

THE DISTINCTION OF SUBSISTENCE AND NATURE IN ST.
THOMAS: SUMMA THEOLOGIAE, I, 3, 3 and III, 2, 2.

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INTRODUCTION

The understanding of being, of essence and of the act of existence is so fundamental to any metaphysical study that we cannot honestly say that we understand the science if we overlook it in any consideration of that science. For this reason, the greater part of this paper is devoted to the meaning of being (i.e. ens), of essence and of the act of existence, (i.e. esse), and to their distinction in all contingent beings. Only after seeing the distinction can we hope to attack, even in a cursory manner, the distinction of subsistence and nature as it is treated in the final two sections of this paper.

It is difficult to obtain St. Thomas's meaning for the word esse when it is translated as "existence", or worse still, when translated as "being". Because the word "existence", as Hilary Carpenter in his article, "A note on the fundamental concept of Thomism" says; is commonly taken to mean "...the ultimate common perfection added to all the other proper perfections of the infinitely varied world of reality." According to St. Thomas's identification of esse with perfection, he indicates that both signify actuality. For how can there be a perfection which is not in act? Granting that a perfection is existence, then it is a mode of esse which can be infinitely varied. This is because the variation arises from the diverse grades of actual perfection in every being. Father Carpenter further says that the esse of each actual thing is "...the sum of its proper actual perfections, whether those perfections be generic, specific or individual." Consequently, the esse of every individual is different from that of every other one.

For the above reasons then, the Latin word esse shall be used throughout instead of translating it into the English word "existence", "act of

existence" or the clumsy term "beingness"; all of which would be better terms than just to translate it as "being", which leads to confusion.

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Section I

We attribute the name of being to the composite of essence and esse, i.e. that which has existence, that which is outside of its cause and not nothing. However a being (ens per se) can be considered in two ways: either as it is divided into the ten predicaments; i.e. the ten ultimate genera of being, or as it signifies the truth of a proposition; i.e. the mode or way that either an affirmative or negative proposition is made, regardless of whether it adds anything to reality or not. E.g. Blindness is in the eye. In this proposition, an actual negation of a positive perfection of the eye is stated.¹

Now, since privations do not have essences, (if they did have, their essences would be "not to be" and there would exist the impossible situation of a being whose essence it would be "not to exist".) Essence can not properly be said of a privation, for it can only properly be said of a being in the first mode; i.e. as signifying primarily the substance of a thing. Just as being is divided into the ten predicaments. Now since the ten predicaments are the only way in which real extra-mental being exists, and all other genera and species are derived from these ten, the essence of being must in some way be common to all. And it is. For the essence, the capacity for existence, that by which a thing is constituted in the proper genus, that by which a thing is what it is, is signified by the definition of the being in question.

The above demands qualification: In saying that there can only be a real being in nature according to the predicaments, several things should be noted. The first of these is; being is not a genus. For a thing is determined in a genus by opposition to something else. For every genus

has differences which are outside the essence of that genus. However, outside of being, there is only non-being which cannot be a difference, for it is nothing. And furthermore, a thing is designated in a genus when its act of existence and its quiddity differ. But being (ens) is that which has existence. E.G. Man and horse are both in the genus animal; they both have existence but their essence or quiddity differ.²

The second qualification is as follows. The ten predicaments are divided in a twofold manner; the act of existence in itself (esse in se) and the act of existence in another (esse in alio). Hence there is no other alternative for a mode of real existence than that of substance, whose essence is to be in itself and not in another, and that of an accident, whose essence is to adhere in another.

The definition signifies what a thing is, and the essence is that by which it is, as Aristotle gives the definition. Or it is also called, "the whatness" or quiddity of the being.³ The essence is also called the form of a thing, i.e. insofar as the perfection of something is signified through the form.

Moreover, the word nature, when taken in the first of the four ways in which Boetius explains it in De Duobus Naturis (chapter one) is used to signify the essence of thing according to its proper act. This is because there is nothing which exists without its proper act. So by designating the proper act, the nature of that being is indicated.⁴

Now that being, the essence of which is to exist in itself and not in another is substance. Essence is primarily and properly said of a substance and only secondarily and secundum quid said of accidents because they have their existence only in or with substance or in another accident which in turn is dependent upon a substance.

Just as in man we distinguish this man, or the "whatness" of this

particular man from the "whatness" of mankind, the universal. Thus it can be seen that essence can be considered either as part of the individual or as the whole individual. For the quiddity of humanity, animality and rationality when considered of this man signifies only a part of him; that which makes him to be a man. It is that by which he is designated in the species of man but it does not tell why he is this man. But if the essence of this man John is to be considered, it must be taken as the whole, i.e. all that by which this man is John, which includes that form by which he acts, that nature by which he does these particular acts, not that nature by which he does the acts of man, but rather these acts of this man.

For the above reasons, it can be seen that St. Thomas is not contradicting himself when in De Ente (c. 3) he says that the essence can be predicated of Socrates and then at another time he says that it cannot. When he says that a certain essence is Socrates, he is taking it as the whole. But when he says the essence of Socrates is not Socrates, he is taking essence as part, that by which Socrates is in the species of man.

The essence of a thing is only rationally distinguished from the nature of that being. The essence, as has been said, is "that by which a thing is what it is or is constituted in a species". It is an intrinsic principle of being whereas nature is a "radical intrinsic principle of operating." But everything acts according to its proper mode of existence. So therefore the nature and the essence of a thing are really the same but only rationally distinct. For a thing can act only insofar as it has existence or esse. And that particular mode of existence from which it acts or operates is determined by the essence.

In order to clearly understand essence, it is most helpful to consider it as a potency, which it really is. For it is the potency or capacity for receiving esse. This can be seen by considering the modes of esse descend-

ing from the most perfect existence of God Who is existing from Himself and of Whom the act of existing (esse) is properly said alone. For He is Esse per se subsistens.

Skipping the first descent to pure spirits, where existence is not limited by matter but nevertheless limited by the nature, we shall look at man's mode of existence, where the act of existence is limited by having been received into matter so disposed to receive a particular kind of esse. I.e., esse limited by the matter which it informs. So also with those things lower than man which receive esse according to the capacity of their essence to receive it. The degree of esse which is received is limited by that capacity. Since it is thus limited, there must be a distinct principle of limitation because it certainly cannot be the cause of its own limitation and also be the object of the limitation.

Considering esse again as actuality which in turn is limited by potency, or the capacity of the recipient for actualization, then esse is limited by essence.

Before proceeding further, it would be well to consider the act of existence (esse) of itself and then through potency and act to show the real distinction between essence and esse.

In commenting on the Sentences of Peter the Lombard,⁵ St. Thomas says that the act of existing, esse, can be considered in three ways. It can be taken as signifying the "quiddity or nature of a thing", or the "act of the essence", or as "signifying the truth of propositions". This latter way, however, we shall not consider.

In the first way, i.e. as signifying "the quiddity or nature", he says, "...the definition is a statement signifying what that thing is; for the definition signifies the quiddity of a thing."⁶ However, esse considered in this mode is the universal predicate of all beings. This

concept does not contain the metaphysical concept of esse as the constituent element of every thing which has actual existence, and in which esse is really distinct from the essence of that being and also from the esse of every other being. Consequently, esse should be considered here in the second mode of which St. Thomas speaks, i.e. as "the act of the essence."

Even though to live is the "beingness" of living creatures, it is the act of the soul. Nevertheless, it is not the second act, i.e. the operation but only the first act, i.e. the act of existing for this individual. Or it can be called the formality by which that individual is made present in the universe, in the nature of things.

Esse is most intimately and profoundly in all things since it is formally in all things which are in act. Formally in all means that it is first said of substantial form whose essence is esse per se. And secondly, esse is formally in accidental forms because they are supported by or in substantial form. Just because a form is accidental, it should not be thought that esse is not formally in it. Form gives esse. So accidental form gives accidental esse, i.e. a dependent esse, a mode of esse inhering in a substance.

That which is lacking nothing which is proper to it is said to be perfect.⁷ Now esse, as said above, is that by which something is constituted outside of its causes and outside of nothing. The further from non-being or nothing that a thing is, the closer it approaches perfection. In so far as the first active principle (esse a se) must necessarily be in act in the greatest degree, so also it is the most perfect, it is pure act. Esse itself is the greatest perfection of all things; for nothing has actuality unless it is. And that by which it is constituted in existence, is esse. It is the actuality of all things and of forms themselves which are the actuality of matter.

Esse, even though it is the perfection of perfections, can be limited or determined. However, we must not consider it to be determined as potency is determined by act, for in that way it would be a purely passive determination due to the nature of potency, which is a capacity for existence and is determined by the act which fulfills it and makes it to be in act. However, the potency does exercise a limitative or determinative power over act. And it is this way that we should consider esse to be determined by the essence. And it can be repeated here that esse as esse is not determined, it is only determined when we speak of this particular esse or more properly as a received esse. But just as a given potency by the degree of the capability for actuality determines to what degree it will be actualized, so also in this manner is esse determined by essence.

Considered in itself, esse is more perfect than either to live or to understand since it includes in itself all perfection of being. But if we consider esse itself as participated in by any creature which obviously does not have the total perfection of being, it can be seen that for this creature as for all created beings, perfections must be added over and above that simple esse. Hence it is a more perfect existence for man to be both living and understanding than it would be for him merely to have existence as a rock. When we speak of a participation in esse we mean that the being is a caused being, one which does not have a sufficient reason for esse of itself, and consequently does not have the complete perfection of esse.

Moreover, esse has a certain primacy over essence in so far as it is the act of the essence. However, this is not a priority of time but one of nature. It is the same priority which act has over potency. And in this way it can be seen that esse is extraneous to and distinct from essence.

However, esse of itself is infinitely variable, applicable to all

things in act due to the diversity of the grades of perfection. So if correctly understood it is as the esse of each thing, the sum of that being's generic, specific and individual perfections. For as St. Thomas says in the De Potentia, "...the esse of anything is proper to it and distinct from the esse of any other thing."⁸

If at this point we are not yet fully convinced of the real distinction between esse and essence, there is no point in proceeding further without drawing some conclusions from the foregoing analogy of potency and act with esse and essence. However, it might be objected that potency as potency does not remain in the being which is in act, whereas essence does remain. The effect of potency as potency however does remain, not in so far as it is the capacity for esse, but in so far as it limits the degree of actuality which is received. And so when the potency has been fulfilled, its limitative function does remain. It is in this sense then "...a constituent principle of actually existing things."⁹

Act or esse considered in itself is unlimited perfection. But as a co-principle of being it is limited by the limitations of the potency which it fulfills or actualizes.

As was stated earlier in the consideration of essence as essence, it is primarily a signification of that by which something is placed in a genus or species. However, in that context it must be remembered that essence is a universal and consequently has existence only in the mind, not as a real thing in the extra-mental order. And considered in this way, the real existence of a being having such and such an essence so as to place that being in a genus is not known. E.g. We can know what the quiddity of a centaur is but we do not have a real one in the nature of things, in the extra-mental order. So even here we can see that essence and esse are distinct. For the actual existence (esse in actu) is not even considered in

the concept of essence. However, the concept of esse as a constituent element of actually existing things is not included here. So there still remains to be seen that there is a distinction of esse and essence in extra-mental things.

Both essence and esse are real but not separable principles of being. Even though they are not separable in actual beings they must be distinct, otherwise the essence could not be a real limitation to esse. By essence and esse not being separable is meant that in an actually existing thing we cannot say that this part is esse and that part is essence. There is a simultaneous composition with no priority of time, only of nature. It should be kept in mind that in regard to created beings, esse is a principle of actuality, the "beingness", but it is not the actuality itself. And furthermore, it should be remembered that essence is a real capacity to receive the measure of actual perfection of which it is capable, for everything which is received is received according to the mode of the receiver. But nevertheless, in regard to a real being, it is a co-principle and also a limitative principle. In order to see this it is helpful to think of two compositions in all material beings. First, there is one of matter and form which is the essence of this individual. Secondly, there is a composition of essence and esse which is the actual being. Again--this is not a composition according to time, but according to nature. Spiritual substances or non-material substances are also composed but there is not matter involved, the composition is of essence (potency) and of esse.¹⁰

Here the question may arise; Is the composition of matter and form and one of substance (essence) and esse the same thing? St. Thomas shows that it is not. First, because matter is not the substance and essence of a thing, it is only a part of the whole thing. Secondly, esse is not the act

of matter, but rather the act of substance as a whole; because the substance is that which is. It is the concrete thing. And thirdly, esse, as can be seen from the foregoing, is not the form itself but rather the act of form. For form gives esse to matter. Just as the light is that whereby a thing is made visible or lightsome, so the form is that by which matter is made to be in act. In things which are composed of matter and form, the form, he says is a principle of being, because it is the complement of substance. And what is substance but that whose esse is to exist per se, thence the act of substance is esse itself. So in those things composed of matter and form, neither one can be called either the whole substance nor can either be the esse itself, but the form is rather that by which the thing is. And the esse is that by which the substance is a being.¹¹ Hence, the real distinction of esse and essence can be seen.

Finally, it can be said that esse is the ultimate act of all things for three reasons. First; it is the act of acts, the perfection of perfections and is only determined in the way that act is determined by potency, which is a positive determination allowing for particularization upon which all actions of finite beings are dependent. For no thing can act in an indeterminate way. Secondly; esse is the ultimate act of all things because nothing can be added to that which is most formal. Esse, being the actuality of all acts, the perfection of perfections, cannot have an addition to itself which is more formal than it itself is. There is nothing extrinsic to it which could be added to it for only non-being is extrinsic to esse. Thirdly; that in which all things participate must itself be both separate from the participants and not be participating in another.¹²

However, in intellectual substances, the form is "the thing which is" and the esse is the act "by which it is". Consequently, the form is a

subsisting substance. For this reason it can be seen why it was said above that in a material being there are two compositions, but in an intellectual substance there is only one.

Another conclusion to be noted is that matter and form are only a division of material substance whereas the composition of potency and act includes this plus the division of being (ens) in common. Again, the distinction of esse from essence by analogy with potency and act is seen to be valid both for material and immaterial substances.

II

In this further treatment of the distinction of essence and esse in intellectual substances, the following terms shall be explained and it shall lead us in turn into the third part of the paper giving the distinction between subsistence and nature. These terms shall be clarified: Substance (substantia), the act of substance (substare), subsistence (subsistentia), the act of subsistence (subsistens), supposit and nature.

St. Thomas considers the distinction of esse and essence (or "that which is") of intellectual substances in the second book of the Contra Gentiles, chapter 52.

In composites the esse is not the same as the whole being. For this would mean that the esse would be subsistent of itself and would consequently be a necessary being. A clarification of this can be seen in the following syllogism.

Major: Esse subsisting is only one.

Minor: But God is esse subsisting.

Therefore, nothing other than God is esse subsisting. And consequently in all created things, esse must be distinct from the essence.

In regard to the major proposition: If esse is diversified there would be something exterior to it. (E.g. a mode of esse, is a diversity of esse

as to be a horse or a man.) Since esse is the ultimate act and the act of all forms, it cannot be united to something as potency is to act, as was shown above. Moreover, if it is to be united to itself it must be in one of two ways: "either because there is a subject which receives esse or because both esse and another thing are received in a common receptor."¹ But even in those things in which esse is not subsisting, what is in existence outside of its esse itself is not one with the esse except accidentally in so far as there is one thing having esse and what is extraneous of the proper esse. I.e. the accidents existing in the subject.

But if esse subsisting is granted, there obviously cannot be a receptor of it. For that would deny its subsisting. It would deny its very "in-itselfness".

Before treating the minor proposition, the terms should be clarified both in regard to their meaning as nouns and also as verbs, i.e. the words and the act which they signify should be shown.

Esse was sufficiently clarified in the first section, but nevertheless let it suffice here to say that it signifies what is common to all genera and does not determine any particular mode of existing. But to subsist (subsistere) does signify a special mode of existing which belongs only to substances. (I.e. esse per se et non in alio.) To substand means that act of standing under as does substance, since it is the substrate for accidents.

Whereas esse is common to all genera; to subsist and to substand are only predicated properly of the first genus, substance. However, they are predicated in two ways. First, in so far as substance is a being complete in itself (ens in se completum). Second, in so far as it supports accidents. Therefore, the act of essence is esse, of subsistence is to subsist and that of substance is to stand under or support accidents.²

However, according to St. Thomas, all three of these can be taken in two ways. Esse can be either the act of everything which is, or that by which a thing is. For when esse follows the composition of matter and form, (in so far as form is the principle of esse) but not just form alone because a thing is not called a being, neither does it have esse from the form alone but rather from the whole. In composite things, the essence is more than just the form because the essence is also composit. It is said of the whole. This is what Boetius calls the "usia", i.e. the composit of matter and form. So then, essence or "usia" can signify either a universal substance or a particular.

Substance is a reality. It is neither a negative concept nor an imaginary one. Aristotle gives the following proof for its reality.

That which is of itself (per se) and simple in any genus is prior to that which is through another and secundum quid. But substance is a being, simple and per se. All other genera than substance are beings secundum quid and through substance. Therefore substance is the first among all beings.³

These propositions have been sufficiently explained earlier and need not be qualified here.

From the definition of substance ("a quiddity to which belongs esse not in a subject")⁴, it would seem that it is a negative concept. However, "inherence in another" is a negative perfection which it is denied in the definition of substance. The notion of inherence itself is a negation of subsistence, i.e. the "inseity" or the "in-itselfness of substance". So rather than the definition being a negative concept, it is a positive one denying any negative perfection and stating the positive one.

Considered as it is existing in itself (esse in se) substance is said to subsist, i.e. it is independent in being as opposed to the dependence of an accident which is to exist in another.

Accidently substance is divided into first and second substance. It

is an accidental division because second substance does not have anything which first substance lacks. It is also a generic division according to the modes of being. Second substance signifies the nature of the genus according to itself absolutely, i.e. as a universal. But first substance is applied to the individual subsisting substance and it differs in three ways from first substance just as the particular differs from the universal. First: a particular substance, St. Thomas says, is not predicated of any inferior. Secondly: a universal substance only subsists by reason of a particular which subsists through itself. And thirdly: because a universal substance is in many and is separable and distinct from all.⁵

An analogous division of substance divides it into transcendental and predicamental substance. Transcendental is divided further into created and uncreated. Predicamental is divided further into complete and incomplete. This, however, does not mean that it is incompletely or completely in esse. For in the entitive line, something either is or is not. There is no middle between being and non-being. When substance is said to be incomplete, this is taken in the essential line or essential order. That is: according to its species it is either to subsist of itself or with another as does the human soul. Complete substance can be simple or composed. That is: as a complete substance it is not by nature the substantial essence of a composite. (E.g. A man or an angel are complete substances but they are both composed.) God alone is a substance complete and simple for that implies esse from Himself, esse subsisting, which contains within itself the sufficient reason for its esse.

Now an incomplete substance is subdivided into: first, incomplete by reason of species. The human soul is by nature ordained to be united with the body although it can subsist. It can exist separately from the body. Secondly: A substance can be incomplete by reason of species and by sub-

stantiality. (E.g. Prime matter and substantial forms excepting only the substantial form which is the human soul.) The human soul is excepted because it is a true substance whereas prime matter is pure potentiality, not in act nor subsistent in itself. Although this division of substance may appear tenuous, Aristotle proves its validity as follows.

A substance cannot consist of substances which are present in it by complete reality; for things that are in complete reality two, are never in complete reality one. Though if they are potentially two, they can be one.⁶ E.G. a double line is composed of two halves.....

To subsist, (esse per se) to exist through itself is the act of subsistence either as that act which subsists or as that act by which it subsists. This must be clarified to avoid confusion. If then it is taken in the first manner, as the act which subsists, then "to subsist" indicates a determined esse. And the whole determination of a thing is by its form or essence which is the term of its being. It is evident that whatever is in the genus of substance is said to be subsisting through the first form. Just as we say that a white thing is white through whiteness, so a being is said to be substance through subsistence. It is in this way, St. Thomas says, that Boetius uses the Greek usiosus (corresponding to the Latin subsistentia) as the form receiving subsistence. I.e. that by virtue of which it is subsisting.⁷

But if subsistence is taken as that which subsists, then it refers to that in which we primarily find such a mode of existing. Primarily then, this mode of existing is found in substance in as far as it is substance. And it is only secondarily found in other things as they are related to substance. Consequently, the name of substance is applied to the genera and species in the genus of substance. But it is not proper for individuals to have such an esse unless they are under a common nature. I.e. genus and species do not subsist except in the individual, whose esse

however is a mode of being which is determined by the nature or "quiddity" of the superior in that genus.⁸

In summary then: to subsist is said in two ways. Either esse simply said of individuals only or it is a determined mode of being which exists according to or from the genus and species even though genus and species do not subsist except in individuals. But they are nevertheless called subsistences. And finally, although nothing subsists but the individual substance which is called a hypostasis, it is said to subsist, because it does not exist in another. But it is said to substand in so far as others exist in it. Consequently a substance, not as the subject of accidents but as existing by itself is properly called a subsistence, not a substance.⁹

There remains yet the terms of supposit and person to be identified. Since we know God through created things, whatever we attribute to Him we first know in creatures. But in creatures the perfect and subsistent is compound. However, their forms are not complete subsistence, rather they are, "that by which the creatures exist". So from this it would follow that whatever names we use to signify a complete subsistence must have a concrete meaning which we can apply to the compound things of our experience. But by the names which signify a simple form, we signify it not as a subsistence but rather as "that whereby" a thing is. E.g. whiteness is that whereby a thing is white. And consequently, "...to signify a substance with a quality is to signify the supposit with a nature or determined form in which it subsists."¹⁰

Esse is related to the supposit or to the hypostasis and to the nature as follows. The hypostasis is that which has esse and the nature is that by which it has esse.¹¹ Furthermore, St. Thomas says that the supposit is signified as the whole having the nature as its formal part which perfects it.

When substance is taken as a subject or as a substance perfectly subsisting, it is designative of the supposit. Or more perfectly, it is the supposit. It can also be called by three different names. As it exists in itself and not in another, it is called a subsistence. As it underlies a common nature, or exists in nature it is called a thing of nature (i.e. res naturae). And when it underlies accidents it is called a hypostasis or substance.

However, nothing subsists except the individual substance and since it is not said to subsist for the same reason that is substance, consequently a substance which subsists of itself, not as the subject of accidents, would be called subsistence, not substance. Further, he says that what the three names given above signify in the genus of substance, person signifies in the genus of rational nature. Moreover, the word "hypostasis" was used by the Greeks to indicate an individual substance in any nature. But for St. Thomas and others, it is now used only to signify an individual substance in a rational nature.¹² And it shall be used as such herein.

There are five requirements for a being to fulfill in order to be considered a supposit. It must be self-subsistent and undivided in itself. Furthermore it must be distinct from others of the same nature. (e.g. John is distinct from all other men. If he dies, the rest of humanity continues to exist.) So also could it be thought that the hand is a supposit. But this is not true since the supposit must be self-subsistent. The hand or any other integral part of the body are dependent upon the whole both for operation and for their proper mode of being. If each were a supposit in itself, they would each be self-subsistent. They would be perfectly subsisting substances with all of the properties of "inseity", individuality, completeness and incommunicability. But this can be seen from experience not to be true. Moreover, a supposit cannot be composed of two complete

substances for they are mutually exclusive since they are incommunicable. Man, the supposit, or hypostasis is composed of two incomplete substances; namely, the material substance of the body and the immaterial substance of the soul which is incomplete substance by reason of its species.

Thus are seen the five requirements for a supposit; individuality, incommunicability, self-subsistence, complete substantiality and distinction from others of the same nature.¹³

When the nature of a being is given, only that is included which determines it in a species. The individuating properties are not included. However, the definition of the supposit includes what the nature does, plus the accidents accruing to the individual since it signifies the whole, not just the formal part.

If those things which pertain to the nature of the species could not be found united with something else, then there would be no necessity whatsoever of distinguishing between the nature and the individual subsisting in that nature. E.g. Rationality and animality are the nature of man. But a man, this man, also has this body with all of its particularizing accidents. Nevertheless, these are essential to this man but they are not to the common nature. In the supposit, St. Thomas says, the individual subsisting substance, the nature of the species is included but the individuality is super imposed.¹⁵

Hence in those things which are composed of matter and form it is necessary that the nature and the supposit are diverse because the essence or nature is composed of those things which are in the definition of the species.

III

A composit, as the name implies, is composed. However, this composition can be of two kinds; physical or metaphysical. Physically is here

taken as meaning corporeally; i.e. a physical composite is composed of parts through mutation, either physically of itself or experimentally by the senses. But there is a metaphysical composition if the parts cannot be removed by way of mutation or experimentation but rather by an analysis of the thing mediated by the operation of our intellect. This is called a metaphysical composition. It is made by the intellect or as St. Thomas says, "...it is a sign of the identity of the components"¹

The component parts are in themselves really distinct and this is the physical composition or as it is called a real distinction in the thing. The second is had if the parts of the being are only distinguished by reasoning. This is a logical composition or a rational distinction.

Furthermore, a metaphysical composition, Fr. Bounpensierre says, is made between many elements of the same thing, all of which have been seen earlier as the rational distinction between essence and nature. But a physical composition in which a real distinction can be seen, is in the composition of essence and esse, potency and act, generic nature and the individual nature.

In a real distinction, the physical composition can be subdivided into absolute, if the extremes have a relative opposition or are mutually exclusive, as potency and act. It is also divided into real modal distinction in which there is a real opposition existing within the thing and its proper term or mode (as exists between the line and its curvature.)²

Now the argument for the real distinction of esse and essence in spiritual substances shall be concluded. Remembering the syllogism and the major proposition were given in section two of the paper, consequently only the minor shall be qualified here. This will lead into the final phase of the paper, the distinction of subsistence and nature in contingent substances.

The minor proposition of the syllogism is, "But God is esse subsisting." That whose esse is not really distinguished from its essence substantially is its own esse subsisting. Now if the esse of a thing differs from its essence, then the esse must be either caused by that essence itself or by something exterior. But the esse cannot be caused by the essence and still be distinct from it. For then the essence would be the cause of itself and this is contradictory, for the being would both be and not be at the same time. And since we attribute primary efficient causality to God, neither can the other alternative be true; that His esse would be caused by another.³ So consequently, His esse and His essence are one and it is from this identity that He is said to subsist for the following reasons.

By identifying the essence and the esse, there is no external cause. So His esse is from Himself (a se). When esse is really identified with the substance itself of which it is the act, we signify an esse to which is attributed existence by and through itself. It is the sufficient reason for itself. And consequently there is no subject in which the esse is contained. It is a substance for it has the "quiddity" for esse through itself and not in another. So substance is called a being simply because it subsists in its own esse and it sustains the proper act of being.⁴ So it can be seen why it was said earlier that God is a perfectly subsisting substance. For "not being the subject of accidents" is properly called a subsistence. And furthermore, the supposit and the nature of God cannot be distinct because there is nothing outside the essence in God. There is no real distinction in Him.

If esse and that which is are the same, then so also are esse and the having of esse and the supposit or the hypostasis and the act of being. And in like manner are esse and that which subsists under its own proper esse. So esse of itself is subsisting.

Further, from St. Thomas's treatment of God being one, we can conclude that subsisting esse can only be one. For to be from itself, to be the sufficient reason for its own existence is the greatest perfection. Two beings equally and supremely perfect would be contradictory, since one would have to have a perfection lacked by the other. Hence one would not be supremely perfect. There can be only one absolute.

If we examine the subsisting esse from the standpoint of subsistence and from that of esse, we must again come to the conclusion that it can only be one.

On the part of subsistence: its property is to complete the nature so that it is complete in itself and not be communicable to another. Hence it is one in itself. This we know from the definition, that it is a mode of existence, self-contained and independent of any subject.

Now on the part of esse: that which is subsisting esse must be existing through itself. For it has esse either from itself or in another. But if it has esse in another, it is not subsisting esse but rather esse inhering. And finally, if esse and "that which is" were identified in things outside of God, they would be self subsisting because their substance and esse would be identified and consequently they could not, not be. Hence, the essence and the esse of all things outside of God are really distinct. It is by reason of the divine substance that the esse and esse subsisting are identified substantially with the divine essence.

Now that the terms have been identified and we know that individuality is a certain act perfecting immediately the nature of substance, and subsistence is an act immediately perfecting individuality and remotely the nature itself of substance, we can proceed to the proofs by investigating the following syllogism.

Major: In all creatures, nature constitutes the supposit.

Minor: But nothing constitutes itself.

Therefore in no creature is the supposit and nature the same.⁵

In regard to the major: In things composed of matter and form, the nature is part of the supposit. It is that whereby this individual is designated in a species. But the supposit designates the whole, "that which is" or this perfectly subsisting substance, or this person if it is a supposit of a rational nature. The supposit is what is constituted; the nature its constituent.⁶

But in things which are not composed of matter and form (in spiritual substances) how can the supposit be distinct from the nature since there is no matter as the principle of individuation? Spiritual substances although they are subsisting are not esse subsisting which can only be the One, the first cause of the most universal effect. The nature includes only that which pertains to the species, not the accidents of the individual. And since the supposit signifies the whole, the nature is only a formal part. But in God alone there are no accidents outside of His essence for His essence and esse are one and so only in Him is the supposit and nature one.

Moreover the essence of the created immaterial substance is not its own esse. It comes to it not by reason of its species but esse is attributed to the supposit and not to the nature.⁷

However in I,3,3, St. Thomas says that the supposit and nature in immaterial substances are not distinct.⁸ Whereas in III,2,2, he says that they do differ. In the former however, supposit is taken materially, i.e. as the individual substance or the subject of subsistence. Supposit formally taken includes the formal reason, i.e. the subsistence by which the material supposit subsists in all created substances. To go further on this point, Fr. Bounpensierre in his commentary on the same article (I,3,3) says that it seems to him that St. Thomas accepts the supposit in this

article as the individual and in the second article of III,2, he considers it as the subsistent incommunicable. This is because in III,2,2, St. Thomas proves that the person is distinct from the nature. We do not predicate the nature of the individual or of the person. For we never say that this man is humanity.

Cardinal Cajetan in commenting on the same article (I,3,3), after explaining the distinctions says that the distinction between supposit and nature is more than a logical one. He says the following:

...In separate substances the supposit differs from the nature extrinsically because the supposit as such includes 'to subsist' not intrinsically but in a mode as it is its proper act. (I.e. what is esse through itself). Accordingly, it should be defined this way. But nature is not defined so.⁹

Having seen the distinction of the supposit and the nature we can now investigate the distinction of the subsistence and nature.

Major: If in any genera of substances the individuality really differs from their nature, in such things the subsistence differs really a fortiori from the nature.

Minor: But in both material and immaterial substances the individuality differs really from the nature.

Conc: Therefore in both material and immaterial substances, subsistence really differs from the nature.

Qualification of the major: Individuality is an act immediately perfecting the nature of substance because by definition its essence is to be per se. The essential division of substance is into composed and simple substances. And "inseity" is essential to either of these beings. Individuality or the individual is that whole being which is. But nature or the essence is only the formal part of that being by which it is constituted in a genus. It differs just as the whole and the part.

Furthermore, the perfection and the idea of substance by which it is made incommunicable in itself and its operation is subsistence. Conse-

quently, subsistence is an act which immediately perfects individuality, but only remotely does it perfect the nature of the substance.

The minor has been proven in the preceeding syllogism.

From this we can conclude: that in all created substances, the subsistence is really modally distinct from the nature or essence. By being really modally distinct is meant that it is distinct as the curvature of a line is distinct from the line itself. Or as distinct as the point, the principle of the line is distinct from the line itself.

In the material substance, if the nature and the subsistence were one and the same, then there would be no necessity of a hand being joined to a body in order to function. For it would mean that the hand would be a subsisting substance or a supposit, completely subsisting in itself. Whereas truly it is an individual substance but not subsisting. Furthermore, it would cause the impossible situation in which when one man, Paul, would die, human nature would die because Paul, the person, the supposit having a rational nature, would be the same as the rational nature itself.

And consequently in all substance in which there is found something outside the essential principle, the essence and supposit or person are really diverse. All created substances are either material or spiritual. And something is found in them which is outside of their essential principle, namely accidents. Their esse does not belong to them by reason of their essence. Consequently they do not have esse from themselves (esse a se) which would imply esse subsisting in which the nature and the subsistence are not distinct, which can only be said of God, the One, the Absolute, the Undivided.

-finis-

FOOTNOTES

Section I

¹St. Thomas Aquinas, De Ente et Essentia. Turin: Marietti, 1948, chap. 1. (all references to De Ente shall be to this edition.)

²St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae. Turin: Marietti, 1950, Prima Pars, Question 3, Article 5. (all references to the Summa Theologiae shall be to this edition unless otherwise stated and shall be indicated according to the following notation. I,3,5.) "...Quia omnia quae sunt in genere uno, communicant in quidditate vel essentia generis, quod praedicatur de eis in eo quod quid est. Differunt autem secundum esse non idem est hominis et equi, nec huius hominis et illius hominis. Oportet quod quaecumque sunt in genere, differant in eis esse et quod quid est, idest essentia."

³St. Thomas Aquinas, On Being and Essence, translated by Arnold Maurer. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1949, p.27, ft. note 6. "Quod quid erat esse. A literal translation of Aristotle's: TO TI HN EINAI. See Aristotle, Post. Anal. I,22, 82b38; Meta., VII, 3 1028b34. W.D. Ross paraphrases the expression: 'the answer to the question, what was it to be so-and-so.' (Aristotle's Metaphysics, ed. Ross, vol.1, p.127). When we ask the question, - What is this thing? - the complete answer is the statement of its definition, or that which the nature tends to fulfill. For example, if the thing in question is a man, the answer to this question is: He is a rational animal. The definition thus expresses what a thing is, its whatness or the what a thing was to be. The past tense of the verb (was) does not express past time. It expresses absolutely the direction of the tendency of a being's nature."

⁴De Ente et Essentia, ch.1. "Hoc etiam alio nomine natura dicitur, accipiendo naturam secundum primum modum illorum quatuor modorum, quos Boetius, De Duabus Naturis, ch.1, assignat; secundum scilicet quod natura dicitur esse illud quod quocumque modo intellectu capi potest.... Nomen naturae hoc modo sumptae videtur significare essentiam rei secundum quod habet ordinem vel ordinationem ad propriam operationem rei...."

⁵St. Thomas Aquinas, Scriptum Super Libros Sententiarum. Paris: Mandonnet edition, 1929, First Book, Distinction 33, Question 1, Article 1, answer to the first objection. (I Sent. 33,1,1 ad 1.)

⁶Ibidem. "Uno modo dicitur esse ipsa quidditas vel natura rei sicut dicitur quod definitio est oratio significans quid est esse; definitio enim quidditatem rei significat."

⁷I,4,1c. "Unde primum principium activum oportet maxime esse in actu: et per consequens maxime esse perfectum. Secundum hoc enim dicitur aliquid esse perfectum, secundum quod est actu: nam perfectum dicitur, cui nihil deest secundum modum suae perfectionis."

⁸St. Thomas Aquinas, De Potentia Dei, Turin: Marietti. VII,3.

⁹Hilary Carpenter, "A Note on the Fundamental Principle of Thomism," Dominican Studies, vol. 2, (1949) 33.

¹⁰St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Contra Gentiles. Turin: Marietti, 1886, Book II, Question 54. (hereafter noted as follows: II C.G. 54.) "...Comparatur enim forma ad ipsum esse sicut lux ad lucere vel albedo ad album esse.. .. In compositis ex materia et forma, forma dicitur esse principium essendi, quia est complementum substantiae cuius actus est ipsum esse, sicut diaphanum est aeri principium lucendi, quia facit eum proprium subjectum luminis. Unde in compositis ex materia et forma, nec materia nec forma potest dici quod est, nec etiam ipsum esse. Forma tamen potest dici quo est, secundum quod est principium essendi. Ipsa autem tota substantia est ipsum quod est, et ipsum esse est quo substantia denominatur ens."

¹¹Ibidem.

¹²De Potentia, 7, 2 ad 9.

Section II

¹Francis Ferrariensis O.P., In Libros Quatuor Contra Gentiles. Rome: 1897, vol. I, p.201 (in II C.G. 52) "Et ideo si aliquid debet sibi uniri, oportet ut altero duorum modum sit; aut scilicet, quia illud est subiectum receptivum esse; aut quia tam esse quam illud aliud, sunt in uno communi receptivo."

²I Sent. 23,1,1.

³St. Thomas Aquinas, In Metaphysicorum Aristotilelis, Turin: Marietti, 1950, Book VII, lectio 1, number 1248. (hereafter noted as follows: VII In Meta.1, n.1248.)

⁴I, C.G. 25.

⁵V In Meta. 10, n.903.

⁶VII In Meta. 13, n.1588.

⁷I Sent. 23, 1,1c. "...et ideo in Praedicamentis, dicit Boetius quod 'ousiosis' vel 'subsistentia' est forma accipiens subsistentiam pro 'quo subsistitur.' Si autem accipiat 'subsistentia' pro eo 'quod subsistit,' sic proprie dicitur illud in quo per prius invenitur talis natura hoc modo essendi."

⁸Ibidem.

⁹De Potentia, 9, 1 ad 4.

¹⁰I, 13, 1 ad 3.

¹¹III, 17, 2.

¹²De Potentia, 9,1 ad 2.

¹³Ibidem, 8, 3 ad 2.

¹⁴St. Thomas Aquinas, Questiones Disputate et Questiones Duodecim Quod.

libetales. Turin: (second Turin edition) Marietti, 1913. (hereafter noted as follows: II Quodlibetum, 2, 4.)

¹⁵ III, 2, 2c.

Section III

¹ I, 85, 5 ad 3.

² Joseph Gredt O.S.B., Elementa Philosophiae. Herder and Company, Fribourg. 1937, vol. I, par. 119,2.

³ I,3,4.

⁴ N. Del Prado O.P., De Veritate Fundamentali Philosophiae Christianae. Fribourg Helvetiorum: ex Typis Consociationis S. Pauli, 1911, p.30.

⁵ II Quodlibetum, 2, 4.

⁶ Ibidem.

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ I, 3, 3. "In his igitur quae non sunt composita ex materia et forma, in quibus individuatio non est per materiam individuatam, idest per hanc materiam, sed ipsae formae per se individuantur, oportet quod ipsae formae sint supposita subsistentia. Unde in eis non differet suppositum et natura."

⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, Opera Omnia, Pars Prima Summae Theologiae, with a commentary by Cardinal Thomas Cajetan, Rome: De Propoganda Fide, 1888, p. 41. (In I,3,3.) "Quatuor igitur cum sint modi differentiae: secundum rationem tantum ut est inter hominem et humanitatem; inter rem et rem, sit est inter Socratem et Platonem; inter rem includentem intrinsece aliquid reale, et abstrahentem; et inter includentem extrinsece aliquid reale, et abstrahentem ab illo:... et tota hac ratione ac conclusione sermo tantum est de differentia testis modo, idest penes inclusionem intrinsecam."

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