

30

Thomas Aquinas On Being and Essence

Prologue

Because a small error in the beginning grows enormous at the end, as the Philosopher remarks in Book 1 of *On the Heavens and the World*,¹ and being and essence are the first things to be conceived by our understanding, as Avicenna declares in Book 1 of his *Metaphysics*,² in order to avoid falling into error about them, and to reveal their difficulties, we should see what are signified by the names of being and essence, how these are found in various things, and how they are related to the logical intentions³ of genus, species, and difference.

And since we need to arrive at the cognition of simple components from the cognition of what they compose, and from those that are posterior to those that are prior, so that the discussion may suitably progress from the easier subjects, we should proceed from the signification of the name of being to the signification of the name of essence.⁴

1 Aristotle, *De Caelo*, lb. 1, c. 5, A271; *Commentary* of St. Thomas, lc. 9.

2 Avicenna, *Metaphysica*, lb. 1, c. 6.

3 The “logical intentions” are second-order concepts (*secundae intentiones*) whereby we conceive of first-order concepts [*primae intentiones*], which in turn are concepts whereby we conceive of things that are not concepts. For example, by means of the first-order concepts of humans and of dogs we conceive of human beings and of dogs, which are not concepts. But by means of the second-order concept of species we conceive of the first-order, specific concepts of humans, dogs, donkeys, etc., and by means of the second-order concept of genus we conceive of the generic concepts of animals, plants, elements, etc.

4 This passage is a neat expression of Aquinas’s general Aristotelian epistemological stance. We should start with the things with which we are more familiar, namely, the things given in our everyday experience, which are, nevertheless, metaphysically posterior to their simple components. But through the careful conceptual analysis of these things we may arrive at the understanding of their simple metaphysical constituents, which will then enable us to see how these constituents can be found even in things beyond our everyday experience.

Chapter 1. The Meanings of the Names of Being and Essence⁵

We should know that, as the Philosopher says in Book 5 of the *Metaphysics*, something is said to be a being [*ens per se*]⁶ in two different senses: in one sense, [only] those things [are called beings] that are sorted into the ten categories; in the other sense [calling something a being] signifies the truth of a proposition. And the difference between the two is that in the second sense everything can be said to be a being of which a [true] affirmative proposition can be formed, even if it posits nothing in reality; it is in this way that privations and negations are said to be beings, for we say that an affirmation is the opposite of negation, and that there is blindness in an eye. But in the first sense only that can be said to be a being which posits something in reality.⁷ Therefore, blindness and the like are not beings in the first sense. So, the name “essence” [*essentia*] is not derived from “being” [*ens*] in the second sense (for some things are said to be beings in this sense although they do not have an essence, as is clear in the case of privations), but from “being” as it is used in the first sense. This is why the Commentator remarks in the same passage: “‘Being’ in the first sense signifies the substance of the thing.”⁸

And since, as has been said, beings in this sense are sorted into the ten categories; “essence” has to signify something that is common to all natures on account of which various beings fall under the diverse genera and species, as for example humanity is the essence of man, and so on for the rest. And because that by which a thing is constituted in its proper genus or species is what we signify by the definition indicating what [*quid*] this thing is, philosophers changed the name of essence into the name “quiddity” [*quidditas*], and this is what the Philosopher in Book 7 of the *Metaphysics* often calls “what something was to be” [*quod*

5 The division of the text into seven chapters follows the Boyer edition, used for this translation (“Opusculum *De ente et essentia*, introductione et notis auctum,” ed. C. Boyer, *Textus et Documenta*, Series Philosophica, 5: Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana (Rome, 1933)). The chapter titles are added by the translator.

6 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Bk. 5, c. 7, 1017a22–3; *Commentary* of St. Thomas, lc. 7. In the passage to which Aquinas refers, Aristotle contrasts “coincidental being” (*ens per accidens*) with “non-coincidental being” [*ens per se*]. A coincidental being is something identified on the basis of merely coincidental features, on account of which it would belong to two different categories; for example, a tall musician, described as such, is a merely coincidental being, described in terms of a quantity (height) and a quality (a capacity to play music). So, the person conceived and described in this way is a merely coincidental being, an *ens per accidens*. On the other hand, the same person considered merely as a human being, as such, is not described in coincidental terms, so, the person considered in this way is an *ens per se*. Obviously, the distinction itself is not a real distinction between two different sorts of things, but a mere distinction of reason between different ways of conceiving of the same thing.

7 This, initially puzzling, distinction between the two main senses of the term “being” is what is often referred to as the distinction between “real being” (*ens reale*) and “being of reason” (*ens rationis*) (sometimes also referred to as “being as true” (*ens ut verum*)). The distinction will at once be less puzzling, if it is read in its proper context, i.e., the “inherence theory of predication” and the corresponding theory of signification, assumed here by Aquinas, without any preliminary explanation. For detailed analyses of this distinction along these lines, see G. Klima, “The Semantic Principles Underlying Saint Thomas Aquinas’s *Metaphysics of Being*,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology*, 5 (1996), pp. 87–141; “Aquinas’ Theory of the Copula and the Analogy of Being,” *Logical Analysis and History of Philosophy*, 5 (2002), pp. 159–76; “The Changing Role of *Entia Rationis* in Medieval Philosophy: A Comparative Study with a Reconstruction,” *Synthese* 96 (1993), pp. 25–59.

8 Averroës, *In Metaph.*, lb. 5, com. 14.

quid erat esse], that is to say, that on account of which something is what it is. It is also called “form,” because “form” signifies the perfection and determinate character [*certitudo*] of every thing, as Avicenna says in Book 2 of his *Metaphysics*.⁹ It is also called “nature,” taking “nature” in the first of the four senses assigned to it by Boethius in his *On Two Natures*,¹⁰ namely, in the sense in which a nature is said to be that which can in any way be apprehended by the intellect. For a thing is intelligible only on account of its essence and definition; and it is also in this sense that the Philosopher in Book 5 of the *Metaphysics* says that every substance is a nature. But the name “nature” taken in this way seems to signify the essence of a thing insofar as it is related to the thing’s proper operation, since nothing is deprived of its proper operation. The name “quiddity,” on the other hand, is derived from the fact that it is signified by the definition; but it is called “essence” [*essentia*], because it is that through which and in which a thing has its being [*esse*].

Chapter 2. The Essence of Material Substances

But because a substance is said to be a being primarily and without qualification, whereas an accident is a being only secondarily and, as it were, with qualification, only a substance has an essence in a strict and true sense, while an accident has it only somehow, with qualification.

Some substances are simple, others are composite, and both sorts have their essence, but the simple ones in a more genuine and excellent way, just as they have a more excellent way of being. For they are the cause of the composite ones; at least this is true of the first, simple substance, which is God.

However, since the essences of these substances are quite hidden from us, we should begin with the essences of composite substances, so that our discussion may more suitably proceed from the easier subjects.

In composite substances, therefore, form and matter are known [components],¹¹ as are soul and body in man. But it cannot be said that one of these alone should be called the essence of the thing. That matter alone is not the essence of the thing is clear, because the thing is knowable through its essence, and it is on account of its essence that it falls under its proper species and genus; but its matter is not the principle of cognition of the thing, and it is not on account of its matter that a thing is determined to be in its proper genus or species, but that on account of which it actually exists. However, the form of a thing alone cannot be said to be its essence either, even if some people want to make this claim.¹² For on the basis of what has been said so far it is clear that the essence of a thing is what its definition signifies. But the definition of things of nature contains not only form, but matter as well; otherwise natural definitions would not differ from mathematical

⁹ Avicenna, *Metaph.*, 1, 6; 2, 2.

¹⁰ *De persona et duabus naturis*, c. 1. Migne Patrologia Latina (ML), 64, 1341.

¹¹ Matter and form are the obviously given metaphysical components of any material substance, as it is clear from the hylomorphic analysis of physical change, provided by Aquinas in his *On the Principles of Nature*.

¹² In particular, Averroës and his followers made this claim against Avicenna. Aquinas sides with Avicenna on the issue. Cf. Aquinas, *In Metaphysica*, lb. 7, lc. 9, n. 1467; *In Quattuor Libros Sententiarum Petri Lombardi* (SN) 4, d. 44, q. 1, a. 1b, resp. 2.

definitions.¹³ And it cannot be said that matter is included in the definition of a natural substance as something added to its essence, or as something existing outside of its essence, for this sort of definition is proper to accidents, which do not have perfect essence, and therefore they have to receive in their definition their subject, which is outside their essence.¹⁴ It is clear, therefore, that essence comprises both matter and form.

Nevertheless, it cannot be said that “essence” signifies a relation between matter and form, or something superadded to these, because that would necessarily be an accident or extrinsic to the thing, and the thing would not be known on account of it, none of which can apply to an essence. For by the form, which is the actuality of matter, matter is made into an actual being and *this* [particular] thing [*hoc aliquid*]. Therefore, whatever supervenes does not give actual being to matter absolutely speaking, but it makes it actual in some respect, just as accidents do, as whiteness makes something actually white. So, when a form of this sort is acquired, the thing is not said to be generated absolutely speaking, but only in some respect.

What remains, therefore, is that the name “essence” in composite substances signifies what is composed of matter and form. And Boethius agrees with this position in his *Commentary on the Categories*, when he says that *ousia* signifies something composite; for *ousia* signifies the same for the Greeks as “essence” does for us, as he says in his *On Two Natures*. Avicenna also says that the quiddity of composite substances is the composition of matter and form itself.¹⁵ And even Averroës declares in his *Commentary* on Book 7 of the *Metaphysics*: “the nature that the species of generable and corruptible things have is a certain intermediary, that is, composed of matter and form.”¹⁶

And reason agrees with this as well, for the act of being [*esse*] of a composite substance is neither of the form alone, nor of matter alone, but of the composite itself; and the essence is that on account of which the thing is said to be. Therefore, the essence, on account of which the thing is denominated a “being,” cannot be the form alone or the matter alone, but has to be both, although it is the form that causes this act of being in its own way. We can see also in cases of other things composed of several principles that the thing is not denominated on account of only one of those principles that constitute it, but on account of what comprises both, as is clear in the case of flavors: for sweetness is caused by the action of warmth spreading wetness, and although in this way warmth causes sweetness, still, a body is not denominated sweet on account of its warmth, but on account of its flavor, which comprises both warmth and wetness.¹⁷

13 For example, the geometrical definition of a sphere would not differ from the natural definition of a pearl. But even if all pearls are essentially spherical (more or less), they also essentially consist of layers of crystallized calcium carbonate held together by conchiolin, which is why not all spherical bodies are pearls.

14 This point is discussed in more detail in c. 7 below, considering the definition of “pugness,” which is necessarily a curvature of a nose, but in and of itself is the curvature only, having to have a nose as its subject. Cf. also n. 67 below.

15 Avicenna, *Metaph.*, 5, 5.

16 Averroës, *In Metaph.*, 7, 7, com. 27.

17 The example, based on the somewhat obscure Aristotelian doctrine of how the composite qualities of mixed bodies can be derived from the interaction of the simple active and passive qualities of the four elements, is not very illuminating to us. But the point is clear, and can, in fact, be illustrated by another, more familiar example: punch flavor is caused by mixing various fruit juices (and maybe some rum). Still, a punch-flavored cake or scoop of ice cream is not denominated by any of the components, but by the composite flavor resulting from the mixture.

However, since the principle of individuation is matter, from this it may appear to follow that the essence, which comprises both matter and form, is only particular and not universal, from which it would further follow that universals would not have definitions, if an essence is something that the definition signifies.

And for this reason we should know that matter considered in just any way is not the principle of individuation, but only designated matter is. And by *designated matter* I mean matter considered under determinate dimensions. This matter is not included in the definition of man as such, but it would be included in Socrates' definition, if Socrates had a definition. The definition of man, on the other hand, includes non-designated matter; for the definition of man does not include this bone or this flesh, but bones and flesh absolutely, which are the non-designated matter of man.¹⁸

Chapter 3. The Composition of Material Substances

In this way it is clear that the essence of man and the essence of Socrates differ only as designated and non-designated, and this is why the Commentator declares in his *Commentary* on Book 7 of the *Metaphysics*: "Socrates is nothing other than animality and rationality, which are his quiddity."¹⁹ It is also in the same way that the essence of the genus and the essence of the species differ as designated and non-designated, although the manner of designation is different in the two cases. For the designation of the individual with respect to the species takes place through matter determined by dimensions, whereas the designation of the species regarding the genus occurs through a constitutive difference, which is taken from the form of the thing.

But the determination or designation of the species with respect to the genus is not through anything in the essence of the species that would in no way be in the essence of the genus; rather, whatever is in the species is also in the genus indeterminately. For if an animal were not the same as the whole that is a man, but only a part of it, then *animal* would not be predicated of *man*, for no integral part is predicated of its whole.

We can see how this happens if we consider how *body*, insofar as it is taken to be a part of an animal, differs from *body*, insofar as it is taken to be a genus; for it cannot be a genus in the sense in which it is an integral part. The name "body," therefore, can be taken in several senses. For a body, insofar as it is in the genus of substance, is said to be a body because it has a nature on account of which three dimensions can be designated in it; while

18 It is important to note here that the difference between designated and non-designated matter is, again, not a difference between two different kinds of entities, but rather a difference between two different ways of considering the same kind of entity; that is to say, the distinction between designated and non-designated matter is not a real distinction, but a distinction of reason. All matter in reality is designated matter, i.e., concrete chunks of matter existing under the determinate dimensions of the individual bodies they constitute. But just as the individuals can be considered in a universal manner, disregarding their individuating features, so their matter can be considered generally, not as this or that particular chunk of matter. And it is obvious that it is only matter considered in this way that can be signified by the definition of the species (the definition that signifies the specific essence of each individual), for it is clear that the definition of man, for example, cannot signify the flesh and bones of Socrates as *this* particular matter belonging to Socrates, for otherwise all men (i.e., all individuals having the essence signified by this definition) ought to have Socrates' flesh and bones, which is clearly absurd. Cf. n. 26 below.

19 Averroës, *In Metaph.*, 7, c. 5, com. 20.

the three designated dimensions themselves are the body which is in the genus of quantity. But it happens that something that has some perfection also reaches a further perfection, as is obvious in the case of man, who has a sensitive nature and beyond that also an intellectual one. Likewise, to the perfection of a thing's having a form on account of which three dimensions can be designated in it, a further perfection can be added, such as life, or something like that. The name "body," therefore, can signify something which has a form from which there follows the designatability of three dimensions exclusively, namely, in such way that from that form no further perfection would follow, but if something is added, then it is beyond the signification of "body" in this sense. And in this sense the body will be an integral and material part of an animal, for in this way the soul will be beyond the signification of the name "body," and it will be superadded to the body itself, so that the animal will be constituted from these two, namely, from the soul and the body, as its parts.

But the name "body" can also be taken to signify some thing that has a form on account of which three dimensions can be designated in it, whatever that form may be, whether it may give rise to some further perfection or not. And in this sense *body* will be a genus of *animal*, because *animal* contains nothing that is not contained implicitly in *body*. For the soul is not another form than that on account of which in that thing three dimensions can be designated;²⁰ and so when it was said that a body is something that has a form on account of which three dimensions can be designated in it, this form was understood to be *any* form, regardless of whether it is animality or lapideity [rock-ness] or anything else of this sort. And in this way the form of *animal* is implicitly contained in the form of *body*, insofar as *body* is its genus.

There is a similar relationship between *man* and *animal*. For if "animal" only named a thing that has the perfection of sensing and moving on account of an intrinsic principle *with the exclusion* of any further perfection, then any further supervening perfection would be related to *animal* as to a part, and not as implicitly contained in the notion of *animal*. And in this way *animal* would not be a genus. But it is a genus insofar as it signifies a certain thing whose form can give rise to sensation and motion, no matter what sort of form it is, whether it is a sensitive soul only or a soul that is sensitive and rational as well. In this way, therefore, the genus indeterminately signifies the whole that is in the species, for it does not signify only matter.

Likewise, the difference signifies the whole and not only form; and even the definition signifies the whole, as does the species, but in different ways. For the genus signifies the whole as a certain denomination determining what is material in the thing without determining its proper form; and the genus is taken from matter, although it is not matter. Hence it is clear that something is said to be a body because it has the perfection that three dimensions can be designated in it, which is a perfection that is related as something material to the further perfections. The difference, on the other hand, is a certain determination taken from a determinate form without having some determinate matter in its primary notion, as is clear in the case of *animate*, namely, something that has a soul [*anima*], for this does not determine

20 This is an important expression of Aquinas's famous, and in his time very controversial, thesis of the unity of substantial forms. For a detailed discussion of this passage, see G. Klima, "Man = Body + Soul: Aquinas's Arithmetic of Human Nature," in B. Davies (ed.), *Thomas Aquinas: Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 257–73. For more discussion of the thesis and its history, see D. A. Callus, "Forms, Unicity and Plurality of," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York: McGraw-Hill; 1967–79.

what sort of thing it is, whether a body or something else. This is why Avicenna says²¹ that the genus is not understood in the difference as a part of its essence, just as their subject is not part of the understanding of attributes [*passiones*]; and so the genus is not predicated of the difference *per se*, as the Philosopher remarks in Book 3 of the *Metaphysics* and Book 4 of the *Topics*,²² except, perhaps, in the way the subject is predicated of the attribute. But the definition and the species comprise both, namely, the determinate matter designated by the name of the genus and the determinate form designated by the name of the difference.

And from this it is clear why the genus, difference, and species are analogous to matter, form, and the composite in nature, although they are not identical with them. For the genus is not matter, but is taken from matter as signifying the whole, and the difference is not form, but is taken from the form as signifying the whole. Therefore, we say that man is a rational animal, but not that man is *composed of* animal and rational, as we say that man is *composed of* body and soul. For man is said to be composed of soul and body, as a third thing constituted by two things, neither of which is identical with it. For a man is neither soul nor body. But if *man* is somehow said to consist of *animal* and *rational*, then it will not be a third thing constituted by two other things, but rather a third concept constituted by two other concepts. For the concept of *animal* does not determine the specific form expressing the nature of the thing, because it is material with respect to the ultimate perfection; and the concept of the difference *rational* consists in the determination of the specific form; and the concept of the definition or species is constituted by these two concepts. Therefore, just as a thing constituted by others cannot be said to be any of those that constitute it, so a concept cannot be said to be any of the concepts that constitute it; for we do not say that the definition is the genus or the difference.

Although the genus signifies the entire essence of the species, still, the several species in the same genus do not have to have the same essence; for the unity of the genus stems from its indetermination or indifference. However, this does *not* happen in such a manner that what the genus signifies is some numerically one nature in the diverse species having some other thing supervening on it, namely, the difference determining it, as the form determines matter that is numerically one; *rather*, this happens because the genus signifies some form, but not determinately this or that form, which in turn is determinately expressed by the difference; however, this [determinately expressed form] is nothing else but what was indeterminately signified by the genus.²³ And this is why the Commentator says in his *Commentary* on Book 12 of the *Metaphysics* that prime matter is said to be one on account of the removal of all forms, but the genus is one on account of the community of the form signified.²⁴ So, it is clear that the addition of the difference, which removes the indetermination that was the cause of the unity of the genus, yields essentially diverse species.

And since, as has been said, the nature of the species is indeterminate with respect to the individual, just as the nature of the genus is with respect to the species, therefore, just as

21 Avicenna, *Metaph.*, 5, 6.

22 Aristotle, *Metaph.*, 3, 3, 998b24; St. Thomas's *Commentary*, lc. 7; *Topics*, 4, 2, 122b20; 6, 6, 144a32.

23 So, "animal" indeterminately signifies the animality of Socrates and the animality of his dog. But Socrates' animality is nothing else but his humanity, which is determinately signified by the difference "rational," and his dog's animality is nothing else but his "caninity" (dogginess), which is determinately signified by the proper specific difference of dogs (whatever that is).

24 Averroës, *In Metaph.*, 12, com 14.

the genus, insofar as it is predicated of the species, contains²⁵ in its signification everything that is determinately in the species, although indistinctly, so the species, insofar as it is predicated of the individual, has to signify everything that is essentially in the individual, although indistinctly; and this is how the essence of the species is signified by the name “man”; therefore, “man” is predicated of Socrates. However, if the nature of the species is signified with the exclusion of designated matter, which is the principle of individuation, then it is related to the individual as its part, and this is how it is signified by the name “humanity”; for “humanity” signifies that on account of which a man is a man. But designated matter is not that on account of which a man is a man, and so it is not contained in any way among the things from which a man has it that he is a man. Since, therefore, “humanity” includes in its understanding *only* those things from which a man has it that he is a man, it is clear that designated matter is excluded or cut off from its signification. And since a part is not predicated of the whole, this is why “humanity” is not predicated of a man or of Socrates.²⁶ This is why Avicenna remarks that the quiddity of the composite [substance] is not the composite [substance], although the quiddity itself is composite; just as humanity, even if it is composite, nevertheless, is not a man, but it has to be received in something, which is designated matter.

But, as has been said, the designation of the species regarding the genus is by means of forms, whereas the designation of the individual regarding the species is by means of

25 We get this translation by amending the text with the addition of the obviously missing verb “continet.”

26 That is to say, the propositions: “A man is a humanity” and “Socrates is a humanity” are false. This is an expression of Aquinas’ metaphysical claim that a material substance cannot be identical with its essence, but its essence is its part that is really distinct both from the whole and from the other part of the same individual, namely, its designated matter. Note that the real distinction between the specific essence and the designated matter of the same individual is not the same as the real distinction between the matter and substantial form of the same individual, although both distinctions are based on the materiality of the individual in question. These are two different ways of conceptually “carving up” the same individual. (This does not have to mean, however, that the parts thus distinguished are not really distinct: just because we can conceptually distinguish the left half and the right half, as well as the top half and the bottom half of a body, it does not mean that these parts are not really distinct regardless of whether we distinguish them or not.) The (prime) matter and substantial form of the same individual are distinguished on account of the analysis of substantial change: the prime matter of a thing is what takes on a new substantial form when the thing ceases to be, and a new thing comes to be from it, say, when hydrogen turns into helium in a nuclear fusion, or when a living being dies and turns into a corpse. Therefore, the form so distinguished excludes this matter from its notion. But the essence signified by the definition, as we could see above, does not exclude matter in general, but only *this* designated matter in particular (see n. 18 above), and only when it is signified exclusively, by the abstract form of the name of the species, as by the name “humanity.” So, this essence, as signified by this term, is a formal component of the whole substance, received in, and individuated by, the designated matter of this substance. But this formal component is not exactly the same as the substantial form which is received in prime matter, for this formal component comprises both matter and form considered in general, excluding only what individuates them, namely, this designated matter, which is why this formal component, the essence, is also referred to as “the form of the whole” (*forma totius*), to distinguish it from “the form of the part” (*forma partis*), which is the form referred to in the other division, distinguishing substantial form and prime matter. So, an individual material substance, say, Socrates (disregarding his accidents) = substantial form (*forma partis*) + prime matter = essence (*forma totius*) + designated matter. Besides these two divisions of Socrates, there is a third one, not coinciding with either of these two, according to which Socrates = body + soul.

matter; therefore, the name signifying that from which the nature of the genus is taken *with the exclusion* of the determinate form that perfects the species has to signify the material part of the whole, as for example the body is the material part of man; while the name signifying that from which the nature of the species is taken, *with the exclusion* of designated matter, has to signify the formal part. So, humanity is signified as a sort of form, and is said to be the form of the whole [*forma totius*], but not, as it were, as something added over and above the essential parts, namely, form and matter, as the form of a house is added over and above its integral parts, but rather it is a form that is a whole, namely, comprising both matter and form, however, with the exclusion of those things that are apt to designate matter.²⁷

In this way it is clear that the essence of man is signified both by the name “man” and by the name “humanity,” but differently, as has been said. For the name “man” signifies it as a whole, namely, insofar as it does not exclude the designation of matter, but contains it implicitly and indistinctly, just as we said the genus contains the difference. And this is why the name “man” is predicated of the individuals. But the name “humanity” signifies it as a part, because it contains in its signification only what pertains to a man insofar as he is a man, and excludes all designation of matter; therefore it is not predicated of individual humans. And for this reason, the name “essence” is sometimes found to be predicated of a thing, for it is said that Socrates²⁸ is a certain essence; and sometimes it is negated, when we say that Socrates’ essence is not Socrates.

Chapter 4. The Essence of Material Substance and the Logical Intentions

Having seen what is signified by the name “essence” in material substances, we should see how it is related to the notions of genus, species, and difference. Now, since that to which the notion of genus, species, or difference applies is predicated of this designated individual,²⁹ the notion of a universal, that is, of genus or species, cannot apply to essence insofar as it is signified as a part, for example, by the name “humanity” or “animality.” And this is why Avicenna says that rationality is not a difference, but the principle of a difference;³⁰ and for the same reason, humanity is not a species, nor is animality a genus. Likewise, one cannot say that the notion of genus or species applies to essence insofar as it is something existing outside the singulars, as the Platonists believed; for in this way the genus and species would not be predicated of this individual; for it cannot be said that Socrates is something that is separate from him; and neither would that separate thing be of any use in the cognition of this singular. Therefore, it remains that the notion of genus or species applies to essence insofar as it is signified as a whole, for example, by the names “man” or “animal,” as it implicitly and indistinctly contains all that is in the individual.

But a nature or essence so taken can be considered in two ways. In one way, according to its proper notion; and this is its absolute consideration. And in this way nothing is true

27 “Those things that are apt to designate matter” are the dimensions of the material substance, whereby it occupies its location in space, as distinct from other bodies.

28 Correcting the text’s “Socratis” to “Socrates.”

29 This is because according to the “canonical” definitions of Porphyry in his *Isagoge* (which was often referred to as *Praedicabilia*), all universals are “predicables,” i.e., items that can be predicated of several individuals.

30 Avicenna, *Metaph.*, 5, 6.

of it except what pertains to it on account of what it is; therefore, if anything else is attributed to it, then the attribution is false. For example, to a man, on account of being a man, it pertains to be rational and animal and anything else that is in his definition; to be white or black, however, and anything else that is not involved in the notion of humanity does not pertain to a man on account of being a man. Therefore, if it is asked whether this nature considered in this way can be said to be one or many, neither alternative should be accepted, because both are outside of the understanding of humanity, and either can pertain to it. For if plurality were included in its understanding, then it could never be one, although it is one insofar as it is in Socrates. Likewise, if unity were included in its notion and understanding, then Socrates and Plato would have [numerically] one and the same nature, and it could not be multiplied in several things.³¹ In the other way nature is considered according to its existence in this or that thing. And in this way something can be predicated of it accidentally [*per accidens*], on account of the thing in which it is. For example, it is said that a man is white, because Socrates is white, although this [i.e., being white] does not pertain to a man on account of being a man.

This nature has two sorts of existence [*esse*]: one in the singulars, another in the soul, and accidents follow upon this nature on account of each. And in the singulars it has several acts of existence [*esse*] according to the diversity of singulars. But the nature itself, according to its proper, that is absolute, consideration, does not have to have any of these. For it is false to say that the nature of man as such should have existence in this singular, for then it could never exist outside this singular [i.e., in another singular]; likewise, if it pertained to [the nature of] man as such *not* to exist in this singular, then it would never exist in this singular. But it is true to say that to [the nature of] man as such it does not pertain that it should exist in this singular or in that one or in the soul. It is clear, therefore, that the nature of man absolutely considered abstracts from all existence, without, however, excluding any of them.³² And it is the nature considered in this way that is predicated of all the individuals [that have this nature].³³

Nevertheless, one cannot say that the notion of universals applies to natures taken in this way; for the concept of universals includes unity and community,³⁴ but neither of these applies to human nature according to its absolute consideration. For if community were understood

31 This is why it is useful to think of this “common nature,” i.e., the essence of any thing considered absolutely, as the common information content informing several individuals in its several instances, just as the common information content of a book is multiplied in its several copies, or the same genetic information is multiplied and reproduced in several generations of individual living things.

32 So the common nature as such is indifferent to any act of being and so to any mode of being, which is why it can exist in any appropriate singular subject in different ways, i.e., as the common information content of all these singulars, it can exist encoded in different media, whether in the soul or in the actual individuals, just as the same song, for example, can be encoded in magnetic or optical media, or as actual vibrations of the air, i.e., actual sounds.

33 Clearly, the predicate of the sentence “Socrates is a man” attributes to Socrates only what pertains to the nature signified by it according to its absolute consideration. For knowing that this sentence is true, we know that Socrates is a rational animal, and that he is a sensitive living body, etc., namely, whatever is involved in being a man as such, but we certainly do not know whether he is black or white, short or tall, handsome or ugly, etc., anything that does not pertain to human nature according to its actual consideration.

34 For according to one formulaic definition, *universale est unum commune multis*, a universal is [something] one common to many.

to be implied in the concept of man, then there would have to be community in anything in which there is humanity; but this is false, since there is no community in Socrates, but whatever is in him is individuated. Similarly, it cannot be said that the notion of genus or species applies to human nature insofar as it exists in individuals; for in the individuals human nature does not have the sort of unity according to which it is some single thing pertaining to all [of the same nature], which the notion of universals requires.

It remains, therefore, that the notion of species applies to human nature insofar as it exists in the intellect. For human nature itself exists in the intellect abstracted from all individuating conditions, whence it is uniformly related to all individuals [of this nature] outside the soul, being equally a similitude of all, and thus leading to the cognition of all, insofar as they are humans. And since it has this sort of relation to all individuals [of this nature], the intellect forms the notion of species and attributes to it,³⁵ and this is why the Commentator remarks in his commentary on Book 1 of *On the Soul* that it is the intellect that produces universality in things;³⁶ Avicenna also makes the same point in his *Metaphysics*.³⁷

Now, although this nature as understood is universal, insofar as it is compared to the things outside the soul, for it is one similitude of them all, nevertheless, insofar as it exists in this or in that intellect, it is some particular species actually understood [*species intellecta*]. And from this it is easy to see the error of the Commentator who, in his commentary on Book 3 of *On the Soul*, on the basis of the universality of the form understood, wanted to conclude that there is a single intellect for all human beings; for that form is not universal in its existence that it has in the intellect, but insofar as it is a similitude of things, just as if there were a corporeal statue representing several people, it is obvious that the image or shape of the statue would have its own singular act of existence [*esse*], insofar as it would exist in this matter, but it would be common, insofar as it would be a common representation of several things.

Since human nature is predicated of Socrates according to its absolute consideration, and that it is a species does not pertain to it according to its absolute consideration, but it is one of the accidents it acquires on account of its being in the intellect, the name “species” is not predicated of Socrates, so that one could say “Socrates is a species.” But this would have to be the case if the notion of species pertained to [the nature of] man on account of the being

35 “For it is not necessary that if this is a man and that is a man, then they should have the same humanity, just there is no numerically one whiteness in two white things; rather, all that is needed is that one should be similar to the other in that this one has a humanity just as does the other; whence the intellect, taking humanity not insofar as it is the humanity of this one, but insofar as it is humanity, forms an intention common to all.” *SN* 2 d. 17, q. 1, a. 1. Cf. “The individuation of the common nature in corporeal and material things comes from the corporeal matter contained under determinate dimensions; whereas a universal is abstracted from this sort of matter and from the individuating material conditions. Therefore, it is clear that a similitude of a thing received in a sense [organ] represents the thing insofar as it is singular, while received in the intellect, it represents the thing on account of its universal nature; and this is why the senses cognize singulars, and the intellect universals, and that the sciences concern the latter.” *In De Anima*, II, lc. 12. Cf. *In Post.*, II, lc. 20. Cf. G. Klima, “The Medieval Problem of Universals,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2004 edn), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2004/entries/universals-medieval/>>.

36 Averroës, *In De Anima*, 1, com. 8: “one should not believe that the definitions of genera and species are definitions of general things existing outside the soul; rather, they are definitions of particular things, but the intellect produces universality in them.”

37 Avicenna, *Metaph.*, 5, 2: “Universality exists only in the soul.”

it has in Socrates, or according to its absolute consideration, for whatever pertains to a man insofar as he is a man is predicated of Socrates. Nevertheless, “to be predicated” pertains to a genus *per se*, for it is included in its definition.³⁸ For predication is something completed by the action of the judgment-forming intellect, but having some foundation in reality, namely the unity of those [things] of which one is predicated of the other. Therefore, the notion of predicability can be included in the definition of the intention that is the genus, and this is likewise completed by an act of the intellect. Still, that to which the intellect attributes the intention of predicability (predicating it of something else), is not the intention of genus, but rather that to which the intellect attributes the intention of genus, as it is signified by the name “animal.”³⁹

It is clear, therefore, how essence is related to the notion of species; for the notion of species is not one of those [attributes] that pertain to it according to its absolute consideration, nor is it one of those accidents that follow upon it on account of the existence it has outside the soul, such as whiteness or blackness, but it is one of those accidents that follow upon it on account of the existence it has in the intellect; and it is also in the same way that the notion of genus or difference applies to it.

Chapter 5. On the Essence of Immaterial Substances

Now it remains to be seen how essence is found in separate substances, namely, in the soul, in the intelligences [i.e., angels], and the first cause [i.e., God]. Although everybody acknowledges the simplicity of the first cause, nevertheless, some people want to introduce the composition of matter and form in the intelligences and the soul. This position originates from Avicbron, the author of the book called *The Fountain of Life*. But this contradicts the common teaching of philosophers, who called them substances separate from matter, and proved them to be without any matter whatsoever. The most powerful demonstration of this claim proceeds from their ability to understand.

It is clear that forms are not actually intelligible, unless they are separated from matter and its [individuating] conditions, and they are not rendered actually intelligible, except by the power of an intelligent substance, insofar as it receives them and works on them. Therefore, an intelligent substance has to be immune from matter in every way, so that it neither has matter as its part, nor does it exist as a form impressed in matter, as is the case with material forms.

And it cannot be said that intelligibility is impeded not by just any sort of matter, but only by corporeal matter. For if this feature, namely, that it impedes intelligibility, pertained only to corporeal matter as such, then matter would have to have this feature from the corporeal form, since matter is called corporeal only insofar as it is informed by the corporeal form.⁴⁰ But this cannot be the case, because the corporeal form itself is actually intelligible, just as

38 For according to the definition of Porphyry, a genus is something that can be predicated of several specifically different things in response to the question “What is this?”

39 That is to say, although the above-mentioned definition of the term “genus” includes that a genus is predicable, still, this definition does not state it of the intention of genus (expressed by the term “genus”) that it is predicable, but of that to which the term “genus” (as well as its definition) applies, namely, to a generic concept, such as the concept expressed by the term “animal.” Cf. ST 1 q. 85, a. 2, ad 2, included in section 10 of this volume.

40 “The corporeal form” (*forma corporalis*) Aquinas is talking about here is the form of corporeity [*corporeitas*], the form signified by the name “body” (*corpus*).

any other form that is abstracted from matter. Therefore, in the soul or in the intelligences there is no composition of matter and form in any way, so that they could be understood to have matter in the same sense in which corporeal substances do. But there is the composition of form and existence [*esse*] in them. Whence in the commentary on the ninth proposition of *The Book of Causes* it is stated that an intelligence is something having form and existence; and “form” is taken there for the quiddity or the simple nature itself.

And it is easy to see how this can be the case. For if two things are related in such a way that one of them is the cause of existence of the other, then the cause can exist without the other, but not conversely. But this is the relationship between matter and form, because form gives existence to matter; therefore, matter cannot exist without a form, but it is not impossible for a form to exist without matter. For a form, insofar as it is a form, does not have to depend on matter, but if one finds forms that cannot exist without matter, this happens to be the case because of their distance from the first principle, which is the first, pure actuality. So, those forms that are the closest to the first principle are forms subsisting without matter, for the whole genus of forms does not require matter, as has been said, and forms of this sort are the intelligences; so, the essences or quiddities of these substances do not have to be other than their form itself.

The difference, therefore, between the essence of a simple substance and that of a composite substance is that the essence of a composite substance is not only the form, but it comprises both form and matter, whereas the essence of a simple substance is its form only. And this gives rise to two other differences.

The first is that the essence of a composite substance can be signified either as a whole or a part, which results from the designation of matter, as has been explained. Therefore, the essence of a composite thing is not predicated in every way of the composite thing itself, for we cannot say that a man is his own quiddity.⁴¹ But the essence of a simple thing, which is its form, can only be signified as a whole, for there is nothing there apart from the form, so there is nothing that could receive the form. Therefore, no matter how we consider the essence of a simple substance, it is predicated of the simple substance. This is why Avicenna says that the quiddity of a simple substance is the simple substance itself, for there is nothing else [in the simple substance] to receive it.

The second difference is that the essences of composite things, since they are received in designated matter, are multiplied by the division of designated matter, whence in their case it happens that there are numerically distinct things in the same species. However, since the essence of a simple thing is not received in matter, in their case there cannot be this kind of multiplication; therefore, in the case of these substances, there cannot be several individuals in the same species, but there are as many species as there are individuals, as Avicenna expressly claims.⁴²

However, these substances, although they are only forms without matter, are not simple in every way, so that they would be pure actuality, but they are mixed with potentiality, which is clear from the following.

41 The essence of the composite thing is not predicated of it as it is signified exclusively, by means of an abstract term (say, “humanity”), but it is predicated of the thing as it is signified non-exclusive, by means of a concrete term (say, “man”). But the essence of a simple thing is predicated of the thing whether it is signified by a concrete term (say, “angel”) or by an abstract term (say, “angelity”). So, while it is true that Socrates is a man, it is not true that Socrates is a humanity; but it is true that Gabriel is an angelity just as well as it is true that Gabriel is an angel. Compare the end of c. 3.

42 Avicenna, *Metaph.*, 5, 5.

Whatever is not included in the understanding of an essence or quiddity is coming to it from outside, entering into composition with the essence; for no essence can be understood without its parts. But every essence can be understood without even thinking about its existence, for I can understand what a man or a phoenix is, and not know whether it actually exists in the nature of things.⁴³ Therefore, it is clear that existence is distinct from essence, unless, perhaps, there is a thing whose quiddity is its own existence. And this thing would have to be unique and the first [being]. For something can only be multiplied either by the addition of some difference, as the nature of the genus is multiplied in the species, or on account of the reception of a form in diverse pieces of matter, as the nature of the species is multiplied in several individuals, or on account of one of the things multiplied being separate and the other received in something; for example, if there were some separate warmth, then it would be separate from a non-separate warmth [i.e., the warmth of a warm body] on account of its separation itself. However, if there were a thing that is existence only, so that it would be subsistent existence itself [*ipsum esse subsistens*], then this existence would not receive the addition of a difference, for then it would no longer be existence only, but existence and some form besides; and even less would it be receptive of the addition of matter, for then it would already be not subsistent, but material existence. Therefore, it remains that there can only be one thing that is its own existence. And so, in any other thing, the existence of the thing has to be other than its quiddity or nature or form. Therefore, the intelligences have to have existence besides their form, which is why it was said that an intelligence is form and existence.

Now, everything that a thing has⁴⁴ is either caused in it by its own principles, as the ability to laugh in man, or it comes to the thing from an external source, as the light in the air is coming from the sun. But the existence of a thing cannot be caused by its form or quiddity itself (I mean, as by an efficient cause), for then a thing would be its own cause, and would bring itself into existence, which is impossible. Therefore, all such things, namely, those that have their existence as something distinct from their nature, have to have their existence from something else. However, since everything that is through something else [*per aliud*] is reduced to what is through itself [*per se*] as its first cause, there has to be something that is the cause of existence for everything, since it is existence only. For otherwise the series of causes would go to infinity, since every thing that is not existence only has a cause for its existence, as has been said. It is clear, therefore, that an intelligence is both form and existence, and that it has its existence from the first being that is existence only; and this is the first cause, which is God.

43 Despite modern presumptions to the contrary, Aquinas did not take a phoenix to be a merely fictitious, mythical bird by definition. Cf. G. Klima, "On Kenny on Aquinas on Being: A Critical Review of *Aquinas on Being* by Anthony Kenny," feature review in *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 44 (2004), pp. 567–80. So, for Aquinas, the phoenix is rather the illustration of a real, yet ephemeral natural phenomenon, much like a lunar eclipse or a rainbow, of which we may have the scientific definition (and thus we may know perfectly well its real essence, as opposed to merely knowing the meaning of its name), and yet we may not know whether its real essence is presently actualized in any actually existing individual.

44 "Everything that a thing has" is implicitly contrasted with "what a thing is," i.e., what a thing is by its essence. For of course what a thing is by its essence is not *caused* in the thing either by intrinsic or by extrinsic principles. This is the reason why God, who *is* existence, is absolutely *uncaused*, whereas everything that merely *has* existence has to have it *caused* by something.

Everything that receives something from something else is in potentiality with respect to what it receives and the latter is its actuality. Therefore, the quiddity or form that is the intelligence has to be in potentiality with respect to the existence it receives from God, while the existence received is its actuality. And in this way there is potentiality and actuality in the intelligences, although not form and matter, unless equivocally. Thus, also to undergo [change], to receive, to be a subject, and the like, which appear to pertain to things on account of their matter, equivocally apply to intellectual substances and to corporeal ones, as the Commentator remarks in Book 3 of *On the Soul*.⁴⁵ And since, as has been said, the quiddity of an intelligence is the intelligence itself, its quiddity or essence is what itself is, and its existence received from God is that by which it subsists in the nature of things. For this reason, these substances are said to be composed of that *from which* something is [*ex quo est*] and *that which* is [*quod est*], or that which exists [*id quod est*] and existence [*esse*], as Boethius declares.⁴⁶

And since intelligences have potentiality and actuality, it is not difficult to see how there can be a multitude of intelligences, which would be impossible if they had no potentiality whatsoever. This is why the Commentator says in his commentary on Book 3 of *On the Soul* that if we did not know the nature of the possible intellect, then we could not discover the multitude of intelligences.⁴⁷ So, they are distinguished by the different degrees of potentiality and actuality, so that a superior intelligence, which is closer to the first, has more actuality and less potentiality, and so on for the rest. And this series is completed in the human soul, which is at the lowest grade among intellectual substances. Therefore, the possible intellect is related to intelligible forms as prime matter (which is at the lowest grade among sensible beings) is related to sensible forms, as the Commentator remarks in his commentary on Book 3 of *On the Soul*.⁴⁸ And for this reason the Philosopher compares it to a clean slate on which nothing is written.⁴⁹ Therefore, since among other intellectual substances it has the greatest amount of potentiality, it is so close to material substances that it attracts a material thing to share its existence, so that from the soul and the body there results a single existence in one composite thing; although that existence, insofar as it is the existence of the soul, is not dependent on the body.⁵⁰ Therefore, after this form, which is the soul, we find other forms that have even more of potentiality and are closer to matter, so that they have no existence without matter. But even among these we find some order and degrees down to the forms of elements that are the closest to matter. So these do not even have any operation except what is demanded by the active and passive qualities and those that dispose matter to receive form.⁵¹

45 Averroës, *In De Anima*, 3, com. 14.

46 Boethius, *De hebdom.* ML 64, col. 1311 C.

47 Averroës, *In De Anima*, 3, com. 5.

48 Averroës, *In De Anima*, 3, com. 5.

49 Aristotle, *De Anima*, 3, c. 4, 429b31.

50 Besides his thesis of the unity of substantial forms, this is Aquinas' most fundamental metaphysical rationale for his uncompromising position on the substantial unity of body and soul, markedly distinguishing his philosophical anthropology from all forms of dualism both before him (Plato, Augustine, medieval Augustinians) and after him (Descartes, and post-Cartesian philosophy up to the present day), as well as from materialism.

51 This is an allusion to Aristotle's doctrine in his "On Coming to Be and Passing Away" (*De Generatione et Corruptione*), according to which each of the four elements is characterized by a pair of active and passive qualities (active: hot, cold; passive: wet, dry), which account for the material dispositions of all natural bodies, based on the various proportions of the elements that make them up.

Chapter 6. An Overview of the Essences of Substances in Relation to Logical Intentions

Having seen these points, it should be clear how essence is found in various things. Among substances, there are three ways of having their essence: for there is something, namely, God, whose essence is his own existence; and for this reason there are philosophers who say that God does not have a quiddity or essence, because his essence is not something other than his existence. And from this it follows that he is not in a genus. For everything that is in a genus has to have its essence *besides* its existence, since the quiddity or nature of their genus or species is not distinguished on account of the nature of those things of which these are the genus or species, but existence is diverse in the diverse things.⁵²

Nevertheless, if we say that God is existence only, we still do not have to fall into the error of those who stated that God is that universal existence whereby each and every thing formally exists.⁵³ For the existence that is God is of such a condition that nothing can be added to it; therefore, it is distinct from every other existence by its own purity itself.⁵⁴ And for this reason, in the commentary of the ninth proposition of *The Book of Causes* it is stated that the first cause, which is existence only, is individuated through its own pure

52 This argument is stated in a very condensed form in the text, so it needs some explication. The idea is that if there are several things in the same genus or species, then they are obviously not distinguished by their generic or specific nature, since they belong to the same genus or species precisely on account of sharing *the same* generic or specific nature. Therefore, since they *are* nevertheless distinct, they have to be distinct on account of their distinct acts of existence (which in turn are distinct, of course, on account of the relevant principles of specification and individuation, namely, on account of the specific differences of different species in the same genus, and the distinct parcels of designated matter of the different individuals in the same species). So, if the generic or specific nature of several things in the same genus or species is *not* the reason why they are distinct, but their existence is, then the generic or specific nature of these things must be distinct from their existence. That is to say, if something is in a genus or a species, then its existence must be distinct from its essence, whence if the existence of something is *not* distinct from its essence, then it is *not* in a genus or a species. Therefore, divine nature cannot fall under any specific or generic concept, which means that divine nature cannot have a quidditative definition (which would have to contain at least a generic concept); all we can have is several partial characterizations of divine essence, which, however, is ultimately inexhaustible and incomprehensible by means of our finite concepts. Cf. *ST* 1 q. 3, a. 5, the third argument in the body of the article.

53 This was the pantheistic error of the Amalricians (Lat. *Almarici*, *Almarians*, *Amaurians*), the followers of Amalric of Bena (in French, Amaury de Bène or de Chartres, in Latin, *Almaricus*, *Amalricus*, *Amauricus*), a professor at the University of Paris, who died between 1204 and 1207. The Amalricians managed to establish a secret sect (allegedly devoted to ritualistic orgies, in the name of *everything* being divine), which was discovered and eradicated by the authorities in 1210. Their leaders, after refusing to recant, were burned at the stake, and their teachings were officially condemned (in 1210 in Paris, when Amalric's bones were exhumed and buried in non-consecrated ground, and again in 1215, at the Fourth Lateran Council).

54 In Roland-Gosselin's edition – “Le *De ente et essentia* de S. Thomas d'Aquin. Texte établi d'après les manuscrits parisiens. Introduction, notes et études historiques,” ed. M. D. Roland-Gosselin, Bibliothèque thomiste, 8, J. Vrin (Paris: Le Saulchoir/Kain, 1926) – this sentence is completed by the following: *sicut si esset quidam color separatus, ex ipsa sua separatione esset aliud a colore non separato* – “just as if there were a separate color, then it would be distinct from a non-separate color by its very separation.” But Boyer finds this addition inauthentic.

goodness. The common existence [*esse commune*],⁵⁵ however, just as it does not *include* in its understanding the addition of anything, does not *exclude* from its understanding any addition; for otherwise, [if such an addition *were excluded* from its understanding, then] no single thing in which something is added to the thing's existence could be understood to exist.

Likewise, although God is existence only, this does not mean that he should lack other perfections or excellences; rather, he has all perfections of all kinds, and for this reason he is said to be perfect absolutely speaking,⁵⁶ as the Philosopher and the Commentator assert in Book 5 of the *Metaphysics*.⁵⁷ But he has all these perfections in a more excellent manner than any other thing, for in him they are one, and in others they are diverse. And the reason for this is that he has all these perfections on account of his simple existence; just as, if there were someone who on account of a simple quality could perform the operations of all qualities, then in that simple quality he would have all qualities, so too does God have all perfections in his existence itself.⁵⁸

In the second way, essence is found in created intellectual substances, in which existence is other than essence, although that essence is there without matter. Therefore, their existence is not subsistent, but received [in their essence], and so it is finite and delimited to the capacity of the receiving nature. But their nature or quiddity is subsistent, not received in some matter. And this is why it is stated in *The Book of Causes*⁵⁹ that the intelligences are infinite from below and finite from above; for they are finite with regard to their existence that they receive from above, but they are not finite from below, for their forms are not delimited to the capacity of some matter receiving them. And for this reason in their case there is no multitude of individuals in the same species, as has been declared, except in the case of the human soul, on account of the body with which it is united. And although its individuation is temporarily dependent on the body with regard to its beginning (for it cannot acquire an individuated act of existence, except in the body that it makes actual), nevertheless, it does not have to lose its individuation with the removal of the body. For once it has separate existence (after it has acquired individuated existence because it was made the form of *this* body), that existence always remains individuated.⁶⁰ And this is why

55 *esse commune* – existence as conceived by means of our common concept of existence.

56 As opposed to being a perfect this and a not-so-perfect that, as we can say of a man that he is, for example, a perfect lover but a not-so-perfect husband, or vice versa.

57 Aristotle, *Metaph.*, 5, c. 16, 1021b30; Averroës, com. 21; *Commentary* of St. Thomas, lc. 21.

58 Another (necessarily imperfect) analogy might be that just as he who has a Swiss army knife has all the tools of a toolbox in his pocket, so does God have all perfections in his existence.

59 *Liber de Causis*, lc. 16. Cf. lc. 4 and 5.

60 Obviously, if there are two souls already possessing their individual acts of existence on account of the fact that one of them is the form of this body and the other is the form of that body, then, if they continue existing after losing the bodies they actually inform, they do not have to merge into one soul. Indeed, merging into one would be precisely the loss of their individual existence, contrary to the assumption that each individually survives the loss of its body. To be sure, this is an assumption Aquinas does not prove here, he merely answers a possible objection on the basis of this assumption. But he does provide serious metaphysical arguments for the immateriality and the consequent immortality of the soul elsewhere, for example, in his *Questions on the Soul (Quaestio Disputata de Anima)*, qq. 2 and 14. Cf. SN 3, d. 5, q. 3, a. 2, d. 22, q. 1, a. 1; SN 2, d. 19, a. 1, SN 4, d. 50, q. 1, a. 1; *Questiones Quodlibetales (QDL)* X, q. 3, a. 2; *Summa contra Gentiles (ScG)*, II. 79–81; *ST* 1, q. 75, a. 4, a. 6; *Comp. Theol.*, c. 84. For a detailed discussion of Aquinas' arguments for the immateriality of the soul, see

Avicenna says that the individuation and multiplication of souls are dependent on the body, as far as their beginning is concerned, but not with regard to their end.⁶¹ And since in these substances their quiddity is not the same as their existence, they can be sorted into categories; whence they have genera, species, and differences, although their proper differences are hidden from us. For their essential differences are unknown to us even in the case of sensible substances, whence we signify those through accidental differences that stem from the essential ones, as a cause is signified through its effect, as when being bipedal is taken to be the difference of man. But the proper accidents of immaterial substances are also unknown to us; therefore, we cannot signify their [essential] differences either in themselves or through accidental differences.

We should know, nevertheless, that genus and difference cannot be taken in the same way in those substances and in sensible substances. For in the case of sensible substances, their genus is taken from what is material in the thing, whereas the difference is taken from what is formal in it; this is why Avicenna says in the beginning of his book *On the Soul* that among things composed of matter and form, the form “is a simple difference of that which it constitutes.”⁶² But not in the sense that the form is the difference itself, but in the sense that it is the principle of the difference, as he also says in his *Metaphysics*;⁶³ and this sort of difference is said to be *simple difference*, for it is taken from what is a part of the quiddity, namely, from the form. Since, however, immaterial substances are simple quiddities, in their case the difference cannot be taken from a part of the quiddity, but [it has to be taken] from the whole quiddity. And this is why Avicenna remarks at the beginning of his book *On the Soul* that a simple difference “pertains only to those species whose essences are composed of matter and form.”⁶⁴

Likewise, their genus is taken from their whole essence, but in a different manner. For one separate substance agrees with another in immateriality; but they differ in their grade of perfection, in accordance with their being farther away from potentiality and being closer to pure actuality. Therefore, their genus is taken from that which pertains to them insofar as they are immaterial, such as their intellectuality or some such feature; but their difference is taken from their grade of perfection, which, however, is unknown to us. Yet, these differences do not have to be accidental, just because they correspond to greater or lesser perfection, which does not diversify species. For the grade of perfection in receiving specifically the same form does not diversify the form, as something whiter and something less white [do not differ specifically] on account of participating in the same nature of whiteness [to different degrees]; but the diverse grades of perfection among the forms or natures themselves do diversify the species; as nature proceeds stepwise from plants to animals, among which there are some intermediaries between animals and plants according to the Philosopher in his *On Animals*.⁶⁵ Again, intellectual substances do not have to be classified

G. Klima, “Aquinas’ Proofs of the Immateriality of the Intellect from the Universality of Thought,” *Proceedings of the Society for Medieval Logic and Metaphysics*, <<http://www.fordham.edu/gsas/phil/klima/SMLM/PSMLM1.pdf>>, 1 (2001), pp. 19–28. (See also Robert Pasnau’s comments and my rejoinder in the same volume, pp. 29–36 and pp. 37–44, respectively.)

61 Avicenna, *De Anima*, 5, 3.

62 Ibid., 1, 1.

63 Avicenna, *Metaph.*, 5, 5.

64 Avicenna, *De Anima*, 1, 1.

65 Aristotle, *Hist. Animal.*, 8, c. 1, 588b4–6.

in terms of two real differences; for this cannot be done with all things, as the Philosopher says in Book 11 of his *On Animals*.⁶⁶

In the third way, essence is found in substances composed of matter and form, in which existence is received and finite, both because they have their existence from something else and because their nature or quiddity is received in designated matter. And so they are finite both from above and from below; and in their case, because of the division of designated matter, it is already possible to have several individuals in the same species. And we have already discussed earlier how the essences of these substances are related to the logical intentions.

Chapter 7. The Essences of Accidents

Now it remains to be seen how essence is found in accidents; for we have explained how it is found in all substances. And since, as has been said, an essence is what is signified by a definition, accidents have to have their essence in the way they have a definition. But they have an incomplete definition, for they cannot be defined unless their subject is included in their definition, and this is because they do not have their existence separately from their subject, but, just as from form and matter there results a substantial act of existence [*esse substantiale*] when they are united, so from an accident and its subject there results an accidental act of existence [*esse accidentale*], when the accident comes to the subject. And for this reason even a substantial form does not have a complete essence, (and neither does matter); for in the definition of a substantial form one has to include that of which it is the form, and so its definition has to be framed with the addition of something that is outside its genus, similarly to the definition of an accidental form; therefore, the natural scientist, who considers the soul only insofar as it is the form of a natural body, includes the natural body in the definition of the soul.⁶⁷

But there is an important difference between substantial and accidental forms. For just as a substantial form does not have its existence separately from that which it informs, neither does that which it informs, namely, matter. Therefore, their union results in that act of existence [*esse*] in which the thing itself subsists, and they yield something that is one *per se*.⁶⁸ Therefore, their union yields a certain essence; and so the form, although considered in itself not a complete essence, is nevertheless a part of a complete essence. But that which is informed by an accident is in itself a complete being, subsisting in its own existence, which

66 Aristotle, *Part. Animal.*, 1, c. 2, 642b5–7.

67 The soul is defined by Aristotle as the first actuality (i.e., the substantial form, as opposed to an accidental form, which would be a second or secondary actuality) of an organic natural body. Therefore, since no form is a body and no body is a form (because a body has to be a composite of matter and form), the definition of the soul includes something that is outside its genus, which means that this definition contains something that is outside the essence or quiddity of the soul, given that the quiddity of anything is what is signified by its quidditative definition strictly speaking, consisting of genus and difference. Accordingly, this “naturalist” definition of the soul is not its quidditative definition strictly speaking. Perhaps, a strict metaphysical definition could be: the soul is a vivifying substantial form. But of course this definition would apply even to the living subsisting forms of separate substances (and at least analogically even to God), whence it cannot be regarded as a definition in natural science, which only deals with the material universe.

68 Aquinas is talking here about something that is one *per se*, say, a man, as opposed to something that is one *per accidens*, i.e., by mere coincidence, say, a man who happens to be a teacher. Cf. n. 6 above.

naturally precedes the supervening accident. Therefore, the supervening accident does not cause by its union with the thing that act of existence in which the thing subsists, i.e., that on account of which the thing is a *per se* being, but it causes a certain secondary act of existence, without which the subsisting thing can be understood to exist, just as anything that is primary can be understood without what is secondary.⁶⁹ Therefore, an accident and its subject do not yield something that is one *per se*, but something that is one *per accidens* [by coincidence].⁷⁰ Therefore, from their union there does not result some essence, as does from the union of matter and form; and for this reason an accident is neither a complete essence nor a part of a complete essence, but just as it is a being with some qualification [*secundum quid*], so too, it only has essence with some qualification.

However, in any genus, that which maximally and most truly exemplifies its kind is the cause of those that do so to a lesser degree, as fire, which is ultimately hot, is the cause of heat in all hot things, as stated in Book 2 of the *Metaphysics*;⁷¹ therefore, substance, which is the first in the kind of all beings, and which maximally and most truly has essence, has to be the cause of accidents, which participate in the nature of being only secondarily and with qualification [*secundum quid*]. But this happens in various ways. Since matter and form are the parts of substance, some accidents primarily stem from form, others from matter. But there is a certain form whose existence [*esse*] is not dependent on matter, as the intellectual soul, whereas matter only has existence through form. So some accidents stemming from the form do not communicate with matter, such as thinking, which does not take place in

69 For Aquinas, this is the fundamental difference between substantial and accidental forms: the act of being of a substantial form is the same as the act of being of the thing informed by it, whereas the act of being of an accidental form is distinct from the act of being of the thing it informs; therefore, it is logically impossible for a thing to exist without its substantial form, but it is logically possible for the thing to exist without its accidental form (even if it may *naturally* be impossible, as in the case of separable accidents). It is also worth noting that from this claim it is very easy to prove Aquinas' thesis of the unity of substantial forms. For suppose a substance *s* has two distinct substantial forms, *f* and *g*. Since *f* and *g* are supposed to be two distinct entities, they have to have two distinct acts of existence, *e_f* and *e_g*. But if both *f* and *g* are supposed to be substantial forms of *s*, then their acts of existence would have to be identical with the same act of existence of *s*, *e_s*, which is impossible (because if *e_f* = *e_s* and *e_s* = *e_g*, then *e_f* = *e_g*, contrary to our assumption). Therefore, if both *f* and *g* are substantial forms of *s*, then *f* = *g*, for any *f* and *g*, i.e., *s* can have at most one substantial form (and if *s* exists, then it has to have at least one, whence it has to have exactly one). Also, equivalently, if *s* has two forms, one of which is a substantial form, then the other has to be an accidental form, as Aquinas usually argues.

70 Subject and accident, having two distinct acts of being, are two entities, which, however, coincide, insofar as the act of being of the accident is also the act of being of the subject, although not its primary but secondary act. For the being of, say, Socrates' wisdom is nothing but Socrates' being wise, since for Socrates' wisdom to be is for Socrates to be wise (although it is not for Socrates to be, absolutely speaking (*simpliciter*), which is why the act of being of the wisdom of Socrates is only a secondary act of being of Socrates, namely, an act of being with qualification (*secundum quid*)).

71 Aristotle, *Metaph.*, 2, c. 1, 993b24–6. Again, the example is illuminating only with the assumption of Aristotelian physics, where it is assumed that the heat of hot things other than fire is the result of participating in the heat of fire on account of having fire in their composition, whereas fire itself is maximally hot, because it is hot by its own nature and not by participation. But regardless of the example, the idea is clear: something that has a property essentially, and not by participation, has this property maximally and most truly and causes this property to be present to a lesser degree in all those things that have it by participation.

a corporeal organ,⁷² as the Philosopher proves in Book 3 of *On the Soul*.⁷³ There are others stemming from the form, however, that do communicate with matter, such as sensing, but no accident stems from matter without communicating with the form.

But among the accidents stemming from matter there is some further diversity. For some accidents stem from matter in relation to the specific form, as, for example, the masculine and feminine gender in animals, whose diversity is reduced to matter, as stated in Book 10 of the *Metaphysics*; therefore, after removing the form of the animal, these accidents do not stay behind, except equivocally. Others, however, stem from matter in relation to the generic form; and so, after removing the specific form, these still stay behind in matter; as the skin color of a black man, which stems from the mixture of elements and not from the soul, remains in him after death.⁷⁴

And since each and every [material] thing is individuated by matter, the accidents that stem from matter are the accidents of the individual, according to which individuals of the same species differ from each other. But accidents that stem from form are the characteristic attributes [*propriae passionēs*] of the genus or the species; therefore, they can be found in all individuals that share the nature of genus or species, as for example the ability to laugh [*risibile*],⁷⁵ because laughter stems from some apprehension of the human soul.

We should also know that accidents sometimes are caused by the essential principles [i.e., matter and form] in perfect actuality, as heat in fire, which is always actually hot, but sometimes they are caused only as a certain capacity, which is completed by an external agent, as the transparency of the air, which is completed by an external shining body;⁷⁶ and in the case of such accidents, the capacity itself is an inseparable accident, but its completion, which comes from an external principle that is outside the essence of the thing or does not enter the constitution of the thing, is separable, such as motion and the like.

72 According to Aquinas, we do not think with our brain. The brain merely supplies highly processed sensory information for the intellect to form its concepts and do its thinking with those concepts on its own, relying on the brain merely for this information input, but not for carrying out the thinking process itself. But this input is needed for proper mental functioning, which is why brain injuries lead to mental impairment.

73 Aristotle, *De Anima*, 3, c. 4, 429b4; *Commentary* of St. Thomas, lc. 7.

74 To be sure, consistently with Aquinas' thesis of the unity of substantial forms, even these accidents cannot remain *numerically* the same (since this accident is *this* accident on account of pertaining to this substance; so if *this* substance is gone, then *this* accident cannot remain either). However, they can remain in the sense that the new substance resulting from the corruption of another will have *specifically* the same, but *numerically distinct* accidents on account of the disposition of matter of the old substance, which determines what sort of substance with what kinds of accidents can result in a natural process of the corruption of the old substance. But Aquinas merely contrasted here accidents that remain merely equivocally (since being male or female can be said of a dead body only equivocally) with accidents that remain univocally (since being black or white applies in the same sense to a dead body as well as to a living body).

75 This is the stock example of a specific, yet non-essential, characteristic [*proprium*], as introduced by Porphyry. As Aquinas' subsequent remark makes clear, the "laughter" of chimpanzees does not count as laughter in the sense intended here, which is the specifically human kind of laughter that is supposed to come forth from a sudden realization of something inherently funny, as in getting the point of a political joke (which certainly does not happen with chimpanzees).

76 For the air is not actually transparent, i.e., one cannot actually see through it, unless it is actually illuminated, i.e., light actually passes through it.

We should know, however, that in the case of accidents, genus, species, and difference are taken in a different manner from the case of substances. For in the case of substances, from the substantial form and matter conjoined in one nature, there results something that is one *per se*, which properly falls into the category of substance;⁷⁷ therefore, in the case of substances, their concrete names, which signify the composite, are properly said to be in this category as species and genera, as are the names “man” and “animal.” But matter and form are not in this way in this category, except by reduction, as principles are said to be in a category. However, from an accident and its subject there does not result something that is one *per se*, whence they are *not* conjoined in one nature to which the intention of genus or species could be attributed. Therefore, the concrete names of accidents, such as “white [thing]” [*album*] or “educated [person]” [*musicum*], do not fall under the categories as species and genera, except by reduction, only insofar as [the species and genera of accidents] are signified by the corresponding abstract names, such as “whiteness” [*albedo*] and “education” [*musica*]. And since accidents are not composed of matter and form, their genus cannot be taken from their matter and their difference from their form, as is the case with composite substances, but their first genus has to be taken from their mode of existence [*modus essendi*], insofar as “being” is predicated in different, primary and secondary, senses in the ten categories, as for example quantity is said to be [a being] insofar as it is a measure of substance [i.e., of what is a being in the primary sense], and quality [is said to be a being] insofar as it is a disposition of substance, and so on, as the Philosopher explained in Book 4 of the *Metaphysics*.⁷⁸

Their differences, on the other hand, are taken from the diversity of the principles causing them. And since its proper attributes are caused by the proper principles of the subject, in the definition of an accident defined in the abstract form (in the form in which it is properly in a category), in the place of the difference one has to include its subject, as for example, pugness is defined as the curvature of a nose. But it would have to be the other way around if it were defined in the concrete form. For in that case their subject is included in their definition as their genus; since then they would be defined similarly to material substances, in the case of which the nature of the genus is taken from their matter, as we say that a pug is a curved nose.

The case is similar if one accident is the principle of another, as for example actions, passions, and quantities are the principles of relations, and this is the basis of the Philosopher’s classification of relations in Book 5 of the *Metaphysics*.⁷⁹ However, since the proper principles of accidents are not always obvious, sometimes we take the differences of accidents from their effects, as when we take “concentrative” [*congregativum*] and “dispersive” [*disgregativum*] to be the differences of colors, which are caused by the abundance or paucity of light, causing the various species of colors.⁸⁰

77 I am following here Roland-Gosselin’s reading, noted by Boyer in his n. 122, according to which it is the thing that is *per se* one (and not its nature, as Boyer’s reading would have it), that properly falls into the category of substance. To be sure, the nature of a substance is also in the category of substance, insofar as it is signified by all substantial predicates of the thing. But those predicates are predicated of the thing, and not of its nature, although they are predicated of the thing on account of its having this nature signified by these predicates.

78 Aristotle, *Metaph.*, 4, c. 2, 1002b5–7; *Commentary* of St. Thomas, lc. 1. Cf. also *In Meta.*, Bk. 5, lc. 9.

79 Aristotle, *Metaph.*, 5, c. 15, 1020b26; *Commentary* of St. Thomas, lc. 17.

80 Cf. Aquinas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics*, lb. 10, lc. 9, n. 11: “We should take into consideration, however, that *concentrative* and *dispersive of sight* are not the true constitutive differences of *white*

In this way, therefore, it is clear how essence and existence are in substances and in accidents, how they are in the composite and simple substances, and how the logical intentions are found in all, except in the First Principle, which is of infinite simplicity, to which therefore the notion of genus or species does not apply, and so neither does a definition because of its simplicity, in which let there be the end and consummation of this discussion. Amen.

and *black*, but rather their effects. But in place of differences, we can take their signs, just as substantial forms or differences are sometimes designated by means of accidents. For the dispersion of sight results from the vehemence of light, the abundance of which causes whiteness. And the concentration of sight comes from the contrary cause." The problem with this illustration, of course, is that Aquinas never tells us what he means by the "concentration" (or "gathering," "bringing together") and "dispersion" (or "scattering," etc.) of sight. One might think that "dispersion of sight" is something like the dazzling of sight by some bright white light, and the "concentration of sight," accordingly, is whatever the opposite effect of the lack of light is, but we can only guess. However, the theoretical point is clear: one may indicate unknown essential differences by means of known accidents caused by these differences, as when Lavoisier, giving Cavendish's "inflammable air" the name "hydrogen" (meaning "water-maker") in 1783, indicated the unknown difference of hydrogen (its atomic number) by means of its characteristic effect of producing water when burned in air. A similar illustration is often used by Aquinas with reference to the (mistaken, but to a barefoot medieval monk very plausible) etymology of the name *lapis* ("rock") as *laedens pedem* ("something that hurts the foot"). In this case also, the unknown difference on account of which a material substance is a rock is indicated by some well-known (indeed, painfully obvious) effect it has.