it out in lesson 17 of his commentary on that book.

<sup>17</sup> See *Fear and Trembling & Sickness Unto Death*, by Søren Kierkegaard, trans. Walter Lowrie (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1954), p. 132.