Aquinas on Being and Logicism

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Introduction

Anthony Kenny's book, *Aquinas on Being*,[1] is erudite, logically trenchant, and concise. Yet despite the formidable gifts of its author, it is misguided with respect to Thomas's metaphysics. In this vein, the Thomist reader may suppose that the looming eminence of Frege casts a long shadow that subtly distorts the reading of Thomas's texts – and this is not a wholly erroneous supposition, as we shall see. But the first and most arresting series of departures from Thomas's teaching, while congruent with and in part the result of Fregean preoccupations (especially regarding "specific existence"), nonetheless bear comparison with famed objections against the real distinction of essence and existence brought by Suárez. In fact, to think of Kenny's reading of Aquinas as filtered through a combine of Suarezian and Fregean lenses which do not permit St. Thomas's doctrine of the *analogia entis* to appear, seems not far short of the truth – for so long, of course, as it is clear that it is the substantive concerns associated with these authors rather than mere patronage of their texts that is in question. In point of fact, there is no sign in the present work that Kenny has read Suarez, as – all too clearly – it is manifest that he has read Frege. Kenny makes no significant reference to Suarez. Nonetheless his objection to Thomas's characterization of essence as potency vis à vis existence as act mirrors that of Suarez,[2] and everywhere affects – and I shall argue, everywhere vitiates – his appreciation of Thomas's metaphysics. But of course, the Fregean denial that "specific" existence is a first order predicate, and the many ramifications of the value/bound variable schema also contribute a great deal to the story.

Because I believe Kenny's presuppositions block the understanding of key assertions of St. Thomas's text crucial for his metaphysics, the present work is largely an exercise in criticism. Yet one ought not embark on such an effort without first noting the intensive and

[1] Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas on Being*, hereinafter, *AoB* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002).

[2] See Suárez, Francisco. Ed. and tr. Sergio Rábade Romeo. *Disputaciones metafísicas* [hereinafter cited as *Disp. metaphys.*] 31. In *Disputaciones metafísicas*, Vol. 5 Sections 13–14 (p. 186–220). Madrid: Editorial Gredos, 1960–1966. *7* v.

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meticulous treatment which Kenny strives to provide in his book. Whereas there are cases in which an author fails adequately to grapple with a teaching and so launches external criticisms that fail to make contact with their objects, here the case is otherwise. Instead, here is an author who grapples resolutely with a teaching while being so ensconced in a set of metaphysical presuppositions that he cannot consider the contrary account without implicitly translating it into an alien nomenclature and logical grammar. That the book to some degree manifests an awareness of this danger and in fact argues against succumbing to it[3] renders the resultant failure to penetrate St. Thomas's teaching doubly frustrating and unfortunate. One cannot quite escape the thought that a mind as sharp as Kenny's could see more deeply into the inscape of Thomas's teaching than he here permits himself to do.

In any case, external criticism of a teaching should also be considered in the light of possible counter-arguments derivative from the framework that is being criticized. This is simply to perform what Aquinas himself always attempted, namely to provide the strongest possible statement of a position before criticizing it. Kenny does attempt to go to the heart of Thomas's texts before criticizing them. But his *rendering* of the meaning of the texts themselves is falsified by presuppositions that are alien to Thomas's teaching. *Aquinas on Being* is too much the work of a mind which can't harvest the content of propositions directly and unequivocally asserted in the text without implicitly either translating it into an alien logical grammar or puzzling over the difficulties in so doing.

First, I will criticize an error regarding St. Thomas's understanding of *esse* as act and essence as potency; the utter omission of any treatment of the analogy of being as distinct from analogical discourse about God; and the claim that *esse* as a predicate common to all things is thin or near-empty of content. Secondly, I will address certain more general problems touching Dr. Kenny's treatment of Thomas's metaphysics, several of these of Fregean provenance. Only then will I briefly present an approach to the *intellectus essentiae* argument in *De ente et essentia* that rightly regards the natural foundation of this argument and is not utterly misled – as indeed are Kenny and most contemporary readers whether analytic or more historical-minded – by St. Thomas's illustration of the phoenix.

I. Act & Potency; The Analogy of Being; The Putative "thinness" of *Esse*

Before moving to consider more rarified problems, most of which flow from Fregean preoccupations, it is important to point out the remarkable failure of Dr. Kenny to fathom certain essential elements

[3] *AoB,* p. 146.

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of the metaphysical teaching of Aquinas actually implicit throughout his entire *corpus* of work: the relation of act to potency; the doctrine of the analogy of being; and the *richness* rather than "thinness" of *esse*.

Regarding essence as potency in relation to *esse* as act, Kenny indicates throughout most of the book that he supposes this to mean that essence must somehow spookily "pre-exist," that it must be antecedent to *esse* as a potency floating around "waiting" to be actualized. But of course, Thomas never taught any such thing, nor is this what his teaching means.

Possibility is a wider category than potency, for potency refers to an intrinsic principle of a being and not merely to a relation between a cause and what it is within the power of the cause to effectuate. Granted that in second act – the sort of act involved when first we say we "potentially" move and then come "actually" to move – the potency is prior, this is only because this potency itself *presupposes* the *actual being of the thing* which has the potency. This also pertains to the question of "hierarchy" in being, or diverse grades of the perfection of *esse*. For Aquinas, *esse* is the act of being whose internal measure and – in finite things – limit, is essence. Hence it is simultaneously true that in one sense either a thing is or it isn't (so that either there is an actual being or not) and also that *esse* actualizes according to the *ratio* or measure of the essence of the thing of which it is the act of being such that different beings manifest the perfection of *esse* in different degrees (*esse* is proportionate to essence).[4] But significantly, the potential principle – essence – is a real potency precisely because of the *priority of act*, which of course here means the absolute *priority of esse* (for within the being – in

[4] E.g., see *De substantiis separatis*, 7 [Textum Leoninum Romae 1968 editum ac automato translatum a Roberto Busa SJ in taenias magneticas denuo recognovit Enrique Alarcón atque instruxit]: "Ad huc ultra procedentibus manifestum fit quod tanto aliquid in entibus est altius, quanto magis habet de ratione essendi. Manifestum est autem quod cum ens per potentiam et actum dividatur, quod actus est potentia perfectior, et magis habet de ratione essendi: non enim simpliciter esse dicimus quod est in potentia, sed solum quod est actu. Oportet igitur id quod est superius in entibus, magis accedere ad actum; quod autem est in entibus infimum, propinquius esse potentiae." – "Moving further, it becomes clear that something in its being is higher according as it shares more in the *ratione essendi*, the nature of 'to be'. But it is clear that since being is divided by potency and act, that act is more perfect than potency and has a greater share in the *ratione essendi*, the nature of "to be": for we do not say *simpliciter* (simply) that what is in potency is, but rather *only that which is in act*. It is therefore necessary that that which is higher among beings approach more closely to act, but that what is lowest among beings, be nearer to potency." Note also *Quaestiones de Anima* [Textum Taurini 1953 editum ac automato translatum a Roberto Busa SJ in taenias magneticas denuo recognovit Enrique Alarcón atque instruxit] l ad 17: "dicendum quod licet esse sit formalissimum inter omnia, tamen est maxime communicabile, licet non eodem modo ab inferioribus et superioribus communicetur." – "it should be said that although existence is the most formal of all perfections, still it is also the most communicable, although it is not received in the same mode by lower and higher beings."

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which act and potency are simultaneously brought about[5] – esse is most formal and actual).

For Kenny to suppose that for essence to be potency is for essence to "preexist" *esse* is a large mistake. Moreover, even when he cites Aquinas correctly on the point, he seems not to fathom what is being said – perhaps because his conceptual reservations along Fregean lines, with which we shall be coping later, simply do not permit him to follow what Aquinas argues. Hence after evincing incomprehension of this point through two-thirds of his book, Dr. Kenny quotes St. Thomas Aquinas from *De potentia dei* to the effect that "*esse* cannot be determined by something else as potentiality is determined by actuality, but rather as an actuality is determined by a potentiality."[6] But even here his response is veiled – "This is a difficult passage to understand"[7] and "It is only by a very careful choice of examples, in any language, that one can say that the verb 'to be' or one of its equivalents is used to mark the actualization of a potentiality".[8]

Earlier we find such lines as "Later in life Aquinas was quite clear that creation does not involve the actualization of any pre-existent potentiality."[9] But of course at no stage in his life was he particularly unclear about this: potency need not be antecedent to act, *since act is absolutely prior to potency, a decisively important teaching of St. Thomas throughout his work*.[10] Likewise expressive of this erroneous reading of the language of act and potency are the following comments of Dr. Kenny:

> On Aquinas's view, my essence is other than my *esse*; but is it in potentiality to it? Certainly not, if *esse* is existence: it is not as if before ever I was

[5] *De potentia dei* [textum Taurini 1953 editum ac automato translatum a Roberto Busa SJ in taenias magneticas denuo recognovit Enrique Alarcón atque instruxit] I.3.1.ad 17: "Ad decimum septimum dicendum, quod Deus simul dans esse, producit id quod esse recipit: et sic non oportet quod agat ex aliquo praeexistenti." – "To the seventeenth it should be said that God simultaneously brings forth *esse* and that which receives *esse*: and thus it does not follow that something needs to pre-exist his action."

[6] *AoB*, pp. 117–118.

[7] *AoB*, p. 118.

[8] *AoB*, p. 119.

[9] *AoB*, p. 46.

[10] Compare, for example, *Quaestio disputata de spiritualibus creatures .1 .resp*. [Textum Taurini 1953 editum ac automato translatum a Roberto Busa SJ in taenias magneticas denuo recognovit Enrique Alarcón atque instruxit]: "Licet enim in uno et eodem, quod quandoque est in actu quandoque in potentia, prius tempore sit potentia quam actus; actus tamen naturaliter est prior potentia. Illud autem quod est prius, non dependet a posteriori, sed e converso. Et ideo invenitur aliquis primus actus absque omni potentia; nunquam tamen invenitur in rerum natura potentia quae non sit perfecta per aliquem actum; et propter hoc semper in materia prima est aliqua forma. A primo autem actu perfecto simpliciter, qui habet in se omnem plenitudinem perfectionis, causatur esse actu in omnibus; sed tamen secundum quemdam ordinem. Nullus enim actus causatus habet omnem.

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> conceived my essence was already there waiting for me to pop into existence and actualize it.[11]

This passage clearly evidences a failure to come to terms with Thomas's metaphysics of *esse*, which is a metaphysics of the *supremacy of act*, absolutely speaking, and also relatively and analogously within every order.[12] Hence as *esse* is to essence, so is form to matter, and so is accident to substance – not because, as he puts it, for someone who thinks in terms of act and potency "all three cases will be in *the same way* [my emphasis – SL] instances of the actualization of a potentiality,"[13] for each is patently *distinct* from the rest. Rather, each is *analogically speaking – not* merely by analogy of *pros hen* equivocation, but by analogy of proper proportionality – the actuation of a potency.

In the course of a difficult and dense examination of St. Thomas's metaphysics, it is not the least omission that the analogy of being, as distinct from the character of analogical discourse about God, is nowhere treated.[14] Whether this omission flows simply from the antecedent difficulty in making sense of Thomas's account of esse, so that further consideration is judged not to be warranted, or whether it flows from a tendency to insist upon logical univocity to such an extent as to carry this into the metaphysical realm, proper, may be left to further consideration. But the failure to treat of the analogy of being in a book which greatly depends on the claim that the doctrine of esse mingles diverse senses of esse lacking internal unity, intelligibility, and coherence, is a serious omission. This omission likewise touches Dr. Kenny's claim that there is a "thin" notion of existence which applies in precisely the same fashion to everything. "Same" here may reflect merely logical univocity, but then we have exited the ontological order, which is to say that then Dr. Kenny would be writing at cross-purposes with the account he wishes to explicate. In fact, although esse is *universally* predicable this is not equivalent to esse

[11] *AoB*, p. 104.

[12] It also manifests a clear failure to read the words of the text of St. Thomas in *De ente et essentia*, Chapter Four, ¶ 7: "Everything that receives something from another is potential with regard to what it receives, and what is received in it is its actuality." – "Omne autem quod recipit aliquid ab alio est in potentia respectu illius, et hoc quod receptum est in eo est actus eius . . . " – "But everything that receives something from another is potential with regard to what it receives, and what is received in it is its act . . . " Now, put this together with the earlier cited lines from *De potentia dei*.3.1.ad 17: "Deus simul dans esse, producit id quod esse recipit." – "God simultaneously produces existence and the subject that receives existence". This is simply to say that creation is the causing by God of a thing whose perfection of existence is limited to a certain capacity.

[13] *AoM*, p. 46.

[14] Here it is worth mentioning the brilliant speculative treatment of the analogy of being in Yves Simon's essay "On Order in Analogical Sets" from *Philosopher at Work* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999).

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being univocally predicable. The failure here is clear in Dr. Kenny's text:

> Not all is clear in these opaque sentences, but the comparison of *esse* with verbs of activity is suggestive. It would be wrong to conclude from the idiom of such passages that Aquinas regards being as some form of activity that is universally indulged in by everything that there is – as Gilbert Ryle once put it – something like breathing, only quieter. The Latin word *'actus'* when applied, say, to running is naturally translated 'activity'; but it has a very general application to actualities of various kinds. Being blue, or being square, would for Aquinas be actualities, no less than speaking or skipping, but they are actualities of very different kinds.[15]

But, *sed contra*, the *actus essendi* or act of being is indeed "universally indulged" by everything that is: but "universally" does not mean "univocally" save in the sense that the analogy of proper proportionality yields a species of logical univocity sufficient to constitute the middle term of a syllogism. Here again, the doctrine of being is treated as a study of second-intention, which is first a misreading of St. Thomas, and second, a drastic philosophic error. Of course, one cannot quite refrain from noting with respect to Ryle's quoted observation, that there is no particular reason why principles of being, like analytic practitioners, should make noise.

Referring to an argument in *De potentia dei* to the effect that *esse* is a single common effect, and that *esse* is the proper effect of God, Kenny comments:

> '*Esse*' as understood in this argument, seems to be the thinnest possible kind of predicate: to be, so understood, is to have that attribute which is common to mice and men, dust and angels, aches and colds. It seems to deserve the objector's complaint that it is the most imperfect of all things. Yet Aquinas' argument is meant to show that it is the proper effect of God.[16]

But for *esse* to be common is not necessarily for it to be *univocally* common. That is to say, for *esse* to be affirmed of many does not mean that what is attributed to each thing by the predicate *esse* fails to correspond with the subject of which it is affirmed. Supposing we were to speak of "form" as common to all substances: would we suppose therefore that all forms were the same? No. Similarly, for *esse* to be the most necessary, most formal, and most universal perfection of things, is not for it to be "the thinnest possible kind of predicate" – any more than for substantial form to be universally affirmed of physical substances is for substantial form to be "the thinnest possible kind of predicate". This is simply a bad argument: it requires that Kenny prove that *esse* is not necessarily correlated with, proportioned to, and measured by, that of which it is the *esse*, an

[15] *AoB*, p. 59.
[16] *AoB*, p. 121.

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argument he nowhere undertakes although it is logically necessary to the conclusion he draws.

But there is no treatment of the analogy of being in this work, although there is a (necessarily) more limited treatment of analogical discourse about God. Indeed, as will be seen below, error regarding "specific existence" seems to engender a general disinterest in analogical knowledge of being in behalf of purely univocal strategies of knowing. But the loss of analogicity is indeed, also related to the erroneous view of *esse* as "thin" because universal, where "universal" is mistakenly taken to be tantamount to "univocal". And the loss of the richness of *esse* is clearly entailed by the loss of the sense of the absolute priority of act vis à vis potency. For if the actuality of a thing is not distinguished from potency it becomes more plausible to predicate *esse* – the act of being – as though act were itself in potency to be perfected by some higher principle: as though act were merely a "thin" notion perfected by that of which it is predicated (and of which it is the act), which is the very opposite of Thomas's teaching.

Failure to understand the absolute priority of act in St. Thomas's teaching gravely distorts this teaching. For this reason it is important to establish the distinction of act and potency in philosophy of nature, before these terms come to be re-thematized in relation to the wider and transcendental horizons of the science of being *qua* being. Potency is not the less potency for not being antecedent, but rather the opposite is true: potency presupposes act, in this case, the *actus essendi* or existential act.

B. Whether being is Merely the Negation of Nought, and Other Difficulties of Logicism

It is helpful here briefly to engage certain confusions present in Kenny's work, most but not all of which seem consequent upon acceptance of the Fregean logical schema as a metaphysical norm. For reasons of space, I shall list these discretely together with a response to each.

a) Being is not merely the "negation of nought". The famed proposition of Frege quoted by Dr. Kenny is worthy of express and primary consideration, as demonstrating the absurdist implications of logicism run amuck. Here is the text as he quotes it from Frege's *Foundations of Arithmetic* §54:

> In this respect existence is analogous to number. An affirmation of existence is in fact nothing other than a denial of the number zero. Because existence is a property of concepts the ontological argument for the existence of God fails to conclude. But uniqueness is not a component characteristic of the concept of God any more than existence is.[17]

[17] This citation of Frege by Kenny is found in *AoB*, p. 200, and is taken from *The Foundations of Arithmetic*, tr. J. L. Austin (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), §54.

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Clearly the first part of this proposition says something different from what follows. To be told that existence is merely *analogous* to number is not equivalent to what follows, namely the proposition that "existence is in fact *nothing other* [my emphasis-SL] than a denial of the number zero."

Denial of the number zero does nothing to identify anything but quantity, and as Aristotle quite rightly argues, quantity is an *accident* of being. For example, let us take the unitary conception of the unicorn. It is a conception to which the number "1" may apply, as it does when we say: this is one concept, and if we add to it the concept of the Phoenix that is 2 concepts. But the number in itself says nothing about being one way or the other (perhaps no one is so much as thinking about either).

This is simply to note Frege's Platonism, which of course exerts a powerful influence on Kenny's analysis insofar as it suggests that either we have a subsistent form or we have nothing.

That quantity is only an *accident* of being is sufficiently demonstrated by pondering one of Zeno's paradoxes – that which indicates that we cannot walk from point A to point B, because that would entail moving half the distance between A and B, which would entail moving half the distance of half the distance, and so on *ad infinitum*, requiring one to cross an infinite series of divisions: but an infinite series of divisions cannot be crossed. Of course, from this we rightly infer not that we cannot walk to the post office, but that no putative infinite series of divisions need be crossed in order to do so: because we can perform operations upon *number* (such as unending division) that cannot be performed upon physical *beings*.

But further, consider what is lost by the Fregean consideration. The negation of negation is, in a real subject, equivalent to something positive. If I say that "you do not *not* have a nose" that is equivalent to "you have a nose" – because here we are referring to a real subject. But supposing God knew that "there is no creaturely negating because there is no creature". That is a negation of negation, but as it concerns no *real subject* it posits precisely nothing whatsoever in reality. Similarly, the "negation of nought" signifies *precisely nothing* unless it be understood *as referring to a real being*, and that it refer to a real being is – as witness the example of "no creaturely negating because no creature" – not sufficiently indicated by the "negation of the number zero".

After all, we can negate the number zero in the same way as indicated in the example: there is no number zero because there are no numbers. If someone should say: "yes, but is there still in the absence of creation not for you *one* God?" The answer is: transcendental unity is not numerical unity. With transcendental unity we may say there is one, and there is another, but we cannot say there are "two" in any way that implies material continuum. Further,

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the absence of being is not chiefly the absence of unity, for unity is defined by a being's indivisibility from itself, which clearly is to say: being is prior to unity. Granted there is – as Frege suggests – an *analogy* or *comparison* between the absence of zero and being, it is stark nonsense to claim that "An affirmation of existence is in fact *nothing other* [again, my emphasis – SL] than a denial of the number zero".

b) There is in Kenny's work something similar to the Suarezian notion that to be a principle of being must mean: to be a subsistent thing, or at least to be in some way intrinsically actual.[18] One might also discern here a soupçon of the concern with Thomas's teaching often associated with Scotus, namely that for the *unity* of essence to depend upon a *superordinate principle* is for it to be imperiled or implicitly denied. Thus Kenny writes:

> Aquinas insists, as we have seen, that it is not correct to say that Peter and Paul are both human because they share a common humanity; for the humanity of Peter is not identical with the humanity of Paul. But suppose we go on to ask: what makes the humanity of Peter and the humanity of Paul both humanities? Aquinas sometimes answers that they are both individuations and determinations of the same common nature. This seems to make sense only if the common nature is something extra-mental like a Platonic idea.[19]

I.e., only if essence subsists independently does Kenny suppose that it makes sense to speak of essence as a principle of being. Earlier there was occasion to note Kenny's difficulty in coping with the real distinction of act and potency as it pertains to *esse*. But what could be clearer than the incomprehension of Thomas's teaching expressed in the proposition that 'essence *must* have being to itself'? And this proposition is implicitly and actually asserted in the words of Kenny ("this seems to make sense only if the common nature is something extra-mental like a Platonic idea" – the essence must, like a Platonic idea, be a *subsistent*) as though it were a self-evident axiom. But for Thomas it is the *contrary* axiom that is true: *act is not self-limiting*, but is limited only by a corresponding potency.[20] Hence since the existence of any finite thing is precisely limited, it must be because and insofar as *esse* is limited in relation to a certain capacity

[18] See Suarez, *Disp. Metaphys.* 30.2.18, for the assertion that act in some way either limits itself or is limited only by its efficient cause. For the idea that prime matter is not pure potency but is in act, see also *Disp. Metaphys.* 15.9, as well as all of disputations 30 & 31.

[19] *AoB*, p. 56.

[20] *Compendium theologiae* [Textum Taurini 1954 editum ac automato translatum a Roberto Busa SJ in taenias magneticas denuo recognovit Enrique Alarcón atque instruxit] 1.18: "Nullus enim actus invenitur finiri nisi per potentiam, quae est vis receptiva: invenimus enim formas limitari secundum potentiam materiae," – "For no act comes to be limited save through a potency which receives it: as we see that form is limited according to the potency of matter."

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to be which is both a *limit* (in finite being) as well as a *measure*.[21] I.e., regarding essence, Thomas is precisely arguing that it has unity as it has being, namely through the superordinate and superessential principle[22] of *esse*.

c) There is what at least seems to be a pseudo-problem of negative existential propositions putatively 'solved' by the Fregean schema. Here again one must let Dr. Kenny speak for himself:

> Philosophers in recent centuries who have considered existence have concentrated on specific existence, and since the time of Frege it has been customary [in some circles – SL] to cast statements of specific existence in the 'There is a . . . ' form. For logical purposes, a sentence of the form 'Fs exist' is rewritten with the aid of a quantifier as 'There is at least one x such that x is F', or more simply as 'Something is F'. An advantage of this form is that it makes more perspicuous the import of negative existential propositions such as 'extra-terrestrial intelligences don't exist'. If we take this as a straightforward subject-predicate sentence we seem to get into a muddle: for if the sentence is true there isn't anything in the universe for the subject expression 'extra-terrestrial intelligences' to refer to, and so it is obscure *what* we are predicating non-existence of; whereas if we say 'There is no x such that x is an extra-terrestrial intelligence' or 'nothing is an extra-terrestrial intelligence', that problem disappears.

The quotation above is a muddle. But let us begin by asking, in the expression "There is no x such that x is an extra-terrestrial intelligence": what, precisely, is "x"? Clearly x is a stand-in for "being" or "thing". So the phrase is not different from "there is no extra-terrestrial intelligence" or "nothing is an extra-terrestrial intelligence" or "no being which is an extra-terrestrial intelligence exists". But of course we do not literally mean that "nothing" is logically equivalent in definition with "extra-terrestrial intelligence" so that if we ask what is meant by "extraterrestrial intelligence" the answer is "nothing" – as though Frege's earlier proposition might have been that "existence is nothing other than the negation of extra-terrestrial intelligence". By "nothing" we mean: none *exists*. Nor is existence primarily an issue of

[21] Of course, Thomas teaches that God produces existence and the subject receiving it simultaneously – e.g. (see note #5), *De potentia dei* 3.1.ad 17: "Deus simul dans esse, producit quod esse recipit." – while he also every teaches that existence is the most formal of all perfections – e.g., *Quaestiones de anima* (cited *supra*, note 4) 1 ad 17: "dicendum quod licet esse sit formalissimum inter omnia, tamen est maxime communicabile, licet non eodem modo ab inferioribus et superioribus communicetur." – "it should be said that although existence is the most formal of all perfections, still it is also the most communicable, although it is not received in the same mode by lower and higher beings."

[22] Of course, *esse* is not a "principle" in the exact same sense that form and matter are, for *esse* is not itself what exists nor part of *what* exists, although it is the most formal and actual principle of being. It is also important to realize that causes may be causes to one another in different respects simultaneously, keeping in mind that what is prior by nature need not be prior in time. Hence in diverse respects one can see that *esse* actuates the essential nature while the essential nature measures and in finite being limits the perfection of *esse*; and also that absolutely speaking, within the created being *esse* is prior (the essence or capacity *to be* is identified in relation to *esse*).

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quantity although if someone wishes to say that "for x to exist is also for x to be indivisible from itself, i.e. for x to have unity" this is true: as an implication of its prior *being*. At the end of the day, what conundrum, then, is avoided? One still needs to know the *supposition of terms*, i.e., to know that although we have a nominal definition of extra-terrestrial intelligence that in fact we have as yet not discovered in actual nature what is normally conjured by this phrase.

Thus the conceptual payload of the Fregean schema appears to dissipate into a sociological observation, i.e., the proposition that "for some philosophers after Frege, it is customary to speak in such and such ways" – perhaps an adequate description of the practices and protocols of those who persist in approaching ontological questions with an exclusively logical apparatus, just as some people may ingest soup using only a fork (although, one might add, the latter in achieving diminished but genuine contact with the soup exhibit a comparative margin of success vis à vis the former).

d) We have already pointed out Kenny's failure to do justice to the notion of *esse* as actuation of a capacity to be – a capacity that does not antecede *esse* nor enjoy some quasi-entitative status prior to measuring and limiting the actual existence of the thing whose capacity to be it is. However, Kenny misprizes *possibility* in a way similar to that in which he errs about potency, as though to speak of possible individuals were to speak of *entities*. In fairness, there may be reason to cast this aspersion in the direction of Avicenna, but in and of itself the idea of individual possibility is a necessary idea: before Kenny (an individual if ever there was one) existed, there was only, *vis à vis* the divine power, a *possible* individual.[23]

Possibility, as also noted above, is a notion of wider extension than potency, but neither possibility nor potency of itself denotes entity. Existential possibility simply designates that, in relation to God, some effect is *possible*. Since *all* effects are singular even if not "individual" in the material sense (even subsistent forms, according to Thomas, have their own distinctive *esse*; and even universal concepts exist in some mind or other), it necessarily follows as a matter of course that there are *possible individuals* (unless we wish to say that they are *impossible*: but even disagreeing with Dr. Kenny's analysis as I do, it would seem not only impolite but erroneous to suggest that he is being impossible). Kenny writes:

> What, we may ask, is the possible entity that is indifferent between *esse* and *non-esse*? Is it a *merely* possible entity, an entity as it were waiting to come into existence but undecided whether or not to do so? Surely this is absurd. My dog Stigger was a contingent, corruptible entity; but before Stigger was conceived there was no such entity as a merely possible Stigger, awaiting actualization.[24]

[23] And, of course, God as exemplar cause.
[24] *AoB*, p. 89.

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Now, what are we to make of "there was no such entity as a merely possible Stigger" since Stigger is an entity and "possible Stigger" is equivalent to "possible entity" – unless Kenny wishes to conclude that Stigger was, prior to his coming to be, *impossible*? Or, perhaps he is using a 3-valued logic, and holds that Stigger's coming to be was neither possible nor impossible but . . . something else? Moreover, and manifestly, possibles do not "wait" because they do not *do* anything. Hence Kenny's words on this point do not, to this author, make sense.

e) The issue of the putative "thinness" of *esse* has already been considered above. But inasmuch as this may be suggested by thoughts of "specific existence" it is perhaps helpful to remind ourselves, before turning to "f" below, that for *esse* to be universal is not for it to be undifferentiated or univocal or "thin" – all of which would require further premises and arguments which Kenny does not supply.

f) There is a certain mystagogy regarding "instantiation". Kenny claims that all it means for "x to exist" where "x" is a possible nature or 'type' – what he calls a claim of specific existence, as in 'there are extra-terrestrial intelligences' – is the affirmation "that a particular concept is instantiated".[25] But what does "instantiated" mean? It means that one or more subjects defined by the nature exist, for existence is not plausibly treated merely as a quantitative issue. I.e., to say of some kind of thing that "there is one" is to affirm not only number, but the real subject of number; and if we consider not number but transcendental unity, then even more clearly is it the case that this presupposes being.

g) The idea of specific existence is not the idea of "nonindividual" existence but rather a confused, imperfect signification of the actual existence of things of a certain nature. A mystagogy of "instantiation" cannot cloak the datum that the existence of a kind, type, or nature, is nothing other than a general reference to the existence of one or more actually existing individuals. Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as "specific existence" among physical things: because *species* exist only in the mind, and only then because of the immaterial, intentional mode of being that essence enjoys in the mind. Rather individuals with natures exist, as does likewise the intellectual cognition of these natures with the consequent immaterial and intentional mode of being of the nature cognized. Among physical things *species* are not *subjects of being*. The very idea of "specific existence" is, then, misleading.

When we ask of some "kind" – that is, of some real or possible *essence* – whether it is, and answer in the affirmative, we are implicitly affirming one or more subjects of being distinct from the essence, for the essence *is not* the subject of being and indeed *cannot*

[25] See *AoB*, p. 189.

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be the subject of being in a physical thing. It is Socrates, not humanity, that exists, although it is true that that whereby Socrates is human is humanity. If we do not know the particular actually existing things that possess the nature in question, but only indirectly know that there are some (one or more), *then we are merely signifying unknown actually existing things in a confused and general way*. But we are not entitled to reify this confused and general way of signifying unknown things possessed of a nature, as if there is a confused and general existence. There is only a less perfect and more confused manner of signifying individual existence. The element of "fusing together" in a certain order, here, may reach to analogical cognition, which is not that of a nominalistic heap, and is well-expressed by Yves Simon in the following words:

> But in analogy, abstraction uses ways that are not its own, for the obvious reason that the differentiating features exist in the common ground as actually as the common features. These differentiating features cannot be expressed except by assertion and negation of the common ground, and thus order is brought into logical existence, for assertion comes before negation and pure assertion comes before any complex in which negation plays a part. Analogical abstraction proceeds by "fusing together" the members of a set. But such "fusing together" involves assertions and negations that define priorities and posteriorities: if these assertions and negations were ignored, there would no longer be "confusion": rather, there would be substitution of the ways of abstraction for ways that abstraction cannot recognize as its own, and a fallacious imposition of univocity upon subjects [that] exclude all unity except that of analogy.[26]

But, it might be said, this notion of specific existence pertains to unknown beings *within a species*, whereas analogy pertains only among species. To the contrary, although there is univocation in the predication of *essence* within a species, the proper subject of being is a subsistent which in physical reality is a singular, and these material individual subsistents of the same nature each enjoy an existence proportioned to them not simply *qua* essence, but *qua* their singularity. Hence, it appears that in this sense *esse* is analogous even *within a species*. When we say that blade of grass A exists in exactly the same way that does blade of grass B, this is true as regards essence, but not true *simpliciter*, because, *simpliciter*, blade of grass A *is not* blade of grass B nor vice versa, and *esse* is proportioned to each individually diverse subject which is.

Yet even should the view that esse is analogous within a species be false, it remains true that the notion of "specific essence" is comparable to analogous knowledge in that it refers confusedly and imperfectly to

[26] Yves Simon, *Philosopher at Work*, p. 156. Whereas today it is widely thought that metaphysics as *scientia* requires no more than a logic kit, a few afternoons reading Simon should dispel any such notion, which is one of the better things there are to say about anyone.

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actually existing individuals (for to say "there are instantiations of X" is to say that the different subjects in which X is to be found exist, while yet – given that one does not expressly cognize these actually existing individuals – they are only confusedly, imperfectly, and generally signified).

Even should we think of "specific existence" as merely a quantitatively indeterminate reference to individual existence, this still counts as an imperfect and general cognition of individual existence. Indeed, the necessary and sufficient truth condition of "There are some Monarch butterflies" is to be found in one or more individually existing Monarch butterflies. A proposition that affirms that there are one or more individually existing Monarch butterflies can hardly pass itself off as not affirming individual existence. In this last case, clearly, we might take ourselves to be dealing merely with a more remote, imperfect, and general knowledge of individual existence[27] – whereas, with analogy, while the knowledge is imperfect and general it also "fuses together" diverse elements in an ordered relation to a common ground on the basis of affirmations and negations.[28] *But clearly in either case the insistence upon "specific existence" as not being a real predicate is an insistence upon univocality to the point of the loss of real contact with ontological evidence*. I.e., insofar as we prefer to deny the confused and general signification of individual existence rather than to admit that there is genuine knowledge which ineluctably involves an element of unclarity, the clear and distinct ideas of Descartes ride again.

[27] One can imagine someone saying that "I only checked the encyclopedia, which says that there are Monarch Butterflies – but I know nothing about any particular butterfly and its existence." But the answer to this is that one may not know to which particular butterfly one's knowledge pertains, but the proposition that "there are monarch butterflies" is true if and only if particular monarch butterflies do exist. If the chain of inference does not end in some real reference to individually existing monarch butterflies, howsoever vague, indeterminate, confused and general the reference may be, then we have no reason to hold it true that "there are monarch butterflies". Of course, this might be said to be merely a necessary condition. But it is also sufficient: if we know, at whatever degree of remotion and with whatever confusion and indeterminacy, that an individual Monarch butterfly exists, then we know that "There are monarch butterflies" insofar as this latter phrase means that one or more than one individuals ("some") exist. *What does the phrase "some individuals exist" signify other than a quantitatively indeterminate reference to individual existences*? And what can count as evidence for it, other than evidence of individual existences? In the ontological order, there is nothing else for "the existence of monarch butterflies" to be about than individuals: species are not, in physical being, subjects of being. It follows that what the proposition "there are monarch butterflies" is about, is individual monarch butterflies. Someone might say, "but the proposition is verified if only one exists, whereas the proposition is in the plural". Yet the proposition is in the plural because it refers to individual existences indeterminately, generally, and confusedly, such that one or more individually existing butterflies will ratify it. The distinction of specific and individual existence is *quo ad nos – we can consider individual existence indeterminately, but this does not mean that there is indeterminate existence*.

[28] As beings are "fused together" in relation to the common ground of being on the basis of affirmations and negations in the analogy of proper proportionality.

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The lack of any genuine consideration of the doctrine of the analogy of being in Kenny's book was earlier noted. Now we are in a position to see why: the mathematician's penchant for logical univocity is being driven to the very point of obscuring knowledge of the real, lest one admit that there is a logically less perfect knowledge of the real which though it does not fit the mathematician's *habitus*, nonetheless offers *intellective contactus with being*.

There is a name for this preference for univocity at the cost of losing insight into the real: unabashed and imperial reductionism. Its status is not improved by topical references to what those who are ignorant either of analogically abstractive knowledge[29/30] or of merely general reference to individual existence within a species think of it. I.e., if "modern" or "contemporary" thinkers "customarily" suppose things which are not the case, then other thinkers – perhaps fated to be construed as non-contemporary even whilst they live – will need offer criticism, even at the risk of falling out of the official Oxfordian listing of bona fide contemporaries.

h) Hence, the invocation of the mantra of mantras, "to be is to be the value of a bound variable" (i.e., there is an X such that X is Z), and Kenny's lamentation that the claim that God is pure unbounded *esse* is merely an "ill-formed formula"[31] (i.e., "God is Pure *Esse*" as merely "for some X, X . . . " which is "a quantifier with a bound variable attached to no predicate"[32]), are found to hinge more generally on an erroneous understanding of the real predication of existence. For implicit in the mantra is the claim that "specific" existence is a second order property of concepts: For deer to exist is for there to be one or more Xs where X is a deer – i.e., for there to be deer putatively is not about individual existence but about "instantiation" and "specific existence".

But the "to be" of specific existence is only a confused and imperfect reference to actually existing things of a certain nature – it confusedly signifies one or more individual existences. And a confused and imperfect reference to actually existing things is not merely a second-intentional property of a concept, but rather an imperfectly and confusedly known first-intentional property of things.

We do not naturally and directly know either the essence or existence of God. But we do know the truth of the proposition that there is such a reality that its essence comprehends the entire perfection of *esse* such

[29] Perhaps there is an undiscovered treatise of Frege's on the analogy of being languishing in obscurity somewhere: but, on the evidence, we have no particular reason to suppose that he understood the doctrine of the *analogia entis* or the limits of univocal accounts with respect to the subject matter of metaphysics.

[30] For St. Thomas, even the judgment of *separatio* at the font of the discovery of being as subject matter for a distinct science is in the most general sense a type of abstraction, although it occurs through judgment rather than through apprehension.

[31] *AoB*, p. 44.

[32] *AoB*, p. 44.

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that no addition is possible. The failure in Kenny's treatment pertains to the natural signification of the terms "essence" and "existence" which found the rational motion of inference to God, and not in any properly logical issue. I.e., it is implicitly Kenny's view that *esse* is not the most formal perfection but, as has been seen above, that it is "thin". Thus when it is affirmed that *esse* is found in its infinite perfection in God, this is for Kenny a vacuous proposition.[33] But this is only because he fails to see that *esse* is proportioned to, and correlated with, the essence of each thing that is. Just as form is universal to substances while not being "thin" so *esse* as belonging to all that is, but as *most formal in the ontological sense*, is universal but not "thin": an analogous perfection. As Thomas argues,[34] a small mistake in the beginning is a large one in the end. Inasmuch as Kenny fails to fathom being as intrinsically analogous from the start, the doctrine of God whose articulation it permits must remain to him *terra incognita*.

C. The Intellectus Essentiae Argument in *De ente et essentia*

While regrettable, Kenny's loss of the natural foundations of the doctrine of the real distinction of essence and existence in his treatment of the *intellectus essentia* (or knowledge of essence) argument in *De ente et essentia* is eminently comprehensible. Most contemporary accounts of this argument, whether they be analytic or more historical minded, alike tend to focus excessively on the logical rather than the ontological character of the discourse. In this respect, Kenny's work is actually superior to that of others for whom, despite the clear-cut first-intentional language of the argument, the whole argument regards only *conceptual* rather than *real* distinction of essence and *esse*. Kenny rightly resists this reading.[35] Yet, no less than most other contemporaries, he is put on the wrong scent by St. Thomas's famed illustration of the phoenix.

[33] Hence, *AoB*, p. 112: "if a sentence containing a predicate after 'is' indicates the subject to be in a certain way, then a sentence containing 'is' with no addition indicates the subject to be in no way. Once again, the consideration of pure *esse* seems to lead us to a void." But the signification of *esse* and essence are already incorrect for Kenny at the beginning. His sentence should have read: "if a sentence containing a predicate after 'is' indicates the subject to possess the perfection of *esse* only within certain essential limits, then a sentence containing 'is' with no addition indicates the subject to possess the perfection of *esse* with no essential limits whatsoever." But this would require a more realistic contact with being than the univocal Fregean schema will permit.

[34] One recollects *De ente et essentia* [Leonine ed.], the first line of the prologue "...parvus error in principio magnus est in fine secundum Philosophum..." – "...a small error in the beginning becomes vast in the end, according to the Philosopher..."

[35] *AoB*, p. 36: "Even among those who regard the real distinction between essence and existence as a fundamental thesis of St. Thomas, there are some who deny that it is meant to be proved by the phoenix argument." But, he notes on the same page, "It seems clear that Aquinas' phoenix argument establishes something other than a conceptual distinction."

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In the famed passage, which among other things deploys the Phoenix illustration, and is known as the *intellectus essentiae* argument – an argument proceeding from the knowledge of essence – Thomas writes:

> For whatever is not in the concept of an essence or quiddity comes to it from outside and makes a composition with the essence, because no essence is able to be understood without its parts. But every essence or quiddity can be understood without knowing anything about its being: I can understand, for instance, what a man or a phoenix is and still not know whether it has being in actual nature. Therefore it is clear that being is other than essence or quiddity. Unless perhaps there is something whose quiddity is its very being, and this is not possible unless the thing be one and primary . . . [36]

It is true that the phoenix example is distracting, inasmuch as essence as referring to a possible that God might create is (in the case where no such thing is found in actual nature) distinct from essence as this last refers to a real principle of being in this given created order. But, as will be shown, the character of the argument may be sustained quite apart from this element.

It is worth noting that there is some reason for Thomas to advert to the phoenix example. Because without *esse* no essence will be, and inasmuch as anything that God may possibly cause – which is to say, anything which is not intrinsically contradictory or contrary to divine wisdom – is such that God knows what its essential principle *would be*, there is some sense in speaking of substances that God could create and of their essences as possibles in relation to the divine power. Clearly we do not say that prior to creation that which is created is *impossible* either in its singularity or in its essential nature.[37]

The phoenix example highlights this truth that quiddity is not simply of itself actual, as it includes existence neither as an essential note of an essence nor as one of the formal parts of the essence, nor as identical with essence. I.e., read in the way suggested above, one can make some

[36] Passages from *De ente et essentia* are from the Leonine Edition of St. Thomas's works, vol. 43 *Sancti Thomae De Aquino Opera Omnia* 376–377 (Rome 1976): "Quicquid enim non est de intellectu essentie uel quiditatis, hoc est adueniens extra et faciens compositionem cum essentia, quia nulla esentia sine hiis que sunt partes essentie intelligi potest. Omnis autem essentia uel quiditas potest intelligi sine hoc quod aliquid intelligatur de esse suo: possum enim intelligere quid est homo uel fenix et tamen ignorare an esse habeat in rerum natura; ergo patet quod esse est aliud ab essentia uel quiditate. Nisi forte sit aliqua res cuius quiditas sit ipsum suum esse, et hec res non potest esse nisi una et prima . . . "

[37] If we view the divine power precisively, that is: but this notion is seriously limited when the divine wisdom comes into play, such that we do not know whether there be some reason why a thing possible in the sense of its lying within the divine power is not possible in a wider sense insofar as something within God's power is contrary to God's wisdom. This is a serious limitation of "possible worlds" thinking insofar as it must be admitted that our natural insight about the divine wisdom (understood as meaning: the extension of the propositions we may validly form that pertain to it, since we do not know God directly) is slight.

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sense of the illustration of the phoenix as indicating what one might call a "quidditative possibility" in relation to the divine power.[38]

Nonetheless, clearly essence as a real principle of being in the actually existing universe is a better metaphysical and epistemic starting point for us than is an imaginary being. For while God can create anything that is not intrinsically contradictory, *we only know what God causes or even might cause in relation either to real evidence of actual nature or to supernatural revelation*. This is to say that even our knowledge of the possible presupposes prior contact with actual being, and that we abstract essences from actually existing things. Hence what is naturally possible on the supposition of a given order of nature is distinct from what is absolutely possible to the power of God, and our reasoning regarding the real must proceed on the basis of the first. I.e., our reasoning most fruitfully begins with what is naturally possible on the supposition of the given order of nature: on the basis of essence as a real principle of actual being, or actualized essence. For we do not know all the ways in which God is imitable, do not know all that is possible to God, and know whatever we do know in relation to the order of being and nature actually caused by God. This is a proposition clear from Thomas's general insistence on the priority of *act*, and also from the structure of *De ente et essentia* itself (wherein essence is considered as derivative of that being which is divided by the ten categories[39]).

For these reasons, the abstraction of essence from actual being must take methodological precedence over essence identified as a possible in relation to God, although the second is indeed implied and required by the first. To bear Thomas's meaning, the Phoenix example presupposes the prior case of abstractive cognition of essence derived from real being in the actual created order established by God along with the complementary judgment that essence is a potential principle in relation to supervening existential act: which is perhaps why it is the second rather than the first illustration provided by St. Thomas.

Nothing in the consideration of the phoenix example obviates the point that the *intellectus essentiae* argument commences with the prior consideration of one physical or material essence found in actual nature apart from the mind – man – followed by consideration of one material essence considered as a possible in relation to divine power – the phoenix. *Why is it significant that these are material essences*? The

[38] Kenny seems to find the idea of individual "possibilities" in relation to God to be fantastic. I cannot make sense of this proposition, since clearly in relation to the divine power and antecedent to the existence in actual nature of a thing, there is only the possibility that such a nature may be in relation to God. And clearly Kenny cannot intend to claim about actual natures prior to creation that these are *impossible* – for the inference from actuality to possibility is a valid inference.

[39] Leonine *De ente et essentia*, Chapter One, ¶ 3: "Et quia, ut dictum est, ens hoc modo dictum diuiditur per decem genera, oportet ut essentia significet aliquid commune omnibus naturis per quas diuersa entia in diuersis generibus et speciebus collocantur, sicut humanitas est essentia hominis, et sic de aliis."

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reason is that the very subject matter of chapter four of *De ente et essentia* concerns separate substances or subsistent immaterial forms. But throughout his life St. Thomas held that we have no quidditative knowledge of separate substances. It follows that the direct and originative contact we have with essence and existence, and with potency and act more generally, must derive from sensible being. We cannot get in the conclusion what is not implicitly in the premises from the start, and the premises derive from the knowledge of material quiddity. Accordingly, if essence and existence – and, for that matter, potency and act more generally – cannot be known as really distinct in the sensible beings proportionate to our knowing powers, then there will be no hope of distinguishing them in separate substances whose quiddities are unknown to us. The argument in *De ente et essentia* that *if* there were a being in whom essence and *esse* were identical there could *only* be one, because the hypothesis excludes potency and all the real bases of plurifiability include potency, will later enable Thomas to universalize the real distinction of essence and existence. But this argument requires that essence and existence already be known as principles of being that are really distinct in advance, lest they be merely chimerical terms applicable to nothing.

As already seen, Kenny (in my view, correctly) judges that Thomas intends the *intellectus essentiae* argument to yield a real rather than conceptual distinction. That is, the language here is first-intentional language – his conclusion is that "being is other than essence or quiddity" and not simply that "being is other than the concept of essence or quiddity" although this too is true. Yet Kenny proceeds to write:

> Note however that just, as *'esse'* here unproblematically means existence, so 'essence' here has a simple and unproblematic meaning. 'The essence of F' here means simply 'The meaning of the word "F"'. Later in his life, St. Thomas will make a sharp distinction between the meaning of F (which I know by knowing language) and the essence of F (which takes scientific study to ascertain). When he says, however, that I understand the essence of phoenix, he can only mean that I know what the word 'phoenix' means: he cannot mean that I have made a scientific study of phoenixes, as there aren't any around for me to study.[40]

This is both partially true and seriously misleading. The problem with Kenny's remarks, is that it ignores a most fundamental issue in play – one which appears elsewhere in Thomas's writing quite conspicuously, and which is actually implicit in the teaching of *De ente et essentia* regarding our knowledge of the "parts" of essence. Later, in the *Summa theologiae* and elsewhere, he will define the *proper object of the human intellect* as *quiddity found in corporeal matter*, arguing that every faculty is *per se* directed to a proper object such that about its proper object properly speaking a faculty cannot fail for as long as it exists (although it may fall into error regarding accidental or

[40] *AoB*, p. 35.

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circumstantial surroundings of its proper object – the origin of an entire species of bar jokes).[41]

To say that quiddity as found in corporeal matter is the proper object of the human intellect is not to say that we enjoy a quasi-Cartesian all-in-one glimpse of essences which gives us their specific differences – for as noted Thomas held that regarding physical things in general we do not properly cognize their specific differences. What, then, is the sense of this teaching that the proper object of the human intellect is material quiddity? Clearly it is that there is a *generic adequation* of the intellect to material essence, such that (as it is put in the passage quoted above from *De ente)* we know the *generic parts* of material essence: form and matter. This is a decisively important proposition, for insofar as X is said to be the proper object of a faculty, there must exist a most formal and generic *adequation* of the intellect to this object, such that we know what it means to say that material quiddity is the proper object of the intellect. Elsewise Thomas is saying that "we-know-not-what" is the proper object of the intellect, which is hardly plausible.

St. Thomas writes (in Sth.I.84.7.resp.) that "the proper object of the human intellect, which is united to a body, is a quiddity or nature existing in corporeal matter; and through such natures of visible things it rises to a certain knowledge of things invisible."[42] The latter point is as conspicuous as the former – we rise to a certain knowledge of separate substances – the *very subject matter* of the fourth chapter of *De ente et essentia* in which the *intellectus essentiae* argument appears – from *the knowledge of material quiddity*.

In q. 85, article 6 of the *prima pars* of the *Summa theologiae* (in Sth.I.85.6.resp.) Thomas argues that:

> ... every faculty, as such, is "per se" directed to its proper object; and things of this kind are always the same. Hence, as long as the faculty exists, its judgment concerning its own proper object does not fail. – But the proper object of the intellect is the 'quiddity' of a thing; and hence, properly speaking, the intellect is not at fault concerning this quiddity; whereas it may go astray as regards the surroundings of the thing in its essence or quiddity, in referring one thing to another, as regards composition or division, or also in the process of reasoning.[43]

[41] See, e.g., *Summa theologiae.I.85.6.res p.*: "Intellectus autem humani, qui est coniunctus corpori, proprium obiectum est quidditas sive natura in materia corporali existens; et per huiusmodi naturas visibilium rerum etiam in invisibilium rerum aliqualem cognitionem ascendit."

[42] Ottawa ed. of the *Summa theologiae*, 1953; 84.7.resp.: "Intellectus autem humani, qui est coniunctus corpori, proprium obiectum est quidditas sive natura in materia corporali existens; et per huiusmodi naturas visibilium rerum etiam in invisibilium rerum aliqualem cognitionem ascendit"

[43] Ottawa Sth.I.85.6.resp.: "Quia ad proprium obiectum unaquaeque potentia per se ordinatur, secundum quod ipsa. Quae autem sunt huiusmodi, semper eodem modo se habent. Inde manente potentia, non deficit eius iudicium circa proprium obiectum – Obiectum autem proprium intellectus est quidditas rei. Unde circa quidditatem rei, per se loquendo, intellectus non fallitur. Sed circa ea quae circumstant rei essentiam vel quidditatem, intellectus potest falli, dum unum ordinat ad aliud, vel componendo vel dividendo vel etiam ratiocinando."

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He goes on to write in his response to the first objection that "in the absolute consideration of the quiddity of a thing, and of those things which are known thereby, the intellect is never deceived."[44] But clearly if existence were part of material essence, and yet when we knew material essence we did not know existence, we would be deceived. It follows that existence is really distinct from material essence.

It clearly does not alter or distort the text to hold that the knowledge of the parts of essence in physical things requisite to the *intellectus essentiae* argument in *De ente et essentia* is generically adequated and definitive of material quiddity – that selfsame quiddity found in corporeal matter which is the proper object of the intellect about which the intellect cannot fail.[45]

[44] See also Leonine *Summa contra gentiles* IIIb.108: "Nulla virtus cognoscitiva circa proprium obiectum decipitur, sed solum circa extraneum: visus enim non decipitur in iudicio colorum; sed, dum homo per visum iudicat de sapore vel de specie rei, in hoc deceptio accidit. Proprium autem obiectum intellectus est quidditas rei. In cognitione igitur intellectus deceptio accidere non potest, si puras rerum quidditates apprehendat, sed omnis deceptio intellectus accidere videtur ex hoc quod apprehendit formas rerum permixtas phantasmatibus, ut in nobis accidit." – "No cognitive faculty is deceived about its proper object, but only about one that is outside its purview: thus the sight is not deceived in its judgement about colours; whereas deception may occur if a man judge by sight of taste, or of the species of a thing. Now, the proper object of the intellect is the quiddity of a thing. Consequently there can be no deception in the knowledge of the intellect, if it were to apprehend the mere quiddities of things, and all deception of the intellect would seem to occur through its apprehending forms mingled with phantasms, as is the case with us." The whole of this article continues to the same effect, making the point that falsity enters into our judgment through composition and division but only by accident pertains to our apprehension of quiddity – "In operatione autem intellectus qua apprehendit *quod quid est*, non accidit falsum nisi per accidens, secundum quod in hac etiam operatione permiscetur aliquid de operatione intellectus componentis et dividentis."See also *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate* 1.1.12, Leonine (vol I fasc. 2): "Quiditas autem rei est proprium obiectum intellectus: unde sicut sensus sensibilium proprium semper verus est ita et intellectus in cognoscendo quod quid est, ut dicitur in III De anima. Sed tamen per accidens potest ibi falsitas accidere, in quantum videlicet intellectus falso componit et dividit, quod dupliciter contingit, vel in quantum diffinitionem unius attribuit alteri, ut si animal rationale mortale conciperet quasi diffinitionem asini, vel in quantum coniungit partes diffinitionis ad invicem quae coniungi non possunt, ut si conciperet quasi diffinitionem asini animal irrationale immortale: haec enim est falsa 'aliquod animal irrationale est immortale'." – "The proper object of the intellect, however, is the quiddity of a thing. Hence, just as the sensing of proper sensibles is always true, so the intellect is always true in knowing what a thing is, as is said in III On the Soul. By accident, however, falsity can occur in this knowing of quiddities, if the intellect falsely joins and separates. This happens in two ways: when it attributes the definition of one thing to another, as would happen were it to conceive that 'mortal rational animal" were the definition of an ass; or when it joins together parts of definitions that cannot be joined, as would happen were it to conceive that 'irrational, immortal animal' were the definition of an ass."

[45] Of course, the claim is not that everyone who makes use of the intellect immediately hatches a hylemorphic theory or will even assent to the same. Rather the claim is that the primordial evidence of physical substances available to and inerrantly known by all includes and entails the generic parts of material essence, providing the firmest possible evidentiary basis for the reasoning whereby form and matter are distinguishable within physical things. I.e., there is no doubt that for St. Thomas, the knowledge of the generic parts of material quiddity is derivative from, and consequent on, serious intellectual contemplation of the primordial evidence of physical things, an evidence which is trustworthy because it flows from the *conformitatem intellectus ad rei* (Sth.I.16.2.resp.: "Et propter hoc per conformitatem intellectus et rei veritas definitur." Hence the argument is as firmly founded as is rationally possible, ensuing from truths directly consequent upon the generically adequated knowledge of material essence.

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Indeed, the argument gains in force insofar as it is read in this manner. To indulge the liberty of quoting a work in which I pursue the generic *adequatio* of intellect to material quiddity more fully:

> . . . The first man ever to see a whale in all likelihood did not know what it was. I once heard it said that Aristotle had three rather than two questions: not only "is it?" and "what is it?" but "what the hell is it?" Probably the first person to see it thought that the whale was a big fish. That isn't true. Moreover, with Thomas we may doubt that even now we know what the essential difference of the whale is. But we do know that there is a nature to be known, and we know that it is a material nature. We know that the whale is not merely an accident of the sea, nor an angel, nor God. While this is embarrassingly little to know about whales, it is a great deal to know about material quiddity – and the condition of possibility for our knowing this is the general adequation of the human mind to essence or quiddity in material things. The tripartite variant of the Aristotelian questions is more than merely facetious. The second question reflects the reality of the mind's general adequation to material essence poised at the beginning of its trajectory of discovery regarding some particular essence; while the third reflects the truth that this adequation – far from being a comprehensive immediate intuition of all the notes of any particular essence – is the condition not only for partial success but for intermittent and more or less constant frustration and failure as well. If the proper object of the human intellect is quiddity in corporeal matter, this generic *adequatio* is both the precondition for particular success and for the intelligibility of failure.[46]

But clearly existence is not the form of any finite physical nature; nor is it the matter (which is a potential principle, whereas *esse* is the actuality of every form or nature, as Thomas constantly asserts[47]). Further, in this light it becomes clear that the argument is not based merely upon the "meaning of a word," and that it is based upon inerrant evidence available to all – the evidence of the proper object of the intellect which founds certain judgment with respect to the "parts" of material quiddity. While this is not to say that everyone will develop hylemorphic theory or even suppose it to be true, it is to say that the inceptive constituents of this theory are first presented to the intellect in its perception of material quiddity as such, awaiting only further development from the principles so vouchsafed (i.e., the

[46] Steven A. Long, "On the Natural Knowledge of the Real Distinction of Essence and Existence," *Nova et Vetera*, Spring 2003, I, I, pp. 75–108; the quotation is from pp. 85–86.

[47] Not least in *De ente essentia*, Chapter 4, ¶7: "Omne autem quod recipit aliquid ab alio est in potentia respectu illius, et hoc quod receptum est in eo est actus eius; ergo oportet quod ipsa quiditas uel forma que est intelligentia sit in potentia respectu esse quod a Deo recipit, et illud esse receptum est per modum actus" – "But everything that receives something from another is potential with regard to what it receives, and what is received in it is its act; therefore the quiddity or form which is the intelligence is in potency with respect to that *esse* which it receives from God, and that *esse* is received as its act."

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"parts" of material essence) to the conclusions about these parts (e.g., that matter cannot be without form, etc.). Hence the argument could not be founded on more certain evidence.

Yet, if *esse* is neither form nor matter, could it not be a hidden or unknown essential attribute or *note* of the essence? As has been mentioned, St. Thomas makes clear that he does not think we can attain knowledge of the specific differences of the essences of natural things.[48] This might be taken as a fatal flaw in the argument. For if by "parts of essence" were meant the "definitory notes of the essence" – as "rational" and "animal" are definitory notes of the essence "man" – then, since St. Thomas himself does not think (as witness his comments in the fifth chapter[49]) that in *this sense* we know the parts of the essences of most physical things, it might seem that existence could be an occult note of the essence escaping our knowledge.

As an exegetic point, clearly Thomas cannot have intended in the immediately preceding chapter to claim that we possess sufficient knowledge of the "parts" of essence to conclude to a distinction of existence and essence in physical things, and *then* continued to argue *in the very next chapter* that *we do not know the parts of most physical things* taken in *exactly that meaning*. But this does not sufficiently answer the objection. It is an objection Thomas does not take up, and it is not difficult to see why – for it is rendered nonsensical by the very understanding of form and matter in sensible beings. But it may be taken up and easily dispatched.

Were *esse* an occult, hidden definitory attribute or note of essence in physical things, then the selfsame thing would simultaneously contain an essential principle of potency (i.e., matter) whereby it could be transformed and *cease to be the kind of thing it is* while also possessing an essential principle whereby it must necessarily exist without essential transmutation (i.e., *esse* understood as an attribute of the essence): and this is to posit *an internally self-contradictory essence*. This is quite different from a thing including the potency of matter to cease to be the kind of thing it is while nonetheless being preserved through the supervening agency of an *extrinsic* principle – as, say, God might indefinitely preserve a peach from corrupting. Rather, it is to posit an essence that is as internally self-contradictory as the idea of a square circle, and which is intrinsically impossible. Of course were *esse* an essential note this would also have the curious effect of rendering all the other definitory notes of the essence to be

[48] Leonine ed., Chapter 5, §5: "In rebus enim sensibilibus etiam ipse differentie essentiales ignote sunt; unde significantur per differentias accidentales que ex essentialibus oriuntur, sicut causa significatur per suum effectum: sicut bipes ponitur differentia hominis."

[49] Chapter 5, ¶5 of *De ente et essentia*.

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formally non-existent: yet another reason why *existence* cannot be said to be a hidden or occult definitory note of essence.

It follows then that we do, indeed, possess the evidence of real distinction of essence and existence in finite things requisite for the further stages of the argument in the fourth chapter of *De ente et essentia*, which conclude sequentially that if there were a being in which essence and existence is one there could only be one, and that therefore *a fortiori* in all other beings essence and existence are distinct. For the only real evidence of plurification in being indicates that this requires potency, such that it could not be predicated of a hypothetic being whose essence measures not a limited degree of the perfection of actual existence but rather is identical with the full perfection of actual existence insusceptible of any addition.[50] It is then only a short step to the existential proof for God, which proceeds from the real distinction of essence and existence throughout finite being.

If this general approach to the *intellectus essentiae* argument is correct, then to be fixated on the illustration of the phoenix as though the primary instance of our contact with essence is not abstractive from actual physical things, is to misconstrue the nature of the *intellectus essentiae* argument, and for that matter also to miss the only point of the phoenix example itself.

Conclusion

I have focused my remarks on general impediments to the reading of St. Thomas's metaphysical doctrine, and in particular on misreadings of the *intellectus essentiae* argument for real distinction of essence and existence in physical things. It is the gravamen of my argument that Dr. Kenny's treatment does not sufficiently recognize either the natural foundations of the *intellectus essentiae* argument or of St Thomas's metaphysics generally, owing to a variety of erroneous notions, some of Fregean provenance, and others reminiscent of Suarez. If the argument is correct, then it will be no fault of Dr Kenny that he cannot make the mountain come to Mohammed, for no approach so anti-realist in its presuppositions can permit the sun of metaphysical *scientia* to shine through its filigreed latticework. For

[50] A proposition that Dr. Kenny should have spent some time with, in a work on the metaphysics of Aquinas is: *act is not self-limiting*. The thing God ordains to be, is a thing essentially limited by the potency of essence with which it is actuated in creation – esse is, as it were, both the ultimate perfection intended by the Creator in intending that this thing *be*, while it is also the first perfection of the thing (because without *esse* there cannot be found real essential limitation).

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all the reasons suggested above, there is reason to doubt that any cognate approach determined by logicist premises or misreadings of the natural character of act and potency will ever fathom either the nature of St. Thomas's metaphysics of *esse* or the intelligible mystery of being.

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