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St. Thomas Aquinas's *Ens Commune* as *Genus Omnium Supremum*

Ens commune św. Tomasza z Akwinu jako *genus omnium supremum*

ABSTRACT: This paper aims to demonstrate whether Aquinas's concept of "common being" (*ens commune*), as it emerged widely among scholastic metaphysicians, provides a theoretical basis for being reconciled with the concept of "the highest genus of all" (*genus omnium supremum*). The main focus of this study is to understand the underlying resemblance of these concepts, based on Aquinas's selected works, both the *In Metaphysicam Aristotelis* and *In Librum Beati Dionysii De Divinis Nominibus*. The Author proposes either an analytical reconstruction or a metaphysical lens for examining this topic, presenting additional approaches to the study of *ens commune*. The correlation between *ens commune* and *genus omnium supremum* seems quite plausible, though in certain respects. It is generally accepted that Aquinas's *ens commune* refers exclusively to the abstracted concept of common being, encompassing all real beings in terms of existence (*secundum esse*), while *genus omnium supremum* would be a broader and still higher concept, encompassing all varieties of beings, even those of the intentional order (*secundum rationem*). It seems likely that Aquinas's *Commentaries* may convincingly reveal that the concept of *ens commune* has a broader scope than merely referring to diverse real beings and their properties. Arguing in favor of this thesis, the Author strives to demonstrate that the concept of *ens commune* corresponds to all beings considered from a cognitive perspective, not only the existential one, but also a perspective covering all denominations of being in whatever form of their existence, namely combining both real being (*ens reale*) and being of reason (*ens rationis*) into one, unique, intelligible concept.

KEY WORDS: St. Thomas Aquinas, *ens commune*, *genus omnium supremum*, medieval philosophy, Scholasticism

ABSTRAKT: Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu wykazanie, czy pojęcie „bytu wspólnego” (*ens commune*) św. Tomasza z Akwinu, szeroko rozpowszechnione wśród scholastycznych metafizyków, stanowi teoretyczną podstawę umożliwiającą pogodzenie go z pojęciem „najwyższego rodzaju wszystkiego” (*genus omnium supremum*). Głównym

celem niniejszego opracowania jest zrozumienie podstawowego podobieństwa tych pojęć w oparciu o wybrane dzieła Akwinaty, zarówno *In Metaphysicam Aristotelis*, jak i *In Librum Beati Dionysii De Divinis Nominibus*. Autor proponuje albo analityczną rekonstrukcję, albo metafizyczną perspektywę do zbadania tego tematu i przedstawia dodatkowe podejścia do badania *ens commune*. Korelacja między *ens commune* i *genus omnium supremum* wydaje się całkiem prawdopodobna, choć pod pewnymi względami. Powszechnie przyjmuje się, że *ens commune* św. Tomasza odnosi się wyłącznie do abstrakcyjnej koncepcji bytu wspólnego, obejmującego wszystkie byty realne pod względem istnienia (*secundum esse*), podczas gdy *genus omnium supremum* byłoby szerszym i jeszcze wyższym pojęciem, obejmującym wszystkie odmiany bytów, nawet te należące do porządku intencjonalnego (*secundum rationem*). Wydaje się prawdopodobne, że komentarze św. Tomasza z Akwinu ujawniają, że pojęcie *ens commune* ma szerszy zakres niż tylko odniesienie do różnorodnych bytów realnych i ich właściwości. Argumentując na rzecz tej tezy, autor stara się wykazać, że pojęcie *ens commune* odpowiada wszystkim bytom rozpatrywanym z perspektywy poznawczej, nie tylko egzystencjalnej, ale także z perspektywy obejmującej wszystkie denominacje bytu w dowolnej formie ich istnienia, a mianowicie łączącej zarówno byt realny (*ens reale*), jak i byt myślny (*ens rationis*) w jedno, unikalne pojęcie inteligibilne.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: św. Tomasz z Akwinu, *ens commune*, *genus omnium supremum*, filozofia średniowieczna, scholastyka

Introduction

Although the growth of the studies on *ens commune* is not overly noticeable, still recent research has been especially attentive to the philosophical survey, less frequently theological, of the methodology underlying the defense and exposition of some doctrines centered on this theory in the Middle Ages and Baroque scholasticism. While I do not take a decisive stance on this debate, which is apparently still ongoing in the philosophical *milieu*, this paper addresses the problem by focusing on the foremost issue: Aquinas's theory of *ens commune*, according to which this concept is derived exclusively from real beings in relation to the existence understood universally (*secundum esse*) and from beings in relation to reason (*secundum rationem*). In both cases, these are still underexplored topics. Hence, I find the "evanescent" existence of *ens commune* surprising enough to merit its closer inspection. Throughout the article, both references to Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and the Dionysian theory of participation in Aquinas's commentaries should be considered leading, and sometimes only heuristic. To this end, the Neoplatonic doctrine of emanation and participation, as well as the scholastic concept of beings of reason (*entia rationis*), must be taken into account and must play a pivotal role in the topic under discussion. While the scope of real being and being of reason is different, it seems that

there must be something that spans the domains of *ens rationis* and *ens reale* and combines them into one. Although they do not share a common essence, they do share a common cognitive order of being in general (its *esse* becomes *cognosci*) in the intellect as the *ens cognitum*, containing as parts of the whole both the entities *sine* and *cum fundamento in re*. This “whole,” considered as the *ens commune* in terms of *genus omnium supremum*, is precisely the subject of this article.

Since the subject matter discussed in this article does not stem from the fact that some medieval and Renaissance philosophers wrote about it, who rarely, if ever, used the name “*genus omnium supremum*” to denote *ens commune*, but rather impose other related terms interchangeably, hence an important caveat is necessary at the outset. While demonstrating the *ens commune*, this seemingly comprehensive article offers a brief overview of this intriguing concept in Aquinas, which has its roots in more distant traditions, such as Latin Aristotelianism and Neoplatonism. It may come as a surprise that conspicuous connotations of the problem would be found in both Kant and modern thinkers alike. Afterwards, the whole topic goes through a new perspective, outlining the relationship between classical metaphysics and modern ontology, and – in a somewhat specific tone of reconciliation – theology as well. For sooner or later the question of God as a being higher than the *ens commune* would eventually emerge, which is to some extent consistent with Thomistic thought, regardless of other minor philosophical discrepancies.

Primarily, the topic finds its foundation in a centuries-old tradition of demonstrating the main subject of first philosophy, harking back to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, which aimed to lead us to the realm of immaterial forms such as essences, separate substances, species and genus, and perhaps even to draw us towards a supernatural being, instead of placing us solely in terms of corporeal substances. Those who realize the broad nature of metaphysics might also hypothesize that at the core of *ens commune* as *genus omnium supremum* there exists a certain correspondence between the sciences. Suggestively, this could at least be called a *supra*-transcendental doctrine for all of the sciences. Most supporters of opinions similar to mine are rarely evoked or are omitted altogether in contemporary textbooks, similar to the omission of Aquinas's doctrine of *ens commune*. Even if the *ens commune* itself cannot be counted among the separate substances, as everything indicates, it is nevertheless true – as I also demonstrate, drawing on Aquinas – that the *ens commune* cannot in any way be said of God. On the other hand, angelic beings should be permissibly included in the broad denomination of being in general. Moreover, even if Aquinas did not explicitly use the term “*genus omnium supremum*” to mean “*ens commune*,” I nevertheless

intend to use it in this way to grasp the deeper meaning of *ens commune* in the metaphysics of the Angelic Doctor. The reconstruction of Aquinas's views that I offer below leads rather to the conclusion that the *ens commune* cannot truly be any of the existing entities nor their analogous concept in terms of *secundum esse reale*, hence this is where its initial ephemerality comes from. Nor is it a fictitious being. Instead, all paths lead to the plausible conclusion that it is a truly existing principle uniting the real and unreal in the order of matter in one common, *super*-analogous and genus-like concept of *ens commune*, both in terms of existence (*secundum esse*) and in terms of intentionality of reason (*secundum rationem* or *secundum esse cognitum*), but not merely according to the structure of predication or signification (*secundum dici* or *in significando*).

This article is structured in five sections. Following the introductory part (From Roger Bacon to Immanuel Kant), the second section (The Troublesome Subject of Aristotle's Metaphysics) raises divergent claims about the subject of metaphysics as given by Aristotle, which has been a matter of disputes for ages. The third section (Aquinas's Doctrine of the Ens Commune: A General Outline) attempts to discuss the issue in a slightly comprehensive yet general overview. The fourth section (Ens Commune in Aquinas's Commentaries on Metaphysics and on the Divine Names) is an analytical attempt to reconstruct Aquinas's views, which were based on Aristotelian metaphysics on the one hand and on the Neoplatonic doctrine of emanation/participation in Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite on the other. It seems that both of Aquinas's *Commentaries*, or more precisely, his interpretations within, demonstrate that *ens commune* should be considered in terms of the *genus omnium supremum*. The fifth section (*Final Remarks*) contains concluding points supplemented by references to figures who could comparatively follow the same line of reasoning. Hopefully, this unpretentious paper devoted to the theory of the *ens commune* will contribute to increase the theory's basic assessment among committed scholars and improve its overall value in philosophy, not counting merely metaphysicians. As may be seen from the article, the method of intertwining analytical and historical reconstruction employed here is a sparse combination, but quite applicable.

From Roger Bacon to Immanuel Kant

It is a burdensome undertaking to pinpoint with undeniable certainty the origin of the intuition of *ens commune* as *genus omnium supremum* in the history of philosophy. Although this question, which most likely boiled down to the unification of real being (*ens reale*) with being of reason (*ens rationis*)

into the highest, common concept – either as *genus omnium supremum* or under another name – seems to have Aristotelian provenance; presumably its origins can be traced back to the Middle Ages among the masters of the *artes liberales* at the University of Paris, committed to the study of the so-called “common doctrine.” This doctrine comes down to the issues surrounding the theory of “appellation,” “supposition,” “equivocation,” and other theories of early medieval terministic and modal logic. In his treatise *Sumule Dialectices* (Oxford, Bodley Library, Digby 204), Roger Bacon († 1292), in the section *De appellacione*, recalls controversial tendencies surrounding a strange concept that had just emerged from Parisian circles and was becoming increasingly popular in Oxford, and which deeply disturbed Bacon’s mind. According to this logician tendency, in contrast to a metaphysical approach, the early masters of the arts in Paris tended to combine real being and being of reason (considered as a non-being) into one common concept of “appellation,” which was associated with the Parisian theory of “natural” and “accidental” suppositions, although they did not explicitly name it “*genus omnium supremum*” at that time, using instead different terms.¹ Bacon notes the following:

However, the statement about appellations is twofold, because some say that a term appellates of itself the presence, past, and future, and is common to beings and non-beings. Others say that a term is only the name of present things and nothing is common to being and non-being, or past, present, and future, according to what Aristotle says in the first book of the *Metaphysics*. But because the first statement is common, therefore we first distinguish it.²

As Alain De Libera demonstrates in an insightful study, in his final work, *Compendium studii theologiae* from 1292, Bacon addresses two widely debated

¹ See Alain De Libera, “The Oxford and Paris Traditions in Logic,” in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy: From the Rediscovery of Aristotle to the Disintegration of Scholasticism, 1100–1600*, ed. Norman Kretzmann et al. (Cambridge University Press, 1982), 175–87 (ch. 8), esp. 181–82, <https://doi.org/10.1017/chol9780521226059.010>.

² “Duplex tamen est sententia de appellacionibus, quia quidam dicunt quod terminus appellat de se appellata presenciam, preteritam, et futuram, et est communis entibus et non-entibus. Alii dicunt quod terminus est solum nomen presencium et nichil est commune enti et non-enti, sive preterito, presenti, et futuro, secundum quod dicit Aristoteles in primo Methaphysice. Quia vero sententia prima est communis, ideo primo discernamus eam.” (Robert Steele, ed., *Summa Grammatica Magistri Rogeri Bacon necnon Sumule Dialectices Magistri Rogeri Bacon*, Opera hactenus inedita Rogeri Baconi 15 [Oxonii: E Typographeo Clarendoniano Londoni; Apud Humphredum Milford, 1940], 277, nos. 28–35). Unless otherwise indicated, all translations in the text are entirely mine.

questions: whether “word” can denote anything unambiguously common to being and non-being, or beings of reason, and whether this can lead to the displacement of its meaning. Bacon also mentions that as early as the 1250, some Oxford scholars, including Richard Rufus of Cornwall († 1260), considered it permissible to employ an unambiguous concept that signifies the correspondence between real being and non-being (i.e. being of reason). De Libera suggests that this still nebulous “common doctrine” described by Bacon in *Sumule Dialectices* was influenced by these new tendencies, which had originally developed among the Parisian terminists and logicians. To understand precisely what doctrine Bacon firmly opposed in 1250, it would be helpful to examine the way he presented this doctrine more than forty years later, also referring to it in other works, such as *De signis* from 1267.³ Moreover, De Libera mentions that such a concept of unity between being and non-being is absent in Peter of Spain’s *Tractatus*, later known as the *Summulae Logicales*, where the so-called “appellation” is brought in only as a kind of limited supposition, rather than the popular phrase *supponere pro* being used at that time.⁴ It is relevant that no Parisian logician from the period before 1250 adopted any positive terms to denote something common to being and non-being. Hence – as De Libera confidently concludes – this strange “common doctrine” was likely inspired by theories that were just becoming popular, and which may have first appeared in texts from around 1250.⁵ Most likely the first treatise which tends to combine real being and non-being, including *entia rationis*, into one common concept, and thus reminiscent of a supertranscendental concept, is the *Lectura Tractatum* by William Arnaud († 1242) – a Dominican inquisitor and martyr from Montpellier and a master of arts in Toulouse – which was one of the earliest commentaries on Peter of Spain. This same trend was continued by Siger of Brabant († 1280) and Peter of Auvergne († 1304) in their works where the issues of supposition and appellation are invoked.⁶

Somewhat counter to what one might expect, I also begin this section by referencing Immanuel Kant († 1804), who seems to be worthy of attention against the background of the debate on the Aquinas’s common being (*ens commune*). Although Kant himself neither appealed for the *ens commune* nor consistently refrained from using it, at least one passage from the *Critique of Pure Reason* raises a subtle controversy, namely, one that may indicate Kant’s

³ De Libera, “The Oxford and Paris Traditions in Logic,” 181–82.

⁴ De Libera, 182.

⁵ De Libera, 182 et sqq.

⁶ De Libera, 183.

desire to overcome the shortcomings of his transcendental philosophy by crowning it with a genuinely ultimate concept. Interestingly enough, Kant either reached such a parallel conclusion, or borrowed it from the intuition of medieval thinkers who preceded him, or simply did so based on his own insightful knowledge of transcendental logic, which seems to be consistent with the proposals of thinkers of the past. Presumably, this quite astonishing passage from the *Critique*, however, bestows a certain validity to his entire doctrine and provides an outline to the topic under question, which is otherwise still vague. In the *Critique*, Kant took only one step down this path, but it seems to me to be enough to show that the position he holds is akin to the preceding scholastic views, i.e. *genus omnium supremum*; *ens commune*; or simply *ens supertranscendentale*. Concluding the first volume of the *Critique*, Kant extraordinarily proclaims the following:

... Before we leave the Transcendental Analytic behind, we must add something that, although not in itself especially indispensable, nevertheless may seem requisite for the completeness of the system. The highest concept with which one is accustomed to begin a transcendental philosophy is usually the division between the possible and the impossible. But since every division presupposes a concept that is to be divided, a still higher one must be given, and this is the concept of an object in general (taken problematically, leaving undecided whether it is something or nothing).⁷

One might admit that Kant's historically recognized breakthrough in philosophy could be the subject of a separate study, but if we look at the background of Kant's transcendental doctrine, and especially at some of its outcomes, we will discover outright a straightforward idea – expressed implicitly, albeit hypothetically – that could suggest the adoption of some kind of the *genus omnium supremum* or similar projection within his own system. What Kant

⁷ Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), A290, p. 382; and sqq. to A292, p. 383. For the German source, see Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft von Immanuel Kant*, 2nd ed. (Riga: bei Johann Friedrich Hartknoch, 1787), A290–A292. Kant adds significantly that "... since the categories are the only concepts that relate to objects in general, the distinction of whether an object is something or nothing must proceed in accordance with the order and guidance of the categories." Additionally, a broader definition of the object in general was inserted into Kant's copy of the first edition, that is, "the highest concept is that of the object in general" (E CLI, p. 46; 23:38). See also John P. Doyle, "Between Transcendental and Transcendental: The Missing Link?," *Review of Metaphysics* 50, no. 4 (1987): 783–814.

so aptly pointed out in the quoted paragraph, though cautiously and without any particular elaboration, seems to be consistent with arguments from the 16th and 17th centuries, especially those expanded in the Jesuit school. As staggering as this is, one can draw a conclusion comparable to that of the late Scholastics, based on the final thesis of the first volume of the *Critique*, in which Kant openly addresses the question of defining the object in general or common being (*ens commune*) in terms of a *supra*-transcendentality that seems to serve as a bridge between two distinct realms, or simply as the highest notion that stands beyond the division into what is (*entia possibilia*) and what is not (*entia impossibilia*). Kant maintained that this division is due to the necessity of positing a third kind of object from which this division would stem, namely, indicating a *supra*-transcendental concept, as the highest ontological category, a superior genus of being from which everything equally originates and which enables diverse divisions to be possible. Kant defines such a notion as the *most general concept or object in general* (*Gegenstand überhaupt*), without determining what it is, and consequently, whether it is something or nothing. This concept refers to a cognitive object as such or to an object in general, reminiscent of Aquinas's *ens commune*, and not to any unequivocally defined singular thing. As a result, Kant introduced a *supra*-ontological, category encompassing both the world of the senses – “*phenomena*” – and the world of reason – “*numena*,” which surprisingly brings him closer to the earlier solutions of Baroque scholasticism. Kant seems to confirm his position from the 1781 *Critique* in another work from 1797, *Die Metaphysik der Sitten*, where he frames the position in a slightly different delineation:

... Just as the teachers of ontology begin with something and nothing at the very beginning, without realizing that these are already members of a division, and that the divided concept is missing, which can be no other than the concept of an object in general.⁸

As any astute scholar can reasonably deduce, Kant undertook to define what could be boldly described as *ens commune* or a *supra*-transcendental being relating to the uppermost order of existence, marked by two intersecting lines – reality and intentionality of beings of reason, or even nothingness itself,

⁸ “So wie die Lehrer der Ontologie vom Etwas und Nichts zu oberst anfangen, ohne inne zu werden, dass dieses schon Glieder einer Eintheilung sind, dazu der eingetheilte Begriff fehlt, der kein anderer als der Begriff von einem Gegenstande überhaupt sein kann.” (Immanuel Kant, *Die Metaphysik der Sitten*, Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Rechtslehre I [Königsberg: bey Friedrich Nicolovius, 1798], XIV [“Einleitung”]).

which supremely exceeds them both, as it were, beyond all differential entities, divisions, and even self-contradictory ones. A compelling question worth investigating is whether Kant borrowed this line of reasoning from scholastic thinkers, or whether, like others before him, he considered it indispensable for application into his own transcendental philosophy. This system then went beyond medieval metaphysics and logic and instead led to a new ontology, perhaps even to the benefit of a future phenomenology of religion, examining the relevance of phenomenological consideration of God (or the sacred otherwise defined as something beyond the transcendental of being). Hence, in Kant's philosophy one could find many convergences, although only in some respects, with thinkers who afterwards tackled the issue of "transcendentality," "intentionality," "analogy" or the *a priori* limits of knowledge, such as Alexius Meinong († 1920), Edmund Husserl († 1938), Johannes Daubert († 1947), Bertrand Russell († 1970), as well as Adolf Reinach († 1916), the latter of whom pioneered the use of phenomenology to describe supernatural acts (*überirdische Akte*) within sacred and mystical religious experiences, in addition to others who followed in Kant's footsteps.

Either way, I assume that no contemporary scholar would deny that the dominant philosophical system that significantly transformed the main ideas of scholasticism into new ones was supposedly Kant's idealism, from which his transcendental doctrine emerged, though framed in a fairly modern sense. As one might notice, Kant's "ontological shift" led to the formation of completely opposite meanings for numerous philosophical terms derived from the old metaphysical tradition and coined in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. These include, first and foremost, intelligibility and transcendentality, both of which are among the ultimate ideas of Kant's doctrine and are intended to define the ontological structure of the so-called *noumena*. The concept of *noumena* refers to the rational, noumenal aspect of the human existence, which is relatively distinct from the empirical, phenomenal realm of the "self," which in turn is subject to deterministic laws of nature. The *noumena* can be apprehended through the activities of pure reason (*reinen Vernunft*) or through the intelligible subject (*intelligible Subjekt*) and then intentionally discerned by the so-called practical reason (*praktischen Vernunft*). Kant's approach, by replacing the scholastic understanding of both intelligibility and transcendentality with new meaning, refers exclusively to the world of beings of reason (*intelligibile Welt*), which is the equivalent of *entia rationis* in scholastic doctrine, and, accordingly, to a mental realm that exists beyond the empirical and phenomenal world and is thus uncorrelated with the corporeal and sensible things. This is a purely rational structure of mind-dependent objects (*intelligiblen Gegenstand*)

and does not refer to real being (*ens reale*) in the metaphysical sense, as embedded in tradition.

This profound change of meanings, which Michelle Grier has termed a “metaphysical delusion,” “metaphysical error,” or “metaphysical illusion,”⁹ involves a Kantian debasement of the subject of metaphysics, considered from a historical and etymological perspective, on an unprecedented scale. According to Hans Leisegang, who follows Benno Erdmann’s earlier research (“Die Entwicklungsperioden von Kants theoretischer Philosophie”) and whose twentieth-century studies on Kant’s philosophy is consistent with that of Ignacio Angelelli and, more recently, Marco Sgarbi, the pivotal turn in Kant’s transcendental doctrine is primarily the redefinition of the scholastic doctrine of transcendentals (*nomina transcendentalia*) – taking into account the new meanings given to the concept of being (*ens*), essence (*essentia*), reflection (*reflexio*), and so forth. Most likely under the influence of Christian Wolff’s *Ontology* and Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten’s *Metaphysics*, Kant was inspired to write his pre-critical lectures on metaphysics, this tipping point also being confirmed by John P. Doyle.¹⁰ The influence of Wolff and Baumgarten – and perhaps several others from the Albertus-Universität Königsberg who taught there between 1703 and 1770¹¹ – inevitably resulted in Kant’s early philosophy being affected in that

⁹ Cf. Michelle Grier, *Kant’s Doctrine of Transcendental Illusion*, Modern European Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), esp. 17–47 (Part One: “Kant’s Discovery of Metaphysical Illusion,” ch. 1: “Metaphysical Error in the Precritical Works”); 101–40 (Part Two: “Fallacies and Illusions in the *Critique of Pure Reason*,” ch. 4: “Transcendental Illusion”); 263–93 (Part Four: “Illusion and Systematicity,” ch. 8: “The Regulative Employment of Reason”).

¹⁰ Cf. Doyle, “Between Transcendental and Transcendental,” 784–88, where the author thoroughly reports on the interesting debate between Hans Leisegang, Norbert Hinske and Cornelio Fabro on the interrelations between Kant’s doctrine, Baumgarten’s *Ontology* and *Metaphysics*, and Wolff’s *Cosmologia generalis, methodo scientifica pertractata*, as well as exemplifies discernible impact of scholasticism on Kant’s thought.

¹¹ Marco Sgarbi has made significant contributions to this field of cutting-edge and pioneering research. See Marco Sgarbi, “The Historical Genesis of the Kantian Concept of »Transcendental«,” *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 53 (2011): 97–117; Marco Sgarbi, “Abraham Calov and Immanuel Kant: Aristotelian and Scholastic Traces in the Kantian Philosophy,” in “Estratto,” *Historia Philosophica: An International Journal* 8 (2010): 55–62; Marco Sgarbi, “Metaphysics in Königsberg prior to Kant (1703–1770),” *Trans/Form/Ação* 33, no. 1 (2010): 31–64, <https://doi.org/10.1590/s0101-31732010000100004>; Marco Sgarbi, *La Kritik der reinen Vernunft nel contesto della tradizione logica aristotelica*, Studien und Materialien Zur Geschichte der Philosophie 80 (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 2010); Marco Sgarbi, *Logica e metafisica nel Kant precritico: L’ambiente intellettuale di Königsberg e la formazione della filosofia kantiana*, Studien zur Philosophie des 18. Jahrhunderts 11 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2010); Marco Sgarbi, “Il risveglio dal sonno dogmatico e la rivoluzione del

way, which appeared eleven years before his major work, the *Critique of Pure Reason*. These noticeable scholastic traces exist in Kant's philosophy, including those from the period of Baroque Jesuit and Protestant scholasticism, and undoubtedly his pre-critical lectures were formed as a propaedeutic outline of classical metaphysical doctrine and became an instructive path to further, in-depth studies. The end result of Kant's earlier inclination was to be the mature critical philosophy of later transcendental logic, which was based on the deduction of concepts from pure reason itself.¹² Hence, primarily elaborating on this essentialist, noetic, or simply intentional thread between Kant's revolution and the thinkers of the scholastic background who preceded him or merely surrounded him in the scholarly *milieu*, one can see some particularly perceptible implications.

Admittedly, it strikes me that this disaccord between Kant's doctrine of transcendentalism and the scholastic doctrine of the *nomina transcendentalia* concerns both a considerable change in the definition of "transcendentalism" as something previously referred to as reality and – an equally crucial issue – what in Kant's philosophy could be described as a transition from a realistic to a purely noetic knowledge, namely the transition from existential (realistic) metaphysics of the Middle Ages to modern ontology in Kant's favor.

1772," *Archivio di storia della cultura* 25 (2012): 237–49; Marco Sgarbi, "The University of Königsberg in Transition (1689–1722): Aristotelianism and Eclecticism in Johann Jakob Rohde's *Meditatio philosophica*," *Studi Kantiani* 26 (2013): 125–35; Marco Sgarbi, "At the Origin of the Connection between Logic and Ontology. The Impact of Suárez's Metaphysics in Königsberg," *Anales Valentinus* 36, no. 71 (2010): 145–59. On the influence of scholasticism and Aristotelianism on Kant's philosophy, see also Marco Sgarbi, *Kant and Aristotle: Epistemology, Logic, and Method* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2016); Hans Seigfried, "Kant's Thesis about Being Anticipated by Suárez?," in *Proceedings of the Third International Kant Congress*, ed. Lewis White Beck, Synthese Historical Library: Texts and Studies in the History of Logic and Philosophy 4 (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1972), 510–20; Wolfgang Ertl, "'Kant und die Scholastik heute'. Vorüberlegungen zu einer Neueinschätzung," *The Geibun-Kenkyu: Journal of Arts and Letters* 105, no. 2 (2013): 20–40; Costantino Esposito, "The Hidden Influence of Suárez on Kant's Transcendental Conception of 'Being', 'Essence', and 'Existence'," in *Suárez's Metaphysics in Its Historical and Systematic Context*, ed. Lukáš Novák, Series Contemporary Scholasticism 2 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 117–34.

¹² Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B102–29, A96–98, A644, B672, B384.

The Troublesome Subject of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*

The first issue to be examined in order to classify the term of *ens commune* within a philosophical context is the question of what is the primary subject of Aristotelian metaphysics. From all the Aristotelian commentaries given over the centuries, one can distinguish the following denotations: substance itself or being *qua* being (*Met.*, Book IV), substance understood as essence, or essence alone, or something common, such as species or genus, first causes (*Met.*, Book I), the Unmoved Mover (*Met.*, Book XII), or *compositum*, or finally, so-called separate substances (*xechōristos*) or something immaterial and even divine (*Met.*, Book VI). Based on these denotations, one might well conclude that the subject of metaphysics is not a single thing, but that it is complex and diverse. There may be a grain of truth in this, although presumably there is something that unites all these denotations. This “something” is precisely the subject of this article.

It can be undeniably assumed that the issue has in fact been a significant subject of dispute and controversy in the history of philosophy for almost all thinkers of past centuries. Perhaps a certain, albeit rather apparent, simplification lies in examining the primary subject of metaphysics against the backdrop of other sciences, as Aristotle did in *Met.*, book VI, c. 1 (1026a23–32). Given that metaphysics transcends the realm of physical or experimental phenomena, the problem arises of finding a subject unique to itself. Assuming that the subject of physics is the *ens mobile*, of mathematics the *ens quantitative* or *ens numeri*, and of logic the *ens rationis*, what could be identified as utterly distinctive and unequivocal to metaphysics? What is the true domain of metaphysics, and what do we learn through it that physics and mathematics, and even logic, could never achieve? Aristotle himself endeavored to give metaphysics its proper meaning, calling it “first philosophy” or “theology” (*theologia*), which brings to mind certain associations. While the former points to the realm of the first principles of both being and knowledge, the latter is usually attributed to the most intelligent wisdom, which deals with immaterial beings bordering on divinity itself (e.g., God and Angels). However, the question remains as to which term most accurately reflects the scope of metaphysics?

Throughout almost the entire history of philosophy, it has been commonly believed that the primary subject of metaphysics in Aristotle was “being as such” or “the study of being as being,” which corresponds to the Greek term “on” or “to on” (*ens qua ens*; *to on hē(i) on*; *Met.* 1003a21–22). Although Aristotle, in the first books of the *Metaphysics*, described this subject as the study of being as being, this vague phrase posed much controversy in its precise definition and

led to contradictory theories, to be reckoned with from the times of Aristotle, through the Neoplatonists, such as Pseudo-Dionysius, Eriugena, to that of the Arab Neoplatonic-Aristotelian syncretism, to Aquinas, Duns Scotus, the Second Scholasticism, and so forth. Literally taken, “being as being” is a central concept in metaphysics, which means the study of beings insofar as they are beings, and describing the study of being itself through the prism of everything that is real in its existence. In a broader sense, metaphysics aims to demonstrate as its subject the study of “first causes” of being and “that which is not subject to change” (immobile being). The term “*to on hē(i) on*” used by Aristotle was also rendered by the Latin term “*iucunda volumptas*,” meaning the study of things that do not change or that are the first causes, or that which constitutes a true philosophy and ensures a pleasant and worthwhile life. In yet another sense, the meaning of the term “*metaphysica*” was used by Aristotle to refer to the natural philosophy or science of divinity (*theologia*), which was thought to define the primary subject of this science as divine or merely to constitute a part of it. Another term that Aristotle used to describe the subject of metaphysics is “substance” (*ousia*), because being separate, independent, and particular seems to belong exclusively to substances, while matter is neither of these, since its actual existence always depends on form (*eidos* or *morphē*). He then applies the word “substance” to four distinct objects, namely the essence, universal, genus and subject (*substratum*), and he accordingly argues that “substance is that which is not predicated of a subject, but of which all else is predicated” (*Met.*, 1029a1).

The previous is consistent with what follows later on. Aristotle’s argument, therefore, advocated the primacy of form over matter, that is, form understood as substance, and consequently as the essence of a thing: “. . . by form I understand the essence of each thing and its primary substance” (*Met.*, 1032b1). Form thus possesses all the hallmarks that distinguish it, making it primary, and that matter lacks, i.e., separation, and hence can be called a “separate substance” (*xechōristos*). It also exhibits a distinctness that indicates its individuality or particularity, and it has its own existence and essence. Meaning that, in Aristotelian philosophy, *substantia separata* refers to something that can exist independently of other things, as opposed to qualities or accidents. This is a key feature of substance, which Aristotle defines as a concrete, individual “this-something” (*tode ti*) or, in the shorter phrase, “*to ti esti*” (*ti esti*), which literally stands for the “what it is.”¹³

¹³ “Being separable and being a ‘this-something’ seem to belong most of all to substance, and for this reason the form and the product of both would appear to be substance rather than matter” (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, ed. W. D. Ross and J. A. Smith, *The Works of Aristotle* 8

A substance always exists “by itself” and is not parasitic on anything else for its existence, which decisively distinguishes it from accidents or other categories of being attributed to the substance as inherent properties. This contrasts with secondary substances (*deutera ousiai*), such as species and genus, or accidents, which are dependent on the substance and are not “separable” because they cannot exist on their own. More than that, a form can exist in itself and can be separated from substance in two ways: it can be a pattern or imagined model in the mind of an artisan, or it can indicate a cognitively abstracted form (*aphairesis*; Latin *species intelligibilis*), separate from a physical thing.

Aristotle then defined form (*Met.*, 1029b13–14) as the substantial essence of a thing (*to ti ēn einai*), which exists in itself and is not subject to change, but at the same time, form is by itself (Lat. *per se*) the principle of inner change, which is responsible for the movement into matter and gives matter a specific shape and essential features.¹⁴ In turn, in fragment 1035b (*eidōs de legō to ti ēn einai*), Aristotle refers to the expression *to ti en einai*, which may suggest that by the phrase *to ti ēn einai* he understood the form and essence of a thing to be similar to each other. The phrase *ti ēn* also appears in the *First Analytics* (67b12) and the treatise *On the Soul* (429b10), where *ti ēn* is a pronoun asking “what” or “what is it?” and as a question “what is it?” it indicates the essence of being, that is, the essence of what is. Or put another way, it indicates the form or essence of a thing, which may be something abstracted by the intellect or even exist as a separate substance beyond matter. In the *Physics*, he states that the “place for forms” (*topon eidōn*), as Aristotle understood the intellect, has no influence on the physical or essential nature of things known. On the contrary, the intellect can perceive material forms and transform them into intelligible (spiritual) forms, which to some extent pre-exist in things as immanent forms of their matter. In this sense, the intellect is something like an “empty container” without any active influence on the forms and the structure of sensible objects themselves (209a19–22; 209b21; 210b27; 212a1–2, a14–16). On the one hand, the process of knowing the real world must be connected with the act of abstracting essences or forms, which for Aristotle constituted the proper definition of substance in metaphysics (1036a28–29). On the other hand, this

[Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908], 1029a27–30). For more, see Robert W. Sharples, “On Being a Tode Ti in Aristotle and Alexander,” *Méthexis* 12, no. 1 (March 1999): 77–87, <https://doi.org/10.1163/24680974-90000324>; Robert W. Sharples, “Species, Form and Inheritance: Aristotle and After,” in *Aristotle on Nature and Living Things: Philosophical and Historical Studies Presented to David M. Balme on his Seventieth Birthday* (Pittsburgh, PA: Mathesis, 1986), 117–28.

¹⁴ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1029b13–14.

process must involve the dematerialization of material forms adapted to the spiritual nature of the intellect (so-called isomorphic representationalism). Moreover, in the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle holds that material things are not the same as their essences (1037b4–5). This suggests that the true essence of a thing is precisely what its definition indicates, and this always indicates the immaterial form in a thing, not its accidental matter (1036a28–29). The soul or internal form of a given concrete being constitutes its own essence (1043b2–3; 1036a1–2). Therefore, since forms or essences are immaterial by nature, regardless of their connection with matter, only form itself can be an adequate object of intellectual (metaphysical) science, excluding material properties derived from the perception of the external (*sensus externus*) and internal senses (*sensus internus*).¹⁵

For Aristotle, every thing or substance necessarily possesses its essence, because without it it would inevitably lose its natural identity. For essence is most closely reflected in form, there are also accidental properties that categorically relate to the material structure of a given being (e.g., color, shape, location, condition of time, place, etc.). The property of a substance (*symbebēkos*) means “accident” or “that which befalls,” and the phrase *kata symbebēkos* means “in an accidental way” or “coincidentally” and is used to describe accidental causation within a substance. Or, for example, the phrase *aitia symbebēkotos* refers to an accidental cause. This Greek term – which appears sometimes as a noun meaning ‘accident’ and sometimes as an adjective form meaning ‘accidental’ – is used to describe a quality that is not essential to a substance and can either exist or not exist without changing the substance’s fundamental nature. The nature or essence is something completely different from matter, or even its composition with form (*compositum substantiae*), meaning it is something that underlies the existence of a substance, constituting it as a concrete being.

¹⁵ Cf. Boris Hennig, “Form and Function in Aristotle,” *History of Philosophy & Logical Analysis* 23, no. 2 (2020): 317–37, esp. 320–21, <https://doi.org/10.30965/26664275-02302003>. In the Latin Aristotelian tradition, five external senses were distinguished (*quinque sensus externus*): sight (*visus*), hearing (*auditus*), taste (*gustus*), smell (*olfactus*), touch (*tactus*); and five internal senses (*quinque sensus internus*): sensory judgment (*vis aestimativa*), common sense (*sensus communis*), imagination (*phantasia*), memory (*memoria*), and cogitative or judging faculty (*vis cogitativa*). For more, see Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Pars Prima Summae Theologiae: A quaestione L ad quaestionem CXIX*, Opera omnia iussu impensaue Leonis XIII P. M. Edita 5 (Romae: Ex Typographia Polyglotta S. C. de Propaganda Fide, 1889), q. 78, a. 3 (*Utrum convenienter distinguantur quinque sensus exteriores*), pp. 253–55, a. 4 (*Utrum interiores sensus convenienter distinguantur*), pp. 255–57. On the intellect’s activities in the soul, including the Aquinas’s active and potential intellects, see Ibidem, q. 79 (*De potentiis intellectivis*), pp. 258–81. See also John J. Haldane, “Aquinas on Sense-Perception,” *The Philosophical Review* 92, no. 2 (1983): 233–39, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2184927>.

Now, although matter is finite and transient, and therefore subject to change and decay, the essence of things seems to be more permanent and can apparently exist separately from matter after the death of matter or the body. According to this hylomorphic theory, Aristotle believes that the primary subject of metaphysics is in fact the immutable cause of all material changes in the universe, since there must be only one such cause that determines the essential structure of all individual beings and their immutable forms subjectified in them. Aristotle mentions this in Book XII of the *Metaphysics*, where, referring to the theory of the Unmoved Mover (*ho ou kinoumenon kinei*) – which translates to “that which moves without being moved” – as the ultimate object of the soul’s desire and intellectual knowledge, he points to the eternal motion of the cosmos (*kosmos*) or the heaven (*ouranos*), or the whole (*to holon*). Hence, according to Aristotle, man’s natural desire is to acquire knowledge that enables him to know the essence of necessary and imperishable phenomena of the natural realm (*pantes anthrōpoi tou eidenai oregontai fysei*), which would indeed indicate the divine dimension of metaphysics.¹⁶

However, one of the most poignant and deeply troubling aspects of the Aristotelian tradition turns out to be the concept of “separate substances.” This concept has likely been greatly expanded upon by generations of later thinkers who referred to God or Angels in this way, but it undoubtedly has its origins in a theory attributed to Aristotle. If we were to interpret the medieval meaning of “eternity” (*aeternitas*) as a specific term assigned to separate substances, as something existing eternally outside matter (*sempiternity*),¹⁷ it might seem that for Aristotle a separate substance is something that does not participate in earthly matter in any respect. Despite this, in Aristotle’s theory, there is some ambiguity as to whether separate substances are meant to be completely free

¹⁶ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 980a22.

¹⁷ “Sempiternity” is an infinite existence in time (endless or timeless existence), having a beginningless and infinite duration in time. It is often contrasted with the eternity of God, which is timelessness or a form of existence outside of time. The word comes from a contraction of two Latin words meaning ‘always’ (*semper*) and ‘eternal’ (*aeternus*), and the third derivative is intended to indicate something limited by time but infinite. A being endowed with sempiternity exists in all moments of time, which flow sequentially, without end. In some theological theories, God is sometimes described as sempiternal, meaning that He experiences all time without beginning or end, but within its flow, as opposed to being entirely outside of it. For instance, Boethius distinguished the two by saying that humans create time and sempiternity as they pass through the time of which they are a part, while the divine “now” arising from God’s essence is unmoving and stationary, thereby creating eternity within. For more, see Martha Kneale, “Eternity and Sempiternity,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 69, no. 1 (1969): 223–38, <https://doi.org/10.1093/aristotelian/69.1.223>.

from all matter, or merely free from the earthly matter accessible to the senses. For this Greek philosopher, this constitutes a key point in relation to the subject of metaphysics, for he considered the celestial matter of the superlunar world to be of a different kind from the terrestrial matter of the sublunar world, with only the latter subject to generation, corruption and decay. Similarly, Aristotle defined the motions of the stars (heavenly or celestial sphere) as being in “perpetual motion,” considering that in the superlunar sphere no irreversible changes can be observed, only the stellar repetition is distinguishable.

Although Aristotle considered the order of reality, he includes separate substances such as abstracted and cognitive forms of things (*species*) or their essences, which, after all, retain reference to real entities that also bear a separate existence, prescinding the intellect (*extra intellectum*). Even so, his view excludes impossible or self-contradictory entities (non-beings) such as chimera, pegasi or gryphons (Aquinas's interpretation of Dionysian “*to mē on, hanousios*”), presupposing some kind of existence that could be the subject of metaphysics. Accordingly, they are completely excluded from the subject of metaphysics. Aquinas's writing evidently seems to follow the same line and justify a similar position within his philosophical framework. In Aquinas's realistic metaphysics, the question of *ens rationis* refers to a vague area of unreal being, which is not entitled to judgments about the truth of existence, and which lies beyond the direct object of metaphysics and has almost always been excluded from this domain.¹⁸ Since a being of reason or impossible being does not concern reality, it cannot constitute a proper subject of metaphysics. Thomas Aquinas († 1274) probably did not use the phrase *ens rationis* as widely and with the same terms as other Scholastics who followed him (likewise the term *ens reale*, which does not appear explicitly in Thomistic thought). Instead, he usually used the word *res rationis* in many places, emphasizing in particular that a formal approach to truth need not always rely on an adequate relation or correspondence of the intellect to things outside the intellect.¹⁹

¹⁸ See more Matthew K. Miner, “Beyond Non-Being: Thomistic Metaphysics on Second Intentions, *Ens morale*, and *Ens artificiale*,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 91, no. 3 (2017): 353–79, <https://doi.org/10.5840/acpq2017523116>. On the mental object in logic and metaphysics, see Federico Tedesco, “Può l'ente logico essere definito un artefatto mentale (e la disciplina che se ne occupa una tecnica scientifica)? La natura analogica e i limiti epistemici del modello demiurgico di matrice tomista,” in *La dinamica della ricerca: Mozioni et rimozioni nella scienza*, ed. Luca S. Maugeri (Bologna: Pardes Edizioni, 2014), 53–78.

¹⁹ Cf. Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate. Quaestiones 1–7*, Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. Edita, 22/1.2 (Rome: Ad Sanctae Sabinae, 1970), q. 1, a. 1, c.; Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate. Quaestiones 21–29*, Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. Edita, 22/3.1 (Rome: Ad Sanctae Sabinae, 1973), q. 28, a. 6;

Did Aristotle in fact successfully restrict the evanescence of separate substances to concrete entities or their immaterial essences, or should we agree with medieval and Renaissance theologians that they must be conceived in terms of a divine or *supra*-natural being as the ultimate object of metaphysics? All these issues have their roots in both the Neoplatonic and Dionysian traditions, and also hark back to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, where the primary subject and final goal of metaphysics (*finis primae philosophiae*) can be considered the common concept of "being *qua* being" or "*ens commune*," as something completely immutable to be known within the limits of human reasoning. Most likely to the surprise of many modern Thomists who have followed this path, it seems, however, that the subsequent philosophical tradition stemming from scholastic thought, especially the 17th-century Jesuit and post-Cartesian traditions, contributed significantly to the change in this paradigm.

Aquinas's Doctrine of the *Ens Commune*: A General Outline

As indicated, the three prevailing definitions of the most intelligible objects ("... quae maxime intellectualis est. Haec autem est, quae circa maxime intelligibilia versatur"),²⁰ namely those most elevated from matter, correspond to Aristotle's three delineations that mark metaphysics as the first philosophy (*tēn prōtēn philosophian*) or theology (*theologia*), and this is what ultimately safeguards the unity of science.²¹ Consistently, this distinguishes the primary

q. 29, a. 4, ad 12; Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Pars Prima Summae Theologiae: A quaestione I ad quaestionem XLIX*, Opera omnia iussu impensaque Leonis XIII P. M. Edita 4 (Romae: Ex Typographia Polyglotta S. C. de Propaganda Fide, 1888), q. 13, a. 7; Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, ed. M.-R. Cathala (Taurini: Ex Officina Libraria Marietti, 1926), lib. V, lec. IX, n. 897 (hereinafter: *In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*). See also Thomas Osborne, "The Concept as a Formal Sign," *Semiotica* 2010, no. 179 (2010): 1–21, esp. 11–12, <https://doi.org/10.1515/semi.2010.015>; Miner, "Beyond Non-Being," 353–79.

²⁰ *In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, Prooemium S. Thomae, p. 1. For English translation, see Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, trans. John P. Rowan (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1961), Prooemium, pp. 1–2.

²¹ In this context, this explorative study is worth recommending: Jan A. Aertsen, "Why is Metaphysics Called 'First Philosophy' in the Middle Ages?," in *The Science of Being as Being: Metaphysical Investigations*, ed. Gregory T. Doolan, Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 53–69; Gregory T. Doolan, "Aquinas on Separate Substances and the Subject Matter of Metaphysics," *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 22 (2011): 347–82; Stephen D.

subject of metaphysics from other sciences, which in no way undertake to investigate the most general concept of being as being, as Aquinas aptly states:

For none of them determines about being simply, that is, about being in general, nor even about any particular being as a being. Just as arithmetic does not determine about number as a being, but as a number. For it is proper for metaphysics to consider about any being as a being.²²

Metaphysics, therefore, as the first philosophy, is either the demonstration of the first causes, or it is the consideration of being *qua* being and the properties essentially held by it, or finally, it could rightly be called theology since it deals with what is most immaterial and divine, such as causes and separate substances, insofar as such things are the furthest from matter.²³ The term “first philosophy” was likely coined by Aristotle to describe a knowledge that scientifically abstracts from the matter that is primarily dealt with by lower sciences such as physics and other natural sciences.²⁴ Aristotle’s intention seems to have been to model the highest form of knowledge on immutable and separate substances, encompassing all rational inquiry which is the way to study nature and the entire universe. However, for Aristotle himself, God and the Angels, although they are immaterial and may fall within the scope of metaphysical inquiry, they are still not the main subject of demonstration in this science.²⁵

Dumont, “Scotus’s Doctrine of Univocity and the Medieval Tradition of Metaphysics,” in *Was ist Philosophie im Mittelalter?*, ed. Jan A. Aertsen and Andreas Speer (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1998), 193–212, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110801453.1931>.

²² “Nulla enim earum determinat de ente simpliciter, idest de ente in communi, nec etiam de aliquo particulari ente inquantum est ens. Sicut arithmetica non determinat de numero inquantum est ens, sed inquantum est numerus. De quolibet enim ente inquantum est ens, proprium est metaphysici considerare” (*In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, lib. VI, lec. 1, n. 1147, p. 351).

²³ “. . . all causes must be eternal, but especially these; for they are the causes that operate on so much of the divine as appears to us. There must, then, be three theoretical philosophies, mathematics, physics, and what we may call theology, since it is obvious that if the divine is present anywhere, it is present in things of this sort. And the highest science must deal with the highest genus” (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, b. IV, 1026a17–22); “. . . if there is no substance other than those which are formed by nature, natural science will be the first science; but if there is an immovable substance, the science of this must be prior and must be first philosophy, and universal in this way, because it is first. And it will belong to this to consider being *qua* being – both what it is and the attributes which belong to it *qua* being” (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1026a26–33).

²⁴ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, b. IV, 1026a10 sqq.

²⁵ See Peter Furlong, “Reason in Context: The Latin Avicenna and Aquinas on the Relationship between God and the Subject of Metaphysics,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic*

Hence, following Aristotle himself, and the preceding approaches to this subject, presumably Arabic ones, in the *Commentary on Metaphysics*, Aquinas concludes that what truly constitutes the foremost subject of metaphysics are those most intelligible objects (*maxime intelligibilia*), which should be considered in the most universal manner, such as of genus, species, and above all, those separate substances, though not entirely discernible substances, that transcend all species, differentiations, multiplicity, and composition of act and potency, integrating being as a whole.²⁶ Knowledge of these most universal objects would then be binding for understanding the entire range of being, and the science that deals with them should obligatorily bear the hallmarks of *scientia transcendens* or *scientia communis*. Since this science concerns the uppermost category of immaterial being separated from transient matter, but grasped in the intellect as *genus omnium supremum*, and in doing so the primary subject of metaphysics would become the being as common as possible to all its denominations, to all its predications and so forth, namely *ens commune* itself.

As Predrag Milidrag remarked,²⁷ although the concept of “being” is common to all created things and although it is modeled on the generic concept, being would not be a genus, because accordingly it must transcend all genera

Philosophical Association 83 (2009): 129–40, <https://doi.org/10.5840/acpaprocc200983111>; Nathan Poage, “The Subject and Principles of Metaphysics in Avicenna and Aquinas,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 86 (2012): 231–43, <https://doi.org/10.5840/acpaprocc20128618>; Joseph Owens, “Existential Act, Divine Being, and the Subject of Metaphysics,” *The New Scholasticism* 37 (1963): 359–63; Joseph Owens, “Aquinas as Aristotelian Commentator,” in *St. Thomas Aquinas on the Existence of God: Collected Papers of Joseph Owens, C.S.R.* Ed. John R. Catan (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1980), 1–19; Rudi te Velde, *Aquinas on God. The ‘Divine Science’ of the Summa Theologiae*, Ashgate Studies in the History of Philosophical Theology (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

²⁶ “Quamvis autem subjectum hujus scientiæ sit ens commune, dicitur tamen tota de his quæ sunt separata a materia secundum esse et rationem. Quia secundum esse et rationem separari dicuntur, non solum illa quæ nunquam in materia esse possunt, sicut Deus et intellectuales substantiæ, sed etiam illa qua possunt sine materia esse, sicut ens commune. Hoc tamen non contingeret, si a materia secundum esse dependerent.” (*In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, Prooemium S. Thomæ, p. 2). See also James C. Doig, *Aquinas on Metaphysics: A Historico-Doctrinal Study of the Commentary on the Metaphysics* (The Hague: M. Nijhof, 1972).

²⁷ Cf. Predrag Milidrag, “Thomas Aquinas on the Subject of the Metaphysics,” *Theoria, Beograd* 59, no. 1 (2016): 42–58, <https://doi.org/10.2298/theoria601037m>. For more, see also Leo J. Elders, *The Metaphysics of Being of St. Thomas Aquinas in a Historical Perspective* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993); Marco Forlivesi, “Approaching the Debate on the Subject of Metaphysics from the Later Middle Ages to the Early Modern Age: The Ancient and Medieval Antecedents,” *Medioevo* 34 (2009): 9–60; Philip-Neri Reese, “Separate Substances

and species, though not in the sense of an individual being above them, but in the sense of being common to all of them (*communis*) – common to all denominations of beings, things, creatures, etc. The corollary of this is that the category of “being” in Aquinas does not refer to any subjective or singular determination of being, since there is nothing particular that can be common to all things except something outrightly analogous to unity (*analogia entis*). Hence, such unity of being must always be analogical, proportionally attributed to all its components, referring to everything that falls within the scope of the concept of being in general.

However, it would not be impermissible to disagree with the above, I believe, especially since Aquinas himself suggests a completely contrasting way of interpreting such an “ephemeral” concept as *ens commune*, which actually is, and which truly appears, as a kind of guise or “fiction” applied in order to grasp being in the most universal and extensional way. I would venture to assume that at least two of his commentaries provide conclusive premises that do not depart sharply from the likely assumption that *ens commune* is indeed a cognitive concept of the intellect (*ens cognitum*) with the characteristics of a genus, and perhaps the highest genus encompassing everything (*genus omnium supremum*) that falls within the sphere of reflection on being, both that which stands for being *secundum esse* and that which stands for being *secundum rationem* (“... tota de his quæ sunt separata a materia secundum esse et rationem”²⁸). Taking into account the fairly common belief that *ens commune* is not a genus, such a view would be quite limiting for this science, for in the *Commentary on Metaphysics*, Aquinas maintains nearly the opposite opinion and even extends the concept of *ens commune* to super-genus, which may really pose certain inaccuracies in prevalent assessments of his approach. Following Aristotle, he holds that what is indeed separated from matter is the subject of metaphysics, which to some extent must resemble the genus of everything that relates to reality of material and immaterial nature of things, although it is itself immaterial:

... consequently, it must be the office of one and the same science to consider separate substances and being in general (*ens commune*) which is the genus of which the separate substances mentioned above are the common and universal causes. ... For the subject of a science is the genus whose causes and properties we seek, and not the causes themselves of the particular genus studied,

and the Principles of Being as Being: Aquinas's (†1274) Aporia and Flandrensis's (†1479) Answer,” *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 31 (2020): 383–416.

²⁸ *In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, Prooemium S. Thomae, p. 2.

because the knowledge of the causes of some genus is the goal to which the investigation of the science attains.²⁹

Accordingly, the separate substances, though conceived as immaterial natures or causes, become the object of metaphysics, constituting the common and universal subject of being in general or being as being.³⁰ One could even assume that this indicates a clear conditioning of materiality by immateriality, which subtly connects the seen realm with the unseen realm on the border of *ens commune*. Moreover, everything within the scope of this science, which is itself immaterial and unseen, always refers to the emergence of an *ens commune*, as something essentially invisible, and exclusively perceptible by means of intellectual insight into its very nature. In other words, metaphysical speculative knowledge of something as ephemeral as “common being” should always predicate objects whose nature can be confirmed as being separated from matter at the greatest distance, that is, with respect to both the *ratio entis* itself and the *esse essentiae* itself, which together constitute something universal for the intellect’s apprehension, but not singular or individual at all. They are only cognitively perceptible (*in cognoscendo*) at the level of the second or even – as it were – the third intention of the intellect, namely the *supra*-transcendental approach which puts forth an apparent concept that combines both the materiality and immateriality of whole being in one intellectual realm.

When Aquinas invokes the *ens commune*, he does so together with separate substances, though at the same time he seems to understand the separate substances otherwise. Rather, the *ens commune* and separate substances are considered in terms of the formality of a single universal cause. Thus, at one time he denotes the *ens commune* as a genus pertaining to everything, at another time he explicitly states that the *ens commune* is the proper and primary subject of metaphysics. Nevertheless, when he further distinguishes between the *ens commune* and separate substances, he argues that separate substances are never contained in matter, while the *ens commune* is something that exists completely without matter. Moreover, if it is exactly as John F. Wippel confirms

²⁹ In *Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, Prooemium S. Thomae, p. 1.

³⁰ See John F. Wippel, “Thomas Aquinas and Siger of Brabant on Being and the Science of Being as Being,” *The Modern Schoolman* 82, no. 2 (2005): 143–68, <https://doi.org/10.5840/schoolman200582216>. Wippel’s complementary studies are worth recommending: John F. Wippel, “Metaphysics and ‘Separatio’ According to Thomas Aquinas,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 31, no. 3 (1978): 431–70; John F. Wippel, “Thomas Aquinas and Participation,” in *Studies in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. John F. Wippel (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1987), 117–58.

in his works, that *ens commune* has the same extent as *esse commune*, as the below lines in *De Divinis Nominibus* may indeed suggest (cap. V, lec. 2, n. 655, 660), then evidently the Angels, who owe their existence to God the Creator, must be incorporated among *esse commune*, meaning this in terms of possessing existence (*esse*), regardless of whether one considers it spiritual or intellectual.

That said, it seems to me that the question of “abstraction” or “separation,” which does not pertain necessarily to the same operation, may be decisive in establishing the definition of *ens commune*. For in *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, Aquinas describes two ways in which the principles constituting a genus are distinguished, namely, as a supergenus common to all beings. He holds that just as each particular genus has certain common principles that extend to all the principles of that particular genus, so all beings, insofar as they participate in being, have certain principles that are common principles to all beings.³¹ Following Avicenna, he argues that these principles can indeed be called common in two ways: (1) “by predication” (*uno modo per praedicationem*), where a form or genus is common to all the forms of what is predicated because it is predicated of each thing; (2) “by causality” (*alio modo per causalitatem*), when something is one principle for all, as, for example, the sun is numerically one principle for all things that can come into being. From this follows – as Aquinas asserts – that it is possible to distinguish common principles of all beings not only according to the first method of separation which Aristotle gives in *Metaphysics* (Book XI), so that identical principles are assigned to all beings by way of derived analogy *per praedicationem*, but also that it is possible to define the common principle of beings (*ens commune*) according to the second method of demonstration *per causalitatem*. Indeed, this second method leads consequently to the emergence of the coherent definition of the main subject of metaphysics, which is invariably the common being and the divine being at once, understood as the most distant from matter on the plane of separate substances:

But there are common principles of all beings not only according to the first way, which the Philosopher calls in Book XI of the *Metaphysics* that all beings have the same principles according to analogy, but also according to the second way, that certain things existing numerically the same are principles of all

³¹ Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, “Super Boetium De Trinitate,” in *Super Boetium De Trinitate: Expositio libri Boetii De ebdomadibus*, Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. Edita 50 (Rome: Commissio Leonina; Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1992) (or earlier edition: Sancti Thomae de Aquino, *Expositio super Librum Boethii De Trinitate*, ed. Bruno Decker, Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters 4 [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965]), pars III, q. 5, a. 4., co. 2 sqq. (hereinafter: *Super Boetium De Trinitate*).

things, namely insofar as the principles of accidents are reduced to principles of substances, and the principles of corruptible substances are reduced to incorruptible substances, and therefore in a certain degree and order all beings are reduced to certain principles. And since that which is the principle of being for all things must be the greatest being, as said in *Metaphysics* II, therefore such principles must be the most complete and for this reason they must be the most actual, so that they have nothing or the least potency, because act is prior and more powerful than potency, as said in *Metaphysics* IX. And for this reason they must be without matter, which is in potency, and without motion, which is the act of that which exists in. And such are divine things; for if divinity exists anywhere, it is in an immaterial and immovable nature, as is said in *Metaphysics* VI.³²

On this basis, one might reasonably argue that *ens commune* falls into one of these two methods. Personally, I favor the second method (*modo per causalitatem*), which allows for the metaphysical extraction of the *ens commune* by means of the separation of causes, that is, by applying abstraction to the analogy of immaterial causes inherent in all things. This seems to stem from the premise that only abstraction, by which physics and mathematics can be distinguished from metaphysics, should lead to the proof of the existence of superior separate substances, such as the Intelligences that move the heavenly spheres and the “Unmoved Mover” of Aristotelian theology from the “Lambda” book of *Metaphysics*, namely “that which moves without being moved” (*ho ou kinoumenon kinei*).³³ The very proof of separate and immaterial substances transcends our intellect to higher spheres of abstraction, raising human being from the corporeal and sensory level to the level of the intelligent soul elevated

³² “Omnium autem entium sunt principia communia non solum secundum primum modum, quod appellat philosophus in XI metaphysicae omnia entia habere eadem principia secundum analogiam, sed etiam secundum modum secundum, ut sint quaedam res eadem numero existentes omnium rerum principia, prout scilicet principia accidentium reducuntur in principia substantiae et principia substantiarum corruptibilium reducuntur in substantias incorruptibiles, et sic quodam gradu et ordine in quaedam principia omnia entia reducuntur. Et quia id, quod est principium essendi omnibus, oportet esse maxime ens, ut dicitur in II metaphysicae, ideo huiusmodi principia oportet esse completissima, et propter hoc oportet ea esse maxime actu, ut nihil vel minimum habeant de potentia, quia actus est prior et potior potentia, ut dicitur in IX metaphysicae. Et propter hoc oportet ea esse absque materia, quae est in potentia, et absque motu, qui est actus existentis in potentia. Et huiusmodi sunt res divinae; quia si divinum alicubi existit, in tali natura, immateriali scilicet et immobili, maxime existit, ut dicitur in VI metaphysicae.” (*Super Boetium De Trinitate*, pars III, q. 5, a. 4, co. 2).

³³ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1074a38–b14.

from materiality, which means the same as thinking in terms of immaterial causes, unseen transcendentals and divine principles of being. This application of the proper method of abstraction in metaphysics is deliberately used to demonstrate perceptible and main attributes of separate substances, such as “immateriality,” “being in act,” “indivisibility,” “inalterability,” “absolute unity,” and “univocity” which must indeed be prioritized in the demonstration of the *ens commune* and in proportion to the human mind. The last seems to be necessary insofar as Angels also have a connatural object of their own cognition and knowledge of causes, though without pursuing any way of abstraction. It follows, in turn, that the proof of the existence of any separate substances can only begin with proving the existence of *ens commune*, because separate substances, not *ens commune* itself, somehow constitute an analogous structure for abstract inquiry to obtain the causality of entire being depicted in Aristotle’s doctrine. Therefore, the second mode of abstraction (*modo per causalitatem*) seems to be the most perfect way of distinguishing commonality in all kinds of beings with respect to their causes, not only their names or denotations (*secundum dici*), which ultimately meet at the level of *ens commune*, but also not merely with respect to the ways of predicating about them, which, on the contrary, could be a vain course. One could even venture to say that the closer a human being arrives at the *ens commune* in separation, the closer he arrives at the Divine Intellect, which may also mean that the closer we are to the Divine Intellect, the more obvious the subject of metaphysics becomes. So, as to the two modes of abstraction, that is *per praedicationem* and *per causalitatem*, these intellectual operations must not be misunderstood, but taken to be some sort of unified process, within which they can act interdependently to some extent, but ultimately the latter process should be the leading one in metaphysics. However, I strongly lean toward the position that while there are various types of abstraction (physical, mathematical, metaphysical, and even logical), there is the one universal abstraction inherent to sciences that are closer to matter, and then, above them, there is the one total *separatio* proper to metaphysics, ascending above all sciences. While other sciences remain in the domain of universal abstraction, the *separatio* permits the separation of all abstract objects and essential principles, and then raises our knowledge to a higher level of intellectual understanding. The passage from Aquinas’s *In De anima* may point to these specific relationships and the distinction between them, which seems relevant in making the final argument for *ens commune* in Aquinas’s metaphysics. The same applies to the metaphysics of Aristotle and similar metaphysical approaches, which are established in the same vein. *Ens commune* seems to be a univocal concept in relation to all kinds of beings, but

with the provision that this univocity also applies to real beings and beings of reason, uniting them on a higher level in a super-genus, but not beyond this limit. Therefore, although the other sciences differ in terms of the respective subject-matter peculiar to them and their distinct essential principles, yet *ens commune* – which is separation from everything and all sciences, including motion and change, place and position, and even intelligible concepts, etc. – seems to be a universal notion for them all.

And it should be noted that the entire reason for the division of philosophy is based on definition and the method of defining. The reason for this is that definition is the principle of demonstrating things, and things are defined by essentials. Hence, different definitions of things demonstrate different essential principles, from which one science differs from another.³⁴

Departing from the main topic for a moment, but striving to make it more precise, I devote the following few paragraphs to the issue of abstraction and in what context it should be understood in Aquinas. There are basically three types of abstraction in the sciences, and this tripartite division is considered indisputable by scholars.

The sources of three basic degrees of abstraction should primarily be sought in Aristotle's division of sciences that stems from the *Metaphysics* and diverse abstracting lens in his *On the Soul*³⁵. Aristotle's position on the intellect's

³⁴ "Et notandum quod tota ratio divisionis philosophiae sumitur secundum definitionem et modum definiendi. Cuius ratio est, quia definitio est principium demonstrationis rerum, res autem definiuntur per essentialia. Unde diversae definitiones rerum diversa principia essentialia demonstrant, ex quibus una scientia differt ab alia" (Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Sentencia Libri De Anima*, Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. Edita, 45/1 [Rome: Commissio Leonina; Paris: J. Vrin, 1984], lib. I, lec. 2, n. 24s; under n. 14 in Textum Taurini, 1959).

³⁵ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, b. VI, 1025b18–1026a24; b. IX, 1064a15–b4. Cf. Aristotle, *The Physics*, with an English Translation, trans. Philip H. Wicksteed and Francis M. Cornford, 2 vols. (London: William Heinemann; New York: G.P. Putnam, 1929), vol. I, b. II, ch. 2, pp. 116–26, 193b22–194b15; Aristotle, *On the Soul, Parva Naturalia, On Breath*, trans. W. S. Hett (London: William Heinemann; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935), b. I, sec. I, pp. 8–19, 402a1–403b20. On what constitutes the unity of a science, see *Aristotle's Prior and Posterior Analytics: A Revised Text*, with a comment. by W. D. Ross, with an introduction by W. D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 247–48, b. I, ch. 28, 87a38–87b1 (Greek text). For the division of abstractions, see Ludger Oeing-Hanhoff, "Abstraktionsgrade," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 1 (Basel: Schwabe, 1971), 65; Jacques Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, trans. Lewis Galantière and Gerald B. Phelan (New York: Pantheon, 1948), 35–40; Jacques Maritain, *Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Imelda C. Byrne (New York: Philosophical Library, 1951), 12–33; Jacques Maritain,

operation in the process of abstraction (thinking or reasoning), proposed in section 429a13–18 of the treatise *On the Soul* and discussed in greater detail in chapters 4 to 8 of Book III, indicates that thinking consists of the passive reception of forms, where the intellect is a passive faculty or receptive ability, capable of receiving forms impressed on the intellect like a seal on wax. According to Aristotle's definition in section 429a27–29, the intellect is more of a "place for forms" (*topon eidōn*) than a creator of them, and, moreover, said intellect does not possess a formed nature of its own (*physin mēdemian*).³⁶ In a sense, it would be appropriate to say that the intellect, as the cognitive faculty of the rational soul, does not move by itself, but only under the influence of the reception (abstraction) of forms, i.e., passive forms, and then, due to the actively productive function of dianoetic cognition (*dianoia*), it knows all forms. The term *dianoeisthai* (thinking, having in mind), which Aristotle in the *On the Soul* applies to discursive thinking by means of concepts in opposition to *noein* (imagination) and *aisthēsis* (sensory-aesthetic perception), is the exclusive activity of the cognizing intellect (408b3, b9, b14, b25; 427b13; 429a23).³⁷ In the *Metaphysics*, he also compares the process of discursive thinking to a more logical activity or method of combining and separating, by means of which the intellect strives for the cognitive unity of the object (*hen ti*) or the singularity of the object of knowledge (1027b23–25).³⁸

Accordingly, the distinction between the three levels of abstraction comes down to physics, mathematics and metaphysics, the latter of which was the climax of this division, and this whole theory was valid until the 16th century. The primary subject of physics has been considered to be "mobile being" (*ens*

The Degrees of Knowledge, vol. 7 of *The Collected Works of Jacques Maritain*, ed. Ralph McInerney, trans. Gerald B. Phelan (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999) (This is a translation from the first French edition of *Distinguer pour unir, ou Les degrés du savoir* from 1932).

³⁶ For more, see Kurt Pritzl, "The Place of Intellect in Aristotle," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 80 (2006): 57–75, esp. 57–60, <https://doi.org/10.5840/acpapro20068015>; Deborah K. W. Modrak, "The Nous-Body Problem in Aristotle," *Review of Metaphysics* 44, no. 4 (1991): 755–74; Victor Caston, "Aristotle's Two Intellects: A Modest Proposal," *Phronesis* 44, no. 3 (1999): 199–227, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685289960500033>; Lloyd P. Gerson, "The Unity of Intellect in Aristotle's *De Anima*," *Phronesis* 49, no. 4 (2004): 348–73, <https://doi.org/10.1163/1568528043067005>; Caleb Murray Cohoe, "Nous in Aristotle's *De Anima*," *Philosophy Compass* 9, no. 9 (2014): 594–604, <https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12156>.

³⁷ See Adriana Renero, "Nous and Aisthēsis: Two Cognitive Faculties in Aristotle," *Méthexis* 26, no. 1 (2013): 103–20, <https://doi.org/10.1163/24680974-90000616>.

³⁸ Pritzl, "The Place of Intellect in Aristotle," 61–62.

mobile), a being subject to motion or change. Physics abstractly rises above only individual entities and properties of corporeal substances, but nevertheless still remains connected to corporeal and sensible matter.³⁹ In turn, mathematics was treated as a real science in the Middle Ages, but although it is considered as a way of abstracting from things similar to physics, it is understood as a separate type of knowledge and posits a different type of abstraction. The subject of mathematics is then “quantitative being” (*ens quantitative* or *ens principium numeri*). The abstraction procedure of this type assumes quantitative methods, so by means of abstraction it apprehends the relations between objects and their properties as being expressed in a numerical way⁴⁰. Nevertheless, mathematics, which goes beyond the sensible matter, including that of individuals and their properties, does not find the application of its approach at the level of intentional beings. Mathematics is incapable of abstracting objective being from formal being, while the former is the second order of existence for things. Subsequently, the subject of metaphysics was assumed to be “being as being” (*ens qua ens*), that is, something that is the object of knowledge furthest from matter, without ceasing to be a real or transcendental being by nature. Francisco Suárez († 1617) extended this by emphasizing its reality with the term “*ens in quantum ens reale*.”⁴¹ It should therefore be rightly distinguished that in the

³⁹ “Quia liber physicorum, cuius expositioni intendimus, est primus liber scientiae naturalis, in eius principio oportet assignare quid sit materia et subiectum scientiae naturalis. Sciendum est igitur quod, cum omnis scientia sit in intellectu, per hoc autem aliquid fit intelligibile in actu, quod aliquantulum abstrahitur a materia; secundum quod aliqua diversimode se habent ad materiam, ad diversas scientias pertinent. Rursus, cum omnis scientia per demonstrationem habeatur, demonstrationis autem medium sit definitio; necesse est secundum diversum definitionis modum scientias diversificari” (Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Commentaria in octo libros Physicorum Aristotelis*, Opera omnia iussu impensaque Leonis XIII P. M. Edita 2 [Rome: Ex Typographia Polyglotta S. C. de Propaganda Fide, 1884], lib. I, lec. 1, a. 1, n. 1); “Sciendum est igitur quod quaedam sunt quorum esse dependet a materia, nec sine materia definiri possunt: quaedam vero sunt quae licet esse non possint nisi in materia sensibili, in eorum tamen definitione materia sensibilis non cadit. Et haec differunt ad invicem sicut curvum et simum. Nam simum est in materia sensibili, et necesse est quod in eius definitione cadat materia sensibilis, est enim simum nasus curvus; et talia sunt omnia naturalia, ut homo, lapis: curvum vero, licet esse non possit nisi in materia sensibili, tamen in eius definitione materia sensibilis non cadit” (Ibidem, n. 2).

⁴⁰ “. . . et talia sunt omnia mathematica, ut numeri, magnitudines et figurae. Quedam vero sunt quae non dependent a materia nec secundum esse nec secundum rationem; vel quia nunquam sunt in materia, . . .” (Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Commentaria in octo libros Physicorum Aristotelis*, lib. I, lec. 1, a. 1, n. 2).

⁴¹ See Ralf Darge, “Ens in quantum ens: Die Erklärung des Subjekts der Metaphysik bei F. Suárez,” *Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie médiévales* 66, no. 2 (1999): 335–61.

traditional scholastic understanding the intellect uses three basic types of abstraction in cognition: physical, mathematical and metaphysical.

The interpretation of these three levels over the centuries has been discussed mainly by St. Thomas Aquinas, who addresses this issue in four treatises, reducing all three levels of abstraction to two cognitive orders, i.e. the *secundum diversum definitionis modum scientias diversificari*⁴². He argues that knowledge arises through the abstraction of intellect from matter, which can occur on three levels of abstraction with respect to two orders of existence: that which presupposes reality and that which is based solely on reasoning above than anything else.⁴³ Of the three mentioned, this specific division into the first and second abstraction seems to be the most justified in terms of the scope to which the knowing intellect refers, because the intellect knows either through an act relating directly to existence (*secundum esse*) or to the structure of signification (*secundum dici*), which always constitutes a second order of things. The first type of abstraction is therefore an abstraction of the intellect's formal intention, while the second is an objective representation of the intellect. Each of these has cognitive value and represents a specific stage in scientific cognition. In the 16th century, Suárez would also speak of the way in which the soul cognizes reality by performing metaphysical pairing, and then cognizes the abstracted object in the intellect (*animo tamen separantur et cogitatione*). Hence, for St. Thomas, knowledge arises more as a result of the adaptation of the knowing faculty, i.e., the intellect, to the thing known, than to the sensible substance (*quod scientia*

⁴² Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Commentaria in octo libros Physicorum Aristotelis*, lib. I, lec. 1, a. 1, n. 2, 3. See also Joseph Owens, "Metaphysical Separation in Aquinas," *Mediaeval Studies* 34 (1972): 287–306, <https://doi.org/10.1484/j.ms.2.306115>.

⁴³ "Patet ergo quod triplex est abstractio, qua intellectus abstrahit. Prima quidem secundum operationem secundam intellectus, qua componit et dividit. Et sic intellectum abstrahere nihil est aliud hoc non esse in hoc. Abstrahere vero secundum aliam operationem intellectus nihil est aliud quam intelligere quid est hoc sine intellectu alicuius, quod est ei in esse rei coniunctum, quandoque quidem coniunctione formae ad materiam vel accidentis ad subiectum" (*Super Boetium De Trinitate*, pars III, q. 5, a. 3, c. 2); "Et sic omnis scientia humanus intellectus speculativus a materia abstrahit, cum a materia abstrahit, cum intellectus non sit nisi universalium. Alio modo consideratur materia absque dimensionibus designatis. Et sic Scibilia ergo sunt trium. Quaedam quidem Quaedam ergo speculabilium sunt separata quae non dependent a materia et motu secundum esse. Et de his est scientia divina sive theologia vel metaphysica, quae est philosophia prima. Quaedam vero dependent" (Ibidem, c. 3). For more, see Armand Maurer, "Introduction," in *The Division and Method of Sciences: Questiones V and VI of his Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius*, 4th Revised, trans. and annot., with an introduction, by Armand Maurer (Toronto: The Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1986), VIII–XLI, esp. XXIII–XXVII.

est assimilatio scientis ad rem scitam).⁴⁴ St. Thomas discusses abstraction in the context of the division of sciences in the following works: *Summa theologiae*,⁴⁵ *In super librum Boetium De Trinitate*,⁴⁶ *In VIII libros Physicorum Aristotelis*,⁴⁷ *In XII libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis*,⁴⁸ and *De cognitione essentiae animae*.⁴⁹ Aquinas's interpretation of the three degrees of abstraction will later be referred to by Cardinal Cajetan († 1534) in one of his most important works, *In De ente et essentia D. Thomae Aquinatis commentaria*. Cajetan, by additionally supplementing this doctrine with the division into "total" and "formal" abstraction, will mainly deepen the meaning of metaphysical abstraction itself⁵⁰.

Returning to the univocity of *ens commune*, which should be of a broader scope than just that of the concept of real being, one may encounter some ambiguity in its further interpretation, depending on works of Aquinas we take into account in our research. Aquinas does indeed refer to being as a genus (e.g. "... ens commune, quod est genus"⁵¹), but in other places he treats *ens* in an ambiguous sense. For example, he argues explicitly that *ens* is not a genus in both the *Summa theologiae*⁵² and *Summa contra Gentiles*.⁵³ The most likely reason for this confusion is that in each of these places he treats both the *ens*

⁴⁴ *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, pars III, q. 5, a. 3, c. 1.

⁴⁵ Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Summa theologiae I^a*, q. 85, a. 1, ad. 1–5.

⁴⁶ *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, pars III, q. 5, a. 3, c. 1.

⁴⁷ Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Commentaria in octo libros Physicorum Aristotelis*, lib. I, lec. 1 et passim.

⁴⁸ "Postquam philosophus ostendit de quibus sit consideratio huius scientiae, hic comparat istam scientiam ad alias. Et circa hoc tria facit. Primo ostendit quid sit proprium particularium scientiarum. Secundo ostendit differentiam particularium scientiarum adinvicem, ibi, quoniam autem est quaedam. Tertio comparat istam ad alias, ibi, quoniam autem est quaedam entis scientia. Circa primum duo facit, secundum duo, quae dicit pertinere ad particulares scientias. Dicit ergo primo, quod omnis scientia particularis quaerit aliqua principia et causas, circa proprium scibile quod sub ipsa continetur. Dicit autem – aliqua principia et causas, – quia non omnis scientia considerat omne genus causae" (*In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, lib. XI, lec. 7, a. 2247).

⁴⁹ Leonard A. Kennedy, "The Soul's Knowledge of Itself: An Unpublished Work Attributed to St. Thomas Aquinas," *Vivarium* 15, no. 1 (1977): 31–45, arg. 22.

⁵⁰ Caietani Thomas de Vio, *In De ente et essentia D. Thomae Aquinatis Commentaria*, ed. Marie-Hyacinthe Laurent (Taurini: Marietti, 1934), Prooemium, n. 5. For more in Caietani, see Pier Paolo Ruffinengo, "Astrazione, separazione, fondazione, della metafisica," *Annali Chieresi* 2 (1986): 25–63.

⁵¹ *In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, Prooemium S. Thomae, p. 1.

⁵² Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Summa theologiae I^a*, q. 3, a. 5 co.

⁵³ Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Summa contra Gentiles*, Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. Edita 15 (Rome: Apud Sedem Commissionis Leoninae; Typis Riccardi Garroni, 1930), lib. I, cap. 25, n. 6.

and *ens commune* slightly differently, but above all, a clearer premise may be that the concept of “genus” must indeed assume numerous variations and the differentiations of the remaining genera of other beings. The *ens commune* itself is a univocal notion, unifying the distinguished features and principles of all beings into single general concept. This may be the reason for these apparent discrepancies. To my mind, when Aquinas speaks of common being (*ens commune*) calling it a genus in the *Commentary on Metaphysics*, although this sounds suspicious and ambiguously, it is actually to be understood in a sense that assumes a basic definition of genus as something that actually groups all the features, principles, concepts, genera and species of beings in a manner of analogy that is rather proportionally adapted to the knowing intellect (*ad intellectum*) than merely in relation to things or entities accessible to senses. Thus, while *universal abstraction* would have to precede the demonstration of the existence of immaterial beings or separate substances, the next step would be moving beyond universal abstraction and applying the idea of *total separation*, in order to rise above all beings and their concepts to the most general of them all, to beings even more universal than separate substances themselves, from which one would also have to separate oneself.

The very fact that the *ens commune* is being abstracted within metaphysics may indicate that we are dealing with a different and superior type of abstraction than that of physics or mathematics, namely, a super-abstraction, a certain kind of total separation from the entire universe of existents and other essences. If this were the case, then such a ephemeral concept of metaphysics would contain everything and nothing at once, because only the concept of *ens commune* would remain, omitting all possible distinctions, differences of species and genera, all motion, change, matter, physical realm, even the realm of the invisible, spiritual world, insofar as the latter also possesses its essential order, causes, and principles, from which a similar super-abstraction or total separation must be attained in order to achieve the *ens commune* itself. In any case, regarding the necessity of abstraction, at least one assumption remains valid. The very proof of the existence of immaterial beings, such as separate substances, including those pertaining to Intelligences or Angels, as well as to God, must be made almost at the very beginning of metaphysics in order to proceed forward, although this proof is not sufficient to reveal the foremost subject of metaphysics in the form of *ens commune*. It seems more likely that at the very starting point of metaphysics, that is, once we have abstracted from material, sensual properties, and corporeal beings, and then from immaterial and spiritual ones, there remain many questions to be resolved before we reach the very *ens commune* itself (e.g. those of the highly spiritual or mystical kind).

Perhaps one could say that proving separate and immaterial substances is a requisite process, at least at the first stage of this path, to direct human attention toward the inner life of the soul, but it is certainly not an ending and not an exhaustive investigative procedure capable of addressing all the doubts and questions that still remain. Apparently, metaphysics is a kind of spiritual path or explicitly the intellectual path of the soul leading towards its proper object, culminating in communion in the realm of separate substances, immaterial Intelligences, Angels and the like, and finally, to a certain extent, in the realm of God himself. Aquinas put it quite bluntly in the *De veritate*, bringing the authority of Holy Scripture into force:

. . . it must be said that Augustine speaks of the truth which is exemplified by the divine mind itself in our mind, as the likeness of a face is reflected in a mirror; and such truths, which flow from the first truth in our souls, are many, as has been said. Or it must be said that the first truth in a certain sense concerns the genus of the soul, taking genus broadly, according to which all intelligible or incorporeal things are considered to belong to one genus, as is said in Acts, XVII, 28: "For we are indeed the offspring of God."⁵⁴

Proceeding then to the immateriality of *ens commune*, which is abstracted from material beings, it should be underlined that it cannot be reduced to merely those things that are strictly transient and equivalent to materiality. For every material thing can be considered as if it possessed its own materiality by means of its own immaterial causes. Hence, the *ens commune*, though itself immaterial and non-individual, in this sense would contain within it all things that can refer to and be predicated of both materiality and immateriality of all beings; inasmuch as the *ens commune* transcends the entire realm and then encompasses within itself the material and immaterial beings, transcending them all in the end. As Aquinas states in his *Commentary on Boethius's De Trinitate*, the *ens commune* is that which can exist separately from matter and motion, because

⁵⁴ "Ad octavum dicendum, quod Augustinus loquitur de veritate quae est exemplata ab ipsa mente divina in mente nostra, sicut similitudo faciei resultat in speculo; et huiusmodi veritates resultantes in animabus nostris a prima veritate, sunt multae, ut dictum est. Vel dicendum, quod veritas prima quodam modo est de genere animae large accipiendo genus, secundum quod omnia intelligibilia vel incorporalia unius generis esse dicuntur, per modum quo dicitur Act., XVII, 28: *ipsius enim Dei et nos genus sumus*." (Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate. Quaestiones 1–7*, q. 1, a. 4 ad s.c. 8.).

by nature it does not exist in matter and motion, but on the other hand, it can also exist without them, even though we sometimes find it with them.⁵⁵

Presumably all roads lead to the recognition that Aquinas's *ens commune* should be seen as a common being, based either on the principles of *analogia entis*, i.e., the analogy of proportionality in *esse* broadly extended, or the analogy of causes and essential principles, of which sets of causes and principles are being simultaneously determined for the intellect, rather than being seen plainly as a *general being* that could exist separately in an individual and real way outside the intellect. It seems that Aquinas is concerned more with what is truly common to all created things (material and immaterial), and what is inherently embedded in all entities and relates to their specific *actus essendi*, than with what is correlated with things that could only exist corporeally *extra intellectum*, possessing the same species and generic features within. In this case, it seems instead that there must be a higher factor determining things under a common predicate of a super-genus of all particular beings and their concepts, and this factor seems to indicate an entitative foundation in being broadly considered, transformed by the intellect into a multi-level concept of *ens commune*, inscribed in various forms, modes, modifications of simple existence itself (*esse*).

There is no doubt that the concept of *ens commune* is arrived at by abstraction from what constitutes the medium of demonstration of being (*medium demonstrationis*), that is, from what is essential in all created beings possessing any mode of *esse* (animate and non-animate). The *ens commune* itself must be something truly disparate from these created and naturally differentiated forms, and something that essentially transcends the variability of all these things. This is also evidenced by Aquinas in the *Commentary on Sentences*: “. . . similarly, where there is a common thing, there is also the individual and proper aspect of the thing as an object. First philosophy is a special science, although it considers being according to what is common to all, because it considers that particular aspect of being according to which it does not depend on matter and motion.”⁵⁶

⁵⁵ *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, pars III, q. 5, a. 4. See also David Burrell, “Classification, Mathematics, and Metaphysics: A Commentary on St. Thomas Aquinas’s Exposition of Beothius’s *On the Trinity*,” *The Modern Schoolman* 44, no. 1 (1966): 13–34, <https://doi.org/10.5840/schoolman19664412>.

⁵⁶ “Et similiter ubi res est communis, est ratio objecti particularis et propria: sicut philosophia prima est specialis scientia, quamvis consideret ens secundum quod est omnibus commune: quia specialem rationem entis considerat secundum quod non dependet a materia et a motu . . .” (Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum magistri Petri Lombardi*, ed. Pierre Mandonnet, vol. 1 [Parisiis: P. Lethielleux, 1929], lib. III [a distinctione

Ens Commune in Aquinas's Commentaries on *Metaphysics* and on the *Divine Names*

Now, passing to the exposition of Aquinas's opinion from the *Commentary on Metaphysics* and the *Commentary on the Divine Names*, one subsidiary observation should be presented at this point. Notably, many interpreters of Aquinas's thought imply that it is indeed difficult to discern when, in his commentaries on Aristotle or other numerous *opuscula*, Aquinas is actually interpreting Aristotle or others and when he is adopting such an interpretation as his own position, as well as when he is actually going beyond the main thought of the text he is interpreting or the writer he is referring in order to express his own standing. It seems obvious that in both the Prooemium to the *Commentary on the Metaphysics* and in the *Commentary on the Divine Names* of Dionysius, Aquinas writes under his own name. This is indicated either by the logical structure of the Thomistic thought or by the outright title of a given section or chapter; for example, in the *Commentary* on Dionysius, his own position is explicitly marked by the title "Expositio Sancti Thomae" instead of "Textus Dionysii" which, in turn, always precedes Aquinas's lectures (e.g. *In Div. Nom.*, pp. 244–46, n. 651–62, and in like manner at each Dionysius' teaching). However, as Wippel rightly notes, as it is veritably impossible to reconcile certain statements taken from Aquinas's commentaries proper with those he makes under his own name, then in any attempt to identify views consistent with Aquinas's thought and proximate to the truth, priority should be given to the latter.⁵⁷

Aquinas gives varied reasons for setting metaphysics as the first philosophy, but fundamentally he states that metaphysics must have something common to all created beings, something in which, compared to other sciences, only metaphysics finds authoritative application.⁵⁸ However, accepting Aquinas's

XXVII ad distinctionem XXXII], d. 27, q. 2, a. 4 qc 2 co). A worth recommending studies on *ens commune* are: Edmund William Morton, *Doctrine of Ens Commune in St. Thomas Aquinas* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1953); Gaven Kerr, "The Meaning of 'Ens Commune' in the Thought of Thomas Aquinas," *Yearbook of the Irish Philosophical Society*, 2008, 32–60.

⁵⁷ Cf. John F. Wippel, "Essence and Existence," in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy: From the Rediscovery of Aristotle to the Disintegration of Scholasticism, 1100–1600*, ed. Norman Kretzmann et al. (Cambridge University Press, 1982), 390, n. 23, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521226059.022> (for more, see ch. 19, sec. "Thomas Aquinas on Metaphysics and God," 385–410).

⁵⁸ Wippel discusses the differences between Commentary on the Boethius's *De Trinitate* and Aquinas's Prooemium to *Metaphysics*, where the main point is placed on *ens commune*. For more, see John F. Wippel, "The Title 'First Philosophy' According to Thomas Aquinas

fundamental assumptions about metaphysics, one should consider whether *ens commune* extends only to certain or to all possible denominations of being, in the sense that it could be substituted for a *supra*-transcendental concept, which also embraces beings of intellect, that is, beings that are a derivative emanation of intellect or soul (i.e. *sine fundamento in re*) and are as equally created within the human intellect as the rest of real beings outside of it.

Although metaphysics considers first causes to be superior, according to Aquinas, nothing prevents varied secondary causes to be the subject of this science, which is not contradictory, since all causes can be reduced to one thing, namely, to the common being (*ens commune*).⁵⁹ Hence, for Aquinas, nothing prevents this science, even if not every science considers causes, from considering all or some of them, provided, however, that they can be reduced in their ontological essence to something singular, namely, to what is common and analogous to being.⁶⁰ He claims that as with the mathematician, so it is with the philosopher who considers common being or being in general but ignores all particular beings, because he concentrates on considering them all as belonging to an *ens commune*. And although, as Aquinas maintains, there are many causes, there is nevertheless one science of them all, insofar as they all reduce to a single, common concept of being.⁶¹ However, in the Prooemium S. Thomae to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, one of the most enigmatic definitions of the object of metaphysics comes down to the opinion that the primary object would be the so-called "most intelligible objects" (*maxime intellectualis*), which are simultaneously substances separated from matter, and whose separation contributes to the highest degree of their perfection. Indeed, one of the objects indicated by Aquinas is first causes, but they alone do not exhaust the definition of the "most intelligible object." Yet less than a paragraph latter, we find that Aquinas argues for understanding the most intelligible things in a threefold framework, even though he effectively reduces them all to a single object. *Primo*, he says, such intelligibility can be attributed to everything that

and His Different Justifications for the Same," *The Review of Metaphysics* 27, no. 3 (1974): 585–600.

⁵⁹ *In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, lib. III, n. 385, p. 129.

⁶⁰ *In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, lib. III, n. 385, p. 129.

⁶¹ "Et sicut est de mathematico, ita est de philosopho qui considerat ens, et pratermittit considerare omnia particularia entia, et considerat ea tantum qua pertinent ad ens commune; qua licet sint multa, tamen de omnibus est una scientia, in quantum scilicet reducuntur omnia in unum, ut dictum est." (*In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, lib. XI, n. 2203, p. 626); "... Primo ostendit quod omnium est reductio aliquo modo ad unum. Secundo ostendit quod de omnibus reductis ad unum est consideratio hujus scientiae..." (*Ibidem*, lib. XI, n. 2194, p. 624).

exists in the order of knowing (*ex ordine intelligendi*). For Aquinas, those objects from which the intellect derives consistency and certainty inevitably seem more intelligible. Therefore, as he maintains, since certainty in metaphysics is acquired by the intellect inferring from causes, knowledge of these causes must be the most proper to intellectual or noetic knowledge and the most regulative of all the sciences.⁶² *Secundo*, as he says, the most intelligible objects are universals, which the intellect abstracts as those that exist to some range *in natura rei* and are subjected to generalization as inner forms of real things. Hence, this is the subject of metaphysics, as Aquinas deduces based on the comparison of intellect to senses (*ex comparatione intellectus ad sensum*). Since sense refers to what is particular, intellect differs from it in that it encompasses what is most general, such as universals. Therefore, metaphysics deals with the most universal principles, which are by nature immaterial and separate beings, and also with that from which being results as an indivisible whole and as differentiated in everything, in potency and act (“Qua quidem sunt ens, et ea qua consequuntur ens, ut unum et multa, potentia et actus”).⁶³ *Tertio*, the definition of what is the most intelligible object of metaphysics is that which belongs to the knowing intellect itself (*ex ipsa cognitione intellectus*). The most intelligible thing must therefore be that which is most separated from matter by this very intellect. For this reason, the intellect itself and the intelligible within it must be proportional to each other and belong to a single genus, because the intellect and the intelligible are one and the same in actuality (“... intellectus et intelligibile in actu sint unum”). Aquinas emphasizes that what is most separated from matter is that which is not only capable of abstracting from designated matter, as physics does, but entirely from sensible matter, and does so not only according to reason (“... non solum secundum rationem”), as mathematics does, but also, in a suchlike manner, according to abstraction from the whole of being (*secundum esse*), having as its object of knowledge God and intelligences or Angels (*Deus et intelligentiae*).⁶⁴

Accordingly, what follows in the sequent line of Aquinas’s *Commentary on Metaphysics*, presumably its most relevant part, burdens the reader with a considerable difficulty of a different kind, namely, what actually constitutes the primary and ultimate object of metaphysics, since everything is reduced to intelligible and separate substances, although in accordance with Aquinas’s three-stage division, all denominations of the “most intelligible object” (*maxime*

⁶² *In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, Prooemium S. Thomae, p. 1.

⁶³ *In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, Prooemium S. Thomae, pp. 1–2.

⁶⁴ *In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, Prooemium S. Thomae, pp. 1–2.

intellectualis) are reduced to something singular, albeit something common (*communis*). For on the one hand, he calls separate substances causes, and on the other, more surprisingly, he identifies them directly with the common being itself, evidently subordinating and inscribing the former into the univocal concept of the *ens commune*, that really opaque, imperceptible and elusive notion, as posited here:

But this threefold consideration should not be attributed to different, but to one science. For the aforesaid separate substances are universal and the first causes of being. But it is the part of the same science to consider the proper causes of a genus and the genus itself: just as a naturalist considers the principles of a natural body. Hence it must belong to the same science to consider separate substances (*substantias separatas*) and the common being (*ens commune*), which is the genus (*quod est genus*), of which the aforesaid common and universal substances are the causes. From which it is evident that although this science considers the three aforesaid, it does not consider any of them as a subject, but only the common being itself (*solum ens commune*).⁶⁵

From this concise rendering of Aquinas's standing for the nature of the object of metaphysics in the *Commentary*, it follows that, regardless of the denominations of being, its forms and modes, everything that falls within the scope of objects separated from matter constitutes the central subject of this science. From the preceding paragraphs it also follows that this subject includes everything inherent in common being (*ens commune*), but specifically and as a priority that which falls under reason and the knowledge of the intellect itself, thus including the products or intentional emanates of the intellect as well, such as concepts, propositions, ideas, negations and privations (beings of reason), regardless of whether these objects are predicates of existence outside the intellect (*secundum esse*) like a lion or stag, or – as Aquinas himself indicates – predicates of reason itself (*secundum rationem*) like a goat-stag, *alius-Deus*, chimera, other

⁶⁵ “Hæc autem triplex consideratio, non diversis, sed uni scientiæ attribui debet. Nam prædictæ substantiæ separatæ sunt universales et prima causæ essendi. Ejusdem autem scientiæ est considerare causas proprias alicujus generis et genus ipsum: sicut naturalis considerat principia corporis naturalis. Unde oportet quod ad eandem scientiam pertineat considerare substantias separatas, et ens commune, quod est genus, cujus sunt prædictæ substantiæ communes et universales causæ. Ex quo apparet, quod quamvis ista scientia prædicta tria consideret, non tamen considerat quodlibet eorum ut subjectum, sed ipsum solum ens commune.” (*In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, Prooemium S. Thomae, p. 2). Cf. *In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, n 593; n. 1147; n. 1170.

entia impossibilia or *entia rationis* alike. Although the latter do not really exist *extra intellectum*, they undeniably exist within the intellect (*esse in intellectu*), as might be alluded in the case of Aristotle, Plato and others.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ "... tou gar agathou estin epistēmē hoti agathon. alla kai to B tou G-hē gar dikaiosynē hopēr agathon. houtō men oun ginetai analysis. ei de pros tōi B tetheiē to hoti agathon, ouk estai-to men gar A kata tou B alēthes estai, to de B kata tou G ouk alēthes estai-to gar agathon hoti agathon katēgorein tēs dikaiosynēs pseudos kai ou syneton. homoios de kai ei to hygieinon deichtheiē hoti estin epistēton hēi agathon, ē tragelaphos hēi mē on, ē ho anthrōpos phtharton hēi aisthēton-en hapasi gar tois epikatēgoroumenois pros tōi akrōi tēn epanadiplosin theteon." (*Aristotle's Prior and Posterior Analytics, Analytika Protera* A, 49a24); "... ti pōs deixei to ti estin; anankē gar ton eidota to ti estin anthrōpos ē allo hotioun, eidenai kai hoti estin to gar mē on oudeis oiden ho ti estin, alla ti men sēmainei ho logos ē to onoma, hotan eipō tragelaphos, ti d' esti tragelaphos adynaton eidenai; alla mēn ei deixei ti esti kai hoti esti, pōs tōi autōi logōi deixei; ho te gar horismos hen ti dēloi kai hē apodeixis: to de ti estin anthrōpos kai to einai anthrōpon allo." (Ibidem, *Analytika Hystera*, 92b3–8); "... ta men oun onomata auta kai ta rhēmata eoike tō(i) aneu syntheseōs kai diaireseōs noēmati, hoion to anthrōpos ē leukon, hotan mē prostethē ti-oute gar pseudos oute alēthes pō. sēmeion d' estin toude: kai gar ho tragelaphos sēmainei men ti, oupō de alēthes ē pseudos, ean mē to einai ē mē einai prostethē(i) ē haplōs ē kata chronon." (Aristoteles, *De interpretatione vel Periermenias: Translatio Boethii: Specimina translationum recentiorum*, ed. Laurentius Minio-Paluello, *Translatio Guillelmi de Moerbeke*, ed. Gerardus Verbeke, Aristoteles Latinus, 2,1–2 [Bruges: Desclée De Brouwer, 1965], 16a15–16). Cf. also Plato, *The Republic*, Reprint, ed. Giovanni R. F. Ferrari, trans. Tom Griffith, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018): "... One of those creatures the ancient stories tell us used to exist. The Chimaera, or Scylla, or Cerberus, or any of the other creatures which are said to be formed by a number of species growing into one." (Book 9, 588c); "The best of the philosophers find themselves, vis-a-vis their cities, in a situation so awkward that here is nothing in the world like it. To construct an analogy in their defense, you have to draw on a number of sources, like painters painting composite creatures – half-goat, half-deer – and things like that." (Book 6, 488A). Plato, *PLATŌNOS TIMAIOS. The Timaeus of Plato*, ed. and annot., with an introduction, by R. D. Archer-Hind, Greek and the first English edition (London: Macmillan, 1888), 45B–46C, pp. 154–60; Plato, *Theaetetus, Sophist*, trans. Harold North Fowler, Plato with an English Translation 2 (London: William Heinemann; New York: G. P. Putnam, 1921), 266C, p. 450. See also Paul Seligman, *Being and Non-Being. An Introduction to Plato's Sophist* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), esp. §4 (Absolute Not-Being: 237B–239C); §6 (False Logos and the Challenge to Parmenides: 240C–242B); §19 (The Not-Beautiful, the Not-Just and the Not-Tall: 257B–258C); §21 (The Problem of Falsity and the Possibility of Discourse: 259D–261C); §22 (The Nature of Logos: 261C–262E); §23 (True and False: 262E–263D); §24 (The Being of false Logos). More on the topic of Plato's false dialectic and false concepts as the non-beings (the so-called 'falsehood paradox'), see the analysis by Paolo Crivelli, *Plato's Account of Falsehood: A Study of the Sophist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), esp. ch. 2 (Puzzles about not-being) and ch. 5 (Negation and not-being).

Aquinas's reasoning about causes, namely, that the subject matter of the science whose causes we are seeking, does not refer to causes of any kind, any specifically identified causes, but to all causes in general or to the most common cause overall.⁶⁷ Knowledge of causes of any kind is, in fact, the goal to which other sciences aspire, such as physics or natural sciences. Although the subject of metaphysics remains a common being, Aquinas nevertheless states that it concerns only those things that are separated from matter both in terms of being and of intellect, that is, which refer to or directly assume the reality of separate substances. Thus, metaphysics focuses not only on those things that can never exist in matter, such as God and intellectual substances, but also on those that can always exist without matter and do exist in this way, such as common being (*ens commune*). All of these are designated as separated in terms of being and reason (*secundum esse et rationem*),⁶⁸ and then Aquinas interpose the crucial point that "this would not be the case if they depended on matter for their being," which forthwith leads to the conclusion that common being cannot be denominated solely from real and material things or physical entities.⁶⁹ Hence, common being must be something beyond the reality of matter, *ens physicum*, *ens mathematicae*, and even *ens formale*, or at least presuppose what exists within the intellect or soul, excluding direct predications of particular entities. In other words, being in general instantly brings to mind the supernatural or *supra-transcendental* concept in general, which is hardly surprising, since it is the "ontological glue" that holds together all predications and denominations of being beyond the entities themselves (*supra ens*), regardless of the beings' form and mode of existence, both those beings from the level of the visible realm and those from the level of the invisible realm.

Moreover, Aquinas defines these three objects of metaphysics as an emerging divine science, which essentially form a unified whole under the common concept

⁶⁷ "Hoc enim est subjectum in scientia, cujus causas et passiones quærimus, non autem ipsæ causæ alicujus generis quæsitæ. Nam cognitio causarum alicujus generis, est finis ad quem consideratio scientiæ pertingit." (*In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, Prooemium S. Thomæ, p. 2).

⁶⁸ "Quamvis autem subjectum hujus scientiæ sit ens commune, dicitur tamen tota de his quæ sunt separata a materia secundum esse et rationem." (*In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, Prooemium S. Thomæ, p. 2).

⁶⁹ "Quia secundum esse et rationem separari dicuntur, non solum illa quæ nunquam in materia esse possunt, sicut Deus et intellectuales substantiæ, sed etiam illa quæ possunt sine materia esse, sicut ens commune. Hoc tamen non contingeret, si a materia secundum esse dependerent." (*In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, Prooemium S. Thomæ, p. 2).

of *ens commune*, as substances.⁷⁰ All of them constitute the foremost object of metaphysics and are predicates of three substances because of their connection with what accords to the mind, that is, exists in the order of knowing (*ex ordine intelligendi*); with what pertains to the senses, that is, the material objects and the universal concepts derived from them (*ex comparatione intellectus ad sensum*); and with what is denominated as a knowable object in the knowing intellect alone (*ex ipsa cognitione intellectus*). He therefore labels this unifying concept of *ens commune*, which encompasses all these three substances into one notion, a *genus* predicated of them all (“... *ens commune, quod est genus*”).⁷¹ This capacity to connect all beings to *ens commune*, which, moreover, must be articulated not through the senses but through the abstracting power of the intellect, leads to the probable assumption that *ens commune* is what later Scholastics, especially the Jesuits of the 16th and 17th centuries, marked as *ens obiectivum*, or even the higher concept of *ens supertranscendentale*, of which the latter also embraces within its *supra*-transcendental bond both real beings and beings of reason. By the Renaissance doctrine of *entia rationis*, these *quasi* beings (*quasi umbrae entium*) may possess *per modum entis* the same characteristics as real beings, such as singularity, multiplicity, color, shape, intelligibility and other qualities in the likeness of real being, although extrinsically denominated in the intellect. Accordingly, *ens commune* may strike someone as a *supra*-transcendental notion of being that complements the entire doctrine of metaphysics with a superior class of intelligible or *quasi*-intelligible objects, which of themselves are the products of the faculty of pure reasoning (their *esse* becomes *posse cognosci*).

Another worthwhile exposition of the subject of metaphysics that significantly contributes to rendering the *ens commune* in terms of both the *genus omnium supremum* or *ens supertranscendentale* is undoubtedly Aquinas's *Commentary on the Divine Names* of Blessed Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite († ci. 6th century AD). Aquinas's approach to the concept of being, using Dionysius's premises and distinctions, can make a contribution to the plausibility of this thesis. Related to this, the relevance of Aquinas's *Commentary* is also demonstrated by the fact that Dionysius had a profound impact on his thought in terms of shaping the framework of Aquinas's own theory of participation and

⁷⁰ “Secundum igitur tria prædicta, ex quibus perfectio hujus scientiæ attenditur, sortitur tria nomina. Dicitur enim scientia divina sive theologia, inquantum prædictas substantias considerat.” (*In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, Prooemium S. Thomae, p. 2).

⁷¹ “Unde oportet quod ad eandem scientiam pertineat considerare substantias separatas, et *ens commune, quod est genus, cujus sunt prædictæ substantiæ communes et universales causæ.*” (*In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, Prooemium S. Thomae, p. 2).

apophatic theology, and this applies to his general symbolic theology as well.⁷² It was written for those already initiated into a particular Neoplatonic school of Christian theology, although it also represents an attempt to reconcile Greek philosophy with the Christian faith.⁷³ I suppose that there are at least a few encouraging lines from Aquinas's *Commentary on Divine Names*, where the Angelic Doctor adequately explains his own standpoint on *ens commune* through a perspicacious reading of Dionysius's treatise and the guiding idea that it follows. In the subsequent lines I have undertaken an interpretive viewing of the *Expositio Sancti Thomae*, which follows the source *Textus Dionysii*, and more precisely, is referenced in the Aquinas's *Commentary* to: (A) Caput V ("De Existente, in quo et de Exemplaribus"); Lectio II ("Quod Deus est causa omnium particularium entium secundum quod sunt in propriis naturis"), Dionysius's nn. 275–81, appearing in Aquinas's exposition under the reference nn. 651–62, as well as (B) Caput VIII ("De Virtute, lustitia, Salvatione, Liberatione, in quo et de Inaequalitate"); Lectio II ("De processu divinae virtutis ad entia in speciali"), Dionysius's nn. 335–38; appearing in Aquinas's exposition under the reference nn. 752–62.⁷⁴

⁷² For more, see St. Thomas Aquinas, *An Exposition of The Divine Names, The Book of Blessed Dionysius*, ed. and trans. Michael Augros (Merrimack, NH: Thomas More College Press, 2021), esp. i–xxv ("Preface").

⁷³ For more on historical context and influences on Aquinas's thought, see Michael J. Rubin and Elizabeth C. Shaw, "An Exposition of The Divine Names, The Book of Blessed Dionysius by Thomas Aquinas (review)," *The Review of Metaphysics* 77, no. 2 (2023): 345–47, <https://doi.org/10.1353/rvm.2023.a915465>; Conor Stark, "Proceedings of the Second Symposium of the Dionysius Circle: 'Participationes tripliciter considerari possunt': The Absolute Notion of Esse in Aquinas's Commentary on the Divine Names," *European Journal for the Study of Thomas Aquinas* 42, no. 1 (2024): 98–109, <https://doi.org/10.2478/ejsta-2024-0007>; Joshua P. Hochschild, "Aquinas's Two Concepts of Analogy and a Complex Semantics for Naming the Simple God," *The Thomist* 83, no. 2 (2019): 155–84; Brian T. Carl, "The Transcendentals and the Divine Names in Thomas Aquinas," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 92, no. 2 (2018): 225–47, <https://doi.org/10.5840/acpq2018313148>; Michael Harrington, "The Divine Name of Wisdom in the Dionysian Commentary Tradition," *Dionysius* 35 (2017): 105–33.

⁷⁴ Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *In Librum Beati Dionysii De Divinis Nominibus Expositio*, ed. Ceslaj Pera, Petri Caramello, and Caroli Mazzantini (Taurini: Ex Officina Libraria Marietti, 1950); Caput V, Lectio II, Textus nn. 275–28, Expositio nn. 651–62, pp. 242–46; Caput VIII, Lectio II, Textus nn. 335–38, Expositio nn. 752–62, pp. 284–86 (hereinafter: *De Divinis Nominibus*). In this section on Aquinas's *Commentary* on Pseudo-Dionysius, I would follow C. Stark's technical lead and also avoid disputes about the authenticity of the treatises contained in the *Corpus Dionysiacum*. As for the pseudo-epithet attached to Dionysius, I would too recommend the following: Christian Schäfer, *Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite: An Introduction to the Structure and the Content of the Treatise*

Primarily, in the *Commentary* on Pseudo-Dionysius's *Divine Names*, Aquinas explores how to meaningfully speak of God using propositions and descriptions deriving from human language, a receptacle where predication, ideas, concepts, imaginations, representations of things are or may be stored as far as possible in line with reality. Aquinas employed a three-part method – *via negationis* (negation), *via causalitatis* (causality), and *via eminentiae* (eminence) – to demonstrate how names that constitute human evaluation of qualities, such as “good,” “omnipotent,” “majestic,” or “powerful,” can legitimately be applied to God. Following Dionysius, he argues that this can be achieved by an apophatic rather than a cataphatic route, not from the God's perspective (*ex parte primae causae influentis*), that is, by first denying what God is not, then recognizing God as the cause of all creaturely perfections, and finally recognizing that God possesses these perfections in a superior, eminent, transcendent way, far beyond their finite, creaturely meanings, which we wish to attribute to God based on conformity or resemblance to our mind and understanding (*ex parte rerum recipientium*).⁷⁵ Aquinas, adept at the Dionysian teaching, skillfully explains the meaning of the numerous divine names Dionysius adopts for God, including “good in itself,” “justice itself,” “supergood,” “goodness of all good,” “supersubstance,” and so forth. Ultimately, he indicates that God *in se* is a wholly elusive being, transcending human cognition, beyond any comprehensive and intellectual demonstration or solid exemplification of His entitative attributes therewith.⁷⁶

Now, the prevailing opinion among scholars is that in the first verse of the *Divine Names*, Dionysius raises the issue of the so-called “unfolding” (*anaptyxis*) of divine names found in the scriptures, also adopting names (including Wisdom) from the Letters of St. Paul, which Dionysius discusses in the seventh chapter of the treatise.⁷⁷ As becomes clear in subsequent passages, this “unfolding” means taking a divine name and giving it the meaning of “being” (including “being compressed”) and then, accordingly, explaining its content through other names. What is striking is that these names do not add anything to God's essential content, which is the “being” considered by Dionysius in the “supreme superiority” and broad scope of divinity. The previous point clearly

On the Divine Names, *Philosophia Antiqua* 99 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 11–22, Part I (An Introduction to the Problem), §2 (The Phantom Author).

⁷⁵ Cf. Schäfer, 28–31, esp. 29, Part I (An Introduction to the Problem), §3 (The Status Quaestionis), c. Aquinas' Layout of DN.

⁷⁶ Cf. Michael Augros, “Preface,” in St. Thomas Aquinas, *An Exposition of The Divine Names*, iv–vii.

⁷⁷ Cf. Harrington, “The Divine Name of Wisdom in the Dionysian Commentary Tradition,” 118.

emphasizes a certain complexity in Aquinas's participation doctrine, which he also based on his commentary on Boethius's *De hebdomadibus*. Nevertheless, this is crucial insofar as it contributes to indicating the divergent meanings given by Aquinas in relation to *esse* and substance, and the location of the *ens commune* itself in the order of this hierarchy.⁷⁸

Aquinas's wide understanding of *ens commune*, which was most likely derived from the text of Dionysius, causes considerable confusion, first of all because Dionysius uses many different names to describe God, among others he identifies Him with "life itself" (*ton theon pote men autodzōēn*), in another place he defines God as the "substance" that is the cause of life itself (*autodzōēs hypostatēs*), in another "wisdom itself" (*tēn autosophian*), and so forth.⁷⁹ Moreover, Aquinas himself, as contemporary scholars rightly point out, took into account that "Blessed Dionysius used an obscure style in all his books," and he added that this "obscurization" of language was not due to Dionysius's ignorance, but rather to a deliberate attempt to conceal sacred and divine dogmas from the mockery of infidels. According to Aquinas, the aforementioned books also encounter a difficulty from which many could derive divergent interpretations.⁸⁰ As Conor Stark notes, despite this already burdensome "*copia verborum*," Thomas ultimately adopted a completely opposite term, though one that partly unites all the others, to describe God in the dimension of *esse commune*. Unfortunately, the Angelic Doctor's unification of all Dionysian meanings under one common concept, *esse commune*, to which Aquinas also refers, *ipsum esse subsistens* or *ipsum per (secundum) se esse*, did not prove to be a pertinent solution to the nomenclature problem.⁸¹ For Aquinas, what he

⁷⁸ On the participation in references to *esse commune* based on Aquinas's reading of Boethius's *De hebdomadibus*, see Jason Mitchell, "Aquinas on *Esse Commune* and the First Mode of Participation," *The Thomist* 82 (2018): 543–72, esp. 548–54 (I. "Aquinas and Thomists on Participation in *Esse Commune*"). Although not in the metaphysical approach to Aquinas's *esse commune* that is currently in vogue among scholars, nor in the Thomistic vocabulary, to use the author's own remark (p. 463), the following text is revealing and worth recommending: Adrian J. Walker, "Personal Singularity and The Communio Personarum: A Creative Development of Thomas Aquinas' Doctrine of *Esse Commune*," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 31 (2024): 457–79.

⁷⁹ Cf. Stark, "Proceedings of the Second Symposium of the Dionysius Circle," 98.

⁸⁰ "II. – Est autem considerandum quod beatus Dionysius in omnibus libris suis obscuro utitur stilo. Quod quidem non ex imperitia fecit, sed ex industria ut sacra et divina dogmata ab irrisione infidelium occultaret. Accidit etiam difficultas in praedictis libris, ex multis . . ." (*De Divinis Nominibus*, Proomium, p. i).

⁸¹ Cf. Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Summa theologiae* I^a, q. 11, a. 4; Sancti Thomae de Aquino, *Summa contra Gentiles*, lib. I, cap. 21; Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*. *Quaestiones* 21–29, q. 22, a. 14.

considered to be the most perfect of all things is derived from the fact that the act is always more perfect than potentiality and therefore that which is being is the actuality of all acts (*actualitas omnium actuum*) and is thus the perfection of all perfections (*perfectio omnium perfectionum*).⁸² Moreover, quite different interpretations began to be adopted, for example by Étienne Gilson who considered *esse commune* to be an abstract universal in the mind and who directly states that all universals, including this one (i.e. *esse commune*), are the being of reason and do not exist in any other reality than the reality of the intellect that comprehends it,⁸³ while Klaus Kremer and Oleg Georgiev identify *esse commune* with God or as the *genus* that holds divine *esse*. Still others, also mentioned by Stark, such as Cornelio Fabro, John F. Wippel, and Fran O'Rourke, assume that *esse commune* is a concept pointing to *actus essendi* as the grounding essence of being.⁸⁴

Although my interpretation, based on Aquinas's *Commentary on Divine Names*, is one of the lines that addresses the *ens commune* and, accordingly, *esse commune*, it goes in a completely different direction, which aims to reconstruct Aquinas's exposition on the basis of *supra*-transcendental as a heuristic concept, if we assume that he indeed speaks for himself.

Now, Aquinas, after earlier analysis of Dionysius's process of emergence from God and the influence of divine power on beings, moves on to a more detailed exposition of the process of participation, firstly, distinguishing things in the order of being in which the effects of divine power are manifested, and secondly, distinguishing those things that are found as embodied in things due to divine power. This last indication by Aquinas is particularly relevant, since

⁸² "Ad nonum dicendum, quod hoc quod dico esse est inter omnia perfectissimum: quod ex hoc patet quia actus est semper perfectior potentia. Quaelibet autem forma signata non intelligitur in actu nisi per hoc quod esse ponitur. Nam humanitas vel igneitas potest considerari ut in potentia materiae existens, vel ut in virtute agentis, aut etiam ut in intellectu: sed hoc quod habet esse, efficitur actu existens. Unde patet quod hoc quod dico esse est actualitas omnium actuum, et propter hoc est perfectio omnium perfectionum." (Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia*, vol. 2 of *Quaestiones disputatae*, 10th ed., ed. Paulus M. Pession [Taurini: Ex Officina Libraria Marietti, 1965], q. 7, a. 2, ad 9, p. 192).

⁸³ Étienne Gilson, "Éléments d'une métaphysique thomiste de l'être," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 40 (1973): 19 (more 7–36).

⁸⁴ Stark, "Proceedings of the Second Symposium of the Dionysius Circle," 99. Cf. John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being*, Monographs of the Society for Medieval and Renaissance Philosophy 1 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 102–3; Cornelio Fabro, *Participation et causalité Selon S. Thomas d'Aquin* (Louvain: Publications universitaires de Louvain, 1961), 372.

it also refers to the powers and cognitive acts inherent in individuals.⁸⁵ He makes this references by explaining how the progress of divine power towards higher creatures, namely the Angels, and then, secondly, towards lower ones, as shown by Dionysius, should be correctly understood.⁸⁶ He explains, firstly commenting on n. 335 in Dionysius's text, that from divine power (*ex divina potentia*) emerge all angelic powers or substances that are in harmony with God. Now, in Angels, power manifests itself as "to their very being" (*ad ipsum esse eorum*), which in this respect correlates with the immutable divine goodness (*ex divina bonitate*) whereby they possess immutable and permanent angelic being in themselves (*esse immutabile*). Secondly, emergence from God must be understood "as to reasoning or understanding" (*ad intellegendum*). In this respect, angelic eternally intellectual and immortal movements (*eos habere motus aeternos intellectuales et immortales*) also arise from divine power, since, namely, intellect or reasoning is always something in act (*semper intellegunt in actu*). Thirdly, Aquinas elucidates that emergence from God must be understood "as to desire" (*ad desiderandum*). In this respect, he says that they have received from the power of infinite goodness the same power by which they desire good without diminishing such desire (*desiderant sine diminutione talis desiderii*). In fact, Angels have all this by exclusive divine power, insofar as divine power allows them to be and to be capable of desire without pain, having those things that are always present and unchanging for them. This very thing, which is the capacity to desire, as Aquinas shows, which they always have, is the actualizing power that comes solely from God.⁸⁷ In the following paragraph, referring to Dionysius n. 336, Aquinas notes that God's inexhaustible creative power reaches (*procedunt*) through a process of emanation to the farthest layers of creation, demonstrating the progression of God's power to lower creatures. Hence, Aquinas asserts that the effects of this inexhaustible divine power also reach humans, animals, plants, and all natural things, which are all derivatives of this divine process.⁸⁸ Then, referring to n. 337, he confirms what is found in the things which are brought forth by divine power. First, in regard to those things which are common to all (*quae sunt communia omnibus*), the primary one is union (*primum est unitio*). In regard to union, Aquinas holds that the divine power gives union to all those things which are united in a certain friendship and communion with each other, and this communion is determined

⁸⁵ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 752, p. 285.

⁸⁶ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 753, p. 285.

⁸⁷ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 754, p. 285.

⁸⁸ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 755, p. 285.

by divine power (*ad quamdam amicitiam sui et communionem*).⁸⁹ The second is discernment (*discretio*), which indicates that divine power strengthens things distinct from one another so that each, according to its own reason and essence, may be preserved uncorrupted and unmixed with other natures and entities. The third, indicated by Aquinas, is order (*ordo*), which in turn emphasizes that divine power preserves the order of each thing, according to which things are ordered relative to one another. Moreover, despite emanations and the process of participation, God sustains (*conservant*) these things in existence and redirects (*dirigit*) each thing in its proper order toward its end (*ad finem*), which is its proper good (*prioprium bonum rei*).⁹⁰ In turn, commenting on sectional order in Dionysius's n. 338, Aquinas presents what concerns each individual substance. Regarding the Angels, he states that the divine power inviolably preserves from any corruption the immortal life of the angelic individual beings (*immortales vitas angelicarum unitatum*), that is, the simple substances in themselves (*substantiarum simplicium ipsorum*) without composition of form and transient matter.⁹¹ Regarding the heavenly bodies (*corpora coelestia*), he says that God invariably preserves (*custodit*) the substances and orders of the heavenly bodies and luminaries (*coelestium corporum et luminarium*), namely the sun and the moon and the stars (*solis et lune et stellarum*).⁹² In his fourth point, Aquinas remarks on the so-called *aevum*, which measures the substance of the heavens, and posits that divine power makes possible the *aevum*, which is the simple measure of being. Similarly, regarding time, which is the measure of the motion of this same heavens, he emphasizes that divine power distinguishes all the revolutions of time through processes and brings them together through restoration; the celestial sphere and time are in circular motion. Thus, he attributes rotation to time, rotation being that which follows the circular revolution of the heavens themselves. In the motion of the heavens, two things must be considered, he says: firstly, that in the motion of the heavens there is always renewal, according to the passage from one place to another; secondly, that the heavens return to the same position according to their inherent circular motion.⁹³

In the following sections (nn. 758–62), Aquinas demonstrates, through the *Divine Names*, the operation of divine power derived from the elements, regarding fire, the inexhaustible streams of water, which he says result from the constant flow of rivers and the turbulence, waves, and the ebb and flow

⁸⁹ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 756, p. 285.

⁹⁰ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 756, p. 285.

⁹¹ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 757, p. 285.

⁹² *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 757, p. 285.

⁹³ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 757, p. 286.

of the sea, as well as the outflow of air, a property of moisture that is most peculiar to air. All these earthly emanations, evoked by Aquinas, are meant to demonstrate divine power, which is limitless within the limits of natural space. Divine power also places the earth in nothingness, since it is always placed by divine potency at the center of the world and has nothing to sustain it. Divine power also maintains the generative birth of the earth itself, namely, plants and other things that spring from the earth.⁹⁴ All this justifies the premise that, firstly, it is necessary that there is a certain proportion of the elements to each other, which Dionysius treats as harmony (*Dionysius hic nominat harmoniam*); secondly, it is required that the proper force inherent in each element remains uncorrupted, otherwise there would not be a mixture, but a corruption (*alioquin non esset mixtio, sed corruptio*).⁹⁵ Thirdly, following Dionysius, Aquinas affirms the essential and unique influence of divine power on living beings, such that divine power maintains the unity of soul and body (*divina virtus in unum tenet coniunctionem animae et corporis*).⁹⁶ Referring to all created things, Aquinas adds that the divine power strongly sustains the substantial and natural powers of all beings, including animate and inanimate, and establishes the inseparable dwelling place of each thing (*rei firmat indissolubilem mansionem*), insofar as all things retain the proper degree of being according to the nature assigned to them by God (*inquantum scilicet omnia gradum sibi praefixum a Deo conservant*).⁹⁷ The effect of God's emanating power is also seen in the operation of grace (*ad gratiam*), wherein it is the power of God alone that confers participation in the Godhead, which always comes by grace (*idest participationem Deitatis, quae est per gratiam*) and not by any inherent power of the beings themselves, whether they be Angels or men.⁹⁸ Finally, Aquinas deduces from Dionysius's concluding remark that there is nothing in beings that is separate, existing by itself and not under the control of a divine power that extends itself in omnipotence so as to give things their stability and participation in existence.⁹⁹ Aquinas states:

For just as nothing can be separated from divine life except what is devoid of life, so nothing can be separated from divine power except what is devoid

⁹⁴ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 758, p. 286.

⁹⁵ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 758, p. 286.

⁹⁶ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 759, p. 286.

⁹⁷ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 760, p. 286.

⁹⁸ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 761, p. 286.

⁹⁹ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 762, p. 286.

of power. But what has no power universally does not exist at all, nor does it occupy any place, that is, any order in the universe or any durability.¹⁰⁰

In other words, everything created belongs to the order of emanation of being and cannot exist in any other alternative sphere, inasmuch as everything else is most likely non-existence in relation to that which is a product or derivative of God's creation. Hence, Angels, human souls, including their intellects and potencies, or substances composed of body and soul, and finally the realm of both animate and inanimate nature, come into being through the action of benignant will and God's very power (*a potentia Dei*).

That said, following Dionysius in chapters 3–4, and then similarly in chapter 8, which I have reconstructed above, Aquinas demonstrates that God is the universal and necessary cause of all things. In chapter 5, he proceeds to throw light on the assertion that God is the cause of all individual beings, according to their proper nature of existence (*proprias naturas rerum esse a Deo*), meaning that the entire structure of creation can be divided according to the mode or form of *esse* of a given entity.¹⁰¹ Some of these may have real existence (*reale*) and formal existence (*formale*) *secundum esse*, still others objective (*obiective*) or intentional existence (*intentionale*) *secundum rationem*, but they all still are to be considered in the order of being itself.

As for the first, universal and necessary dependence on God, Aquinas implies two things: firstly, he states, following Dionysius, that all degrees of being come from God (*omnes gradus entium a Deo esse*); secondly, that even being in general or common being in itself also comes from and is subject to dependence on God (*quod etiam ipsum esse commune est a Deo*).¹⁰² Then, regarding the first dependence, he makes the following three distinctions: (1) he introduces a distinction between the degrees of particular kinds of beings, saying that they all have their source in God; (2) he includes in this division the degrees of the highest beings (*gradus supremorum entium*), together with angelic beings; and finally (3) he distinguishes the degrees of the lower beings themselves.¹⁰³ The subsequent explanations of this three-level metaphysical composition, which Aquinas conducts in the *Expositio Sancti Thomae*, provide

¹⁰⁰ "Sicut enim a divina vita non potest esse segregatum quidquam nisi quod caret vita, ita a divina virtute non potest esse segregatum nisi quod caret virtute. Quod autem universaliter nullam habet virtutem, omnino non est neque habet aliquam positionem, idest ordinem in universo seu firmitatem" (*De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 762, p. 286).

¹⁰¹ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 651–52, p. 244.

¹⁰² *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 653, p. 244.

¹⁰³ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 654, p. 244.

an extremely important premise for accepting as entirely permissible the claim that *ens commune* (not to be confused with *esse commune*) encompasses all these degrees, not excluding – quite surprisingly – beings of reason (*entia rationis*) within this framework. In a rather surprising approach, this might lead to the plausible supposition that the foremost subject of metaphysics, that is, the one furthest elevated from matter and uniting all denominations of being, would be precisely the *ens commune*, but considered as *genus omnium supremum* or simply *ens supertranscendentale*, which would be the closest association to *ens commune*.

Aquinas therefore proceeds with the following, specifying individual substances within the order of the entire structure: *Primo*, he says that from the universal cause of all things or beings, which is God, come angelic substances (*substantiae Angelorum*), similar to God, which are intelligences insofar as they are immaterial, and intellectual insofar as they have the capacity to reason or use intellect on themselves and others.¹⁰⁴ Angels, therefore, regardless of their hierarchy, constitute the first order of substances that are neither bodies nor united with bodies. *Secundo*, the next level involves substances that are not bodies but are nevertheless united with them; and in this context, they should be perceived as simply the souls of living creatures (*animarum*).¹⁰⁵ *Tertio*, the third level involves purely corporeal substances (*substantiarum corporalium*); and Aquinas applies this understanding of substances to material (physical) bodies in the entire natural world (*omnis mundi naturae*).¹⁰⁶ *Quarto*, at the fourth level of substances or beings, there are accidents (*accidentia*) which are divided into nine genera or generic categories (*in novem generibus*).¹⁰⁷ *Quinto*, the fifth degree of being encompasses those substances that are not fully understood in accordance with the order of nature, for – Aquinas points out – they exist only in thought according to cognition (*non sunt in rerum natura, sed in sola cogitatione*), and they are literally marked as beings of reason (*quae dicuntur entia rationis*), such as genus, species, opinion, and the like, and such as privations or negations, consequents and antecedents, etc.¹⁰⁸ In the following paragraph,

¹⁰⁴ “... quae sunt intelligibiles, inquantum sunt immateriales et sunt intellectuales, inquantum habent virtutem intelligendi se et alia; et iste est primus gradus substantiarum, quae nec corpora sunt, nec corporibus unita” (*De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 655, p. 244).

¹⁰⁵ “... est substantiarum quae non sunt corpora, sed corporibus unita sunt; et quantum ad hoc dicit: et animarum” (*De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 655, p. 244).

¹⁰⁶ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 655, p. 244.

¹⁰⁷ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 655, p. 244.

¹⁰⁸ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 655, p. 244.

Aquinas significantly adds that, regarding these last two degrees of being, they also come from God in the same way and must be treated as inherently subjected in other substances (*inesse aliis*), similar to the accidental features that are incorporated and formed into a *substantia composita*. Thus beings of reason, in turn, and most importantly in this case, belong to the order of substances according to reason or knowing intellect (*esse secundum cogitationem, sicut entia rationis*), to which all beings of reason should be contained.¹⁰⁹ In short, these last substances and the last degree of particularization of being must be enfolded within the subject of intellectual cognition of the soul, directed towards being, or at least referring to one of the five kinds of being in the broad scope of its denotations.

Furthermore, in the preceding Lectio I (“Praemissis quibusdam necessariis ad propositam intentionem prosequitur de causalitate primi Entis”), Aquinas consciously invokes seven orders of existence of things that have their origin in God, which essentially confirms his other accompanying analyses on Dionysius’s *Divine Names*.¹¹⁰ *Primo*, in article n. 650, enumerating all the determinants of existence, he significantly concludes that as to the causality of God (*Dei causalitate*), causality refers in the first line to being itself (*ad ipsum esse*), so that from God alone comes both the very being of things and the being (*esse*) of all beings, in whatever manner they may exist (*quod a Deo est ipsum esse rerum et omnia existentia, quocumque modo sint*).¹¹¹ Accordingly, both the principle of being and the end belong to being itself (*principium essendi et finis*), since they are found in all existing things. God himself is the founding principle of all principles originating at the divine creation, since from Him alone every principle and every end must arise (*ab Ipso est omne principium et omnis finis*).¹¹² *Secundo*, Aquinas points to those things in the order of substantial beings that also have a foundation in God and are particularly related to life (*ad vitam*), whereby all life and immortality come from God and may lead to the indestructibility of this very life (*ex Deo est omnis vita et immortalitas, quae est indeficientia vitae*).¹¹³ *Tertio*, he lists things that should be considered in the order of wisdom (*ad sapientiam*), and as with the other types of dependence in being, all wisdom therefore comes from God in the order of the degree of emanation of being and its participation in the Divine (*ex Deo est omnis sapientia*). And since the duty

¹⁰⁹ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 655, p. 244.

¹¹⁰ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Lectio I; Caput V; Textus nn. 257–74; Expositio nn. 606–50, pp. 227–38.

¹¹¹ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 650, § 1, p. 238.

¹¹² *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 650, § 1.

¹¹³ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 650, § 2.

of the wise man is to order, it follows that all order and all harmony (*omnis ordo et omnis harmonia*), which is the appropriateness derived from order, also flows from God.¹¹⁴ *Quarto*, the order of dependence from God is defined by reference to virtue (*ad virtutem*), for likewise all virtue comes from God. For virtue consists in guarding oneself against vices and bad habits of character, and avoiding harmful things, and it is in this context that Aquinas concludes that this attitude of virtuous life comes from God (*ex Deo est omnis virtus*), because it is based on the divine virtue of “entirely guarding” (*omnis custodia*). This “entirely guarding” safeguards the virtues and is established in what is appropriate to God (*omnis collocatio*), for which reason it is also marked as the virtue of “entirely distributing” (*omnis distributio*).¹¹⁵ *Quinto*, he enumerates things that pertain strictly to the order of cognition (*ad cognitione*) and everything that finds its foundation in knowing intellect. For this reason, Aquinas concludes that *ad cognitione* applies to every kind of intellect (*omnis intellectus*), both angelic intellect (*ad Angelos*) and human speech and reason (*omnis sermo, idest ratio quantum ad Homines*). Accordingly, all the senses, in the case of animals (*omnis sensus quantum ad animalia*), and every habit by which the cognitive and appetitive intellect can be perfected are also included (*omnis habitus quo perficitur ratio cognoscitiva vel appetitiva*).¹¹⁶ Thus, all cognitive operations are merged into the order of being, in particular of the intellect, which operates not only on the forms of the sensory representations of real things (*species intelligibilis impressa*), but also on the basis of the concepts of pure reason, as is the case with beings of reason, and even fictional or imaginary objects of the intellect. *Sexto*, he indicates those things which strictly refer to corporeal things (*corporalia*) and states (*omnis statio*) that every state of them belongs to being, that is, their state of rest, as well as every movement and variation (*omnis motus*).¹¹⁷ At last, *septimo*, Aquinas emphasizes the dependence of things on God by referring to “unity” (*ad unum*), covering all unions (*omnis unio*), such as the personal unity of man, who is subject to various forms of union, e.g. forms of agreement within the union of bodies (*ad unionem corporum*), forms of friendship within the union of feelings (*unionem affectuum*), forms of agreement within the union of concepts, sentences, judgments, statements, opinions (*omnis concordatio quantum ad unionem conceptionum et sententiarum*) etc.¹¹⁸ In concluding his exposition of the Dionysian doctrine, Aquinas lists what

¹¹⁴ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 650, § 3.

¹¹⁵ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 650, § 4.

¹¹⁶ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 650, § 5.

¹¹⁷ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 650, § 6.

¹¹⁸ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 650, § 7.

pertains to “multiplicity” (*ad multitudinem*). This leads him to accept the claim that every distinction (*dinstinction*), that is, differentiation (*omnis discretio*), and also every definition (*omnis deffinitio*), that is, an inner determination of the non-contradiction of each thing, which is always determined in itself by being distinct from others (*ab aliis distinctum*), derives its being from God.¹¹⁹ Perhaps the most meaningful and highly memorable statement is the final sentence of Aquinas’s *Expositio Sancti Thomae*, namely, that “. . . not only these come from God, but also everything else that pertains to being and that beings receive,”¹²⁰ meaning that ever since the creation, there is no thing that, in one order of existence or another, does not fundamentally take its origin from God.

I would venture to say that Aquinas’s reconstruction of Dionysius’s doctrine from the *Divine Names*, as of his Prooemium to the *Commentary on Metaphysics*, quite likely leads to the plausible conclusion that substances or beings existing according to reason (*secundum rationem*), i.e. those from the realm of the knowing intellect, such as beings of reason (*entia rationis*), also come from God, although in the sense of being objects for the human intellect or soul, not as directly created by God.¹²¹ If this is to be considered as a conclusive inference, then entities of this kind must fall within the scope of reflection on being in general or common being, and consequently, in a quite obvious way, they become part of the *ens commune* that Aquinas raises in the margin of both his commentaries; to emphasize it once again: “. . . quod a Deo est ipsum esse rerum et omnia existentia, quocumque modo sint.”¹²² Nevertheless, I would be

¹¹⁹ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 650, § 8.

¹²⁰ “Et non solum ista sunt a Deo, sed quaecumque alia pertinent ad esse quibus entia informantur” (*De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 650, § 8).

¹²¹ A similar opinion can be attributed to Suárez, Pedro Hurtado de Mendoza († 1641), John of St. Thomas († 1644), namely that God does not create beings of reason, but is only capable of knowing them insofar as they are the object and product of the human intellect. Cf. Francisco Suárez, *Disputationes metaphysicae*, Editio nova, ed. Carolus Berton, vol. 25–26, Opera Omnia (Parisiis: Apud Ludovicum Vivès, Bibliopolam editorem, 1866), disp. LIV, sec. 2, n. 23; Pedro Hurtado de Mendoza, “Disputationes metaphysicae, De ente transnaturalis; sive abstracto a materia,” in *Disputationum in Universam Philosophiam a Summulis ad Metaphysicam*, vol. 2 (Moguntiae: Typis & Sumptibus Ioannis Albini, 1619), 605, disp. XIX (*De ente rationis*), sec. II (*Untrum Deus cognoscat entia rationis?*), § 27; more pp. 599–606. Cf. Ioannis a Sancto Thoma, “Ars Logica seu forma et materia ratiocinandi,” in *Cursus Philosophicus Thomisticus, secundam exactam, veram, genuinam Aristotelis et Doctoris Angelici mentem*, ed. Beato Reiser (Taurini: Ex Officina Domus Editorialis Marietti, 1930), 307–13, esp. 310–11 (“Secunda Pars Artis Logicae. De instrumentis logicalibus ex parte materiae,” q. II: “De Ente Rationis Logico, Quod Est Secunda Intentio,” a. V: “Utrum Deus formet entia rationis”).

¹²² *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 650, §1, p. 238.

cautious in my assessment and would not rule out an option that *esse commune* and *ens commune* can also be defined in two opposite ways: firstly, beings considered from the perspective of the order of existence (*esse commune*), which would contain only real substances or those pursuing reality; secondly, those beings or substances considered from the perspective of reason or knowing intellect (*secundum rationem*), such as beings of reason, which would also refer directly to the concept of *ens commune*, along with the remaining denominations and predicates of being regardless of their ontological status and inherent mode of existence, since nothing can be considered existing unless it has *esse*. It means that only those beings denominated existants that share a status in real existence participate in *esse commune* itself, while those that are inherent exclusively in intellect would rather participate in *ens commune*, as in the cognitive concept (*ens cognitum*), and in this context *ens commune* can be treated as *genus omnium supremum*.

In turn, another inference concerning *esse* itself may be equally valid, given what Aquinas says in the following arguments. In articles nn. 658–60, Aquinas outlines that God alone is the cause of common being (*Deus est causa ipsius esse communis*), which means that, firstly, being in itself is common to all (*ipsum esse est omnibus commune*), and secondly, although God is connected with common being, He is excluded from it and does not constitute a part of it, but is only the first efficient cause.¹²³ As I have shown above, in this process God distributes to higher substances (*superiores substantiae*) certain nobler properties of being, forms of existence (*esse*), whereby those higher substances, like Angels, are rightly called eternal substances (*aeternae*), as if they had existed from eternity (*quasi semper existentes*), though not in the sense of the eternity proper to God, according to the words of the Psalmist: “Lift up, you everlasting gates” (Ps 237).¹²⁴ Aquinas then presents a rather intricate structure of the connection between common being and God. He maintains that being in itself comes from the first Being, which is God (*ipsum esse commune est ex primo Ente, quod est Deus*), and from this, in turn, it follows that common being is linked to God by a specific form of dependency, unlike existence. Furthermore, this difference occurs in three respects: *Primo*, existence depends on common being (*esse commune*), but not God (*existentia dependet ab esse communi, non autem Deus*), for it is common being that depends directly on God (*magis esse commune dependet a Deo*). From this, Aquinas infers, following Dionysius, that common being in itself comes solely from God himself and is fully dependent on his power, and that it is not

¹²³ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 658, p. 245.

¹²⁴ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 659.

God who is this very common being or rather the *esse* within it (*et non ipse Deus est esse, idest ipsius esse communis*), but He is its supreme conditioning cause, on which *esse commune* is entirely contingent and subordinated.¹²⁵ *Secundo*, all existing beings fall under the common being itself, excluding God. It is rather the common being itself that is subject to divine power, because God's power, in its infinite omnipotence, extends beyond all created beings, which otherwise emerged from God by virtue of efficient causality. And on this basis, in turn, one can further maintain that the common being is in God himself "as something contained in something contained" (*contentum in continente*), and not the other way around, and therefore that God himself (the efficient and final cause of being) is *esse* in that which is being, hence any form of pantheism or panentheism identifying nature itself with God is utterly rejected.¹²⁶ *Tertio*, from this point, it follows that all other beings participate in that which is being in general, though God does not. Aquinas then concludes that all created being is merely a certain participation of God in His likeness, whereby in a certain analogy the *esse commune* participates as a likeness to God, however, without God being defined as participating in his own divine likeness. Therefore, it must be inferred that God himself is, according to Aquinas and Dionysius, the "unique *aeon*," the cause, foundation, and capacity for the duration of created being, as well as its principle and measure. In his separate existence, God precedes every substance, every being, every *aeon*, preceding them in duration, in order, and in causality. Consequently, the substance of everything depends on Him, since He is the cause of substantial, spiritual, and rational existence in everything. He is the principle of *esse*, because all duration, every movement, every process proceeds directly from God alone. Moreover, presumably, taking into account the Neoplatonic order *monê-pródos-epístrophê*, one might infer, following the Angelic Doctor, that God himself is also the goal (final cause) towards which all things ultimately strive in their earthly permanence and transient being (*duratio et processus omnium est ab Eo et est etiam finis in quem omnia tendunt*).¹²⁷

The following claims of Aquinas, which he derives while commenting on Dionysius, are also worth emphasizing in order to clarify the immense disparity and causal determination between God and beings (*entia creata*), as well as to indicate possible approaches to exemplify the superiority of *ens commune* and its inherent principle of existence: "... in the Holy Scripture God Himself,

¹²⁵ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 660, § 1.

¹²⁶ "... quod esse commune est in ipso Deo sicut contentum in continente et non e converso ipse Deus est in eo quod est esse" (*De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 660, § 2).

¹²⁷ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 660, § 3.

who truly preexists all things, is praised in many ways according to every reason for existing things" (*De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 661, p. 245); "... as is fitting according to God, that all being, according to whatever reason for being, exists supersubstantially in Him, who is the cause of all existing things" (n. 661); "... but He is above all things, as existing supereminently before all things" (n. 661); "... from this that He, according to one unity, infuses being into all things, shining above them without His own defilement" (n. 661); "... and nourishes all living things; and guards, that is, preserves universally all things, both living and non-living; and perfects, that is, brings them to life and due perfection" (n. 662, p. 246); "... in God, who is the cause of both the sun itself and all existents, it must be conceded that the exemplary reasons of all beings preexist according to a supersubstantial unity, which, namely, completely exceeds the unities of substances" (n. 662); "... for God, although He is one in His essence, nevertheless, by comprehends His unity and power, knows whatever virtually exists in Him. Thus, therefore, He knows that diverse things can proceed from Him; hence what He knows can proceed from Himself are called reasons of the intellect" (n. 665, p. 249); "... exemplars are not some things outside God, but in the divine intellect itself certain intellectual reasons of existents, which are the productive of substances, and preexist in God singularly, that is, unitedly and not according to any diversity" (n. 666, p. 249).¹²⁸

In conclusion, given what has been said so far about Aquinas's *ens commune*, I find it somewhat interesting that the concept of *ens commune* brings creation

¹²⁸ "... in sacra Scriptura ipse Deus qui vere praeexistit omnibus, multipliciter laudatur secundum omnem rationem existentium" (*De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 661, p. 245); "... ut decet secundum Deum, quod omne esse, secundum quamcumque rationem essendi, supersubstantialiter existit in Eo, qui omnium existentium est causa" (n. 661); "... sed Ipse est super omnia, sicut ante omnia supereminenter existens" (n. 661); "... ex hoc quod Ipse secundum unitatem unam, omnibus esse infundit, superlucendo eis absque sui maculatione" (n. 661); "... et nutrit omnia viventia; et custodit, idest conservat universaliter omnia, tam viventia quam non viventia; et perficit, idest ad vitam et debitam perfectionem adducit" (n. 662, p. 246); "... in Deo, qui est causa et ipsius solis et omnium existentium, concedendum est quod praeexistant exemplares rationes omnium entium secundum unitatem supersubstantialem, quae scilicet omnino substantiarum unitates excedit" (n. 662); "... Deus enim, etsi sit in essentia sua unus, tamen intelligendo suam unitatem et virtutem, cognoscit quidquid in Eo virtualiter existit. Sic igitur cognoscit ex Ipso posse procedere res diversas; huiusmodi igitur quae cognoscit ex Se posse prodire rationes intellectuales dicuntur" (n. 665, p. 249); "... Hoc est ergo quod dicit, quod exemplaria dicimus esse non res aliquas extra Deum, sed in ipso intellectu divino quasdam existentium rationes intellectas, quae sunt substantiarum activae, et praeexistunt in Deo singulariter, idest unite et non secundum aliquam diversitatem" (n. 666, p. 249).

and God closer together, who is ultimately proven to be the absolute, conserving, and exclusive cause of the existence of everything, and to whom the path of the metaphysical demonstration of *esse* leads. The inclination towards *esse*, whether one speaks of *esse commune* or *ens commune*, clearly points to the existential metaphysics of Aquinas and those who followed in his footsteps.

Final Remarks

It would not be an exaggeration to maintain that the concept of Kant's "object in general" (*Gegenstand überhaupt*) bears some resemblance to the concept of "common being" in Aquinas. More than that, some relative comparisons can also be demonstrated in Avicenna († 1037) and other medieval thinkers. According to the latter, the subject of metaphysics is the most universal concept of the "third nature" (*natura tertia*), which fulfills its function as a synonym of the "common nature" of being (*natura communis*) before its individuation or merely essential determination. Certain convergences can be indicated markedly with Duns Scotus († 1308), for whom the concept of being comes down to an intelligible apprehension of the most universal nature in the intellect.¹²⁹ The concept of *ens commune* may likely be related to Averroes († 1198), for whom diminished being (*ens diminutum*) is a universal *ratio entis* (i.e. *in genere diminuto generum entis*), that is, an intelligible object of apprehension encompassing the nature of distinctive beings.¹³⁰ As in the approach that Scotus maintained, when the *ratio entis* is expressed in the concrete (*haecceitas*), it can determine

¹²⁹ Cf. Eleuterio Elorduy, "Duns Scoti influxus in Francisci Suárez doctrinam," in *Acta Congressus Scotistici Internationalis Oxonii et Edimburgi: De doctrina Joannis Duns Scoti, Scotismus decursu saeculorum* 4 (Rome: Antonianum, 1968), 307–37; Parthenius Minges, "Suárez und Duns Scotus," *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 32 (1919): 334–40. On the differences between Suárez and Scotus, especially in the understanding of prime matter, see Andreas Inaven, "Suárez' Widerlegung des scotistischen Körperlichkeitsform," in *P. Franz Suarez S. J. Gedenkblätter zu seinem dreihundertjährigen Todestag* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 1917), 123–46; José F. Sagües Iturralde, "Escoto y la eficacia del Concurso divino ante Suárez," in *Scotismus decursu saeculorum*, vol. 4 of *De doctrina Joannis Duns Scoti* (Rome: Societas Internationalis Scotistica, 1968), 339–74.

¹³⁰ Averrois, "Commentarium magnum in Aristotelis Metaphysicorum libros," in *Aristotelis Metaphysicorum libri XIII cum Averrois Cordubensis in eosdem commentariis*, Aristotelis opera cum Averrois commentariis 8 (Venetiis: Apud Iunctas, 1562), lib. VIII, s. 6, c. 2, fol. 152v, 152r. For more, see Richard C. Taylor, "Remarks on Cogitatio in Averroes' Commentarium Magnum in Aristotelis de Anima Libros," in *Averroes and the Aristotelian Tradition: Sources, Constitution and Reception of the Philosophy of Ibn Rushd (1126–1198). Proceedings of the Fourth Symposium Averroicum (Cologne, 1996)*, ed. Jan Aertsen and

being in the concrete through an individual mode of existence, constituting its intrinsic mode as proper only to its singular nature (*intrinsecus modus naturae individualis*).¹³¹ Scotus adopted the Avicennan concept of *natura tertia* as a starting point for his own metaphysics and the study of reality; however, in order to designate the most universal concept of being, he also used the term *ens omnino communissime*, which seems to assume that the concept of being encompasses all denotations of real beings, excluding, however, those that are self-contradictory, such as chimera and other *impossibilia*.¹³²

Nevertheless, like most of the scholastic thinkers, Duns Scotus also emphasized the order of the second intention (*secunda intentio*), in which the intellect grasps being through the medium of an objective concept (*ens obiectivum*), which reflects the cognitive status of being in the intellect within the intellect's uppermost and undifferentiated nature, likewise with *ens commune* itself.¹³³ For both Duns Scotus and Avicenna, the concept of "nature" denotes the most universal concept, namely the very *ratio entis* of all beings within the entire created realm, despite their diversity and distinctive attributes at the level of reality. The prevailing opinion is that for Scotus, the concept of "nature" is the result of his theory on the objective apprehension of the *intelligible* in the mind (*tantum objective*), that is, by means of the second intention of the knowing intellect. This approach, being entirely dependent on cognition, discovers the fundamental reason for the existence of being in terms of propositional

Gerhard Endress, *Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Science. Texts and Studies* 31 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 217–55, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004452756_013.

¹³¹ Suárez invokes Duns Scotus's concept of "diminished being" in disp. XXXI, in which he examines the question of the difference between essence and existence: "... reprehendunt Scotum, quod asseruerit, creaturas habere quoddam esse aeternum, quod est esse diminutum earum, scilicet esse obiectivum seu essentiae in esse cognito" (Suárez, *Disputationes metaphysicae*, disp. XXXI, s. 2, n. 1). Furthermore, on the subject of "diminished being" in *Disputationes*, see disp. XX, sec. 1, n. 30; disp. XXXI, sec. 2, n. 1–2; disp. XXX, sec. 15, n. 27.

¹³² Cf. Joannes Duns Scoti, "Quodlibeta III," in *Obras del Doctor Sutil Juan Duns Escoto: Cuestiones cuodlibetales*, ed. Félix Alluntis (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1968), 93–94. See also Olivier Boulnois, *Être et représentation: Une généalogie de la métaphysique moderne à l'époque de Duns Scot* (XIIIe–XIVe siècle), *Épiméthée* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999), 459–62.

¹³³ "Aliquando autem universale accipitur pro re subjecta intentioni secundae, id est, pro quidditate rei absoluta, quae quantum est de se, nec est universalis, nec singularis, sed de se est indifferens, et tale est objectum intellectus directum; non autem est in intellectu subjective, sed tantum objective" (Joannes Duns Scotus, *Quaestiones in Libros IV, V, VI, VII, VIII Physicorum Aristotelis, in Libros Aristotelis De Anima*, vol. 3 of *Opera Omnia* (Parisiis: apud Ludovicum Vivès, Bibliopolam Editorem, 1891), q. XVII, a. 14, 546a, p. 581).

judgments of the intellect (*secundum rationem*) rather than in terms of real being itself. The *ratio entis* is then transferred from the level of being itself to the level of the intellect, which ultimately discerns *ratio entis* within its own structure of apprehension.

A quite similar comparison can be made with Francisco Suárez. In Suárez's doctrine, which draws on the views of Avicenna, Aquinas, and Scotus, essence is indeterminate in terms of individuality. For these reasons, it is indeterminate in the most universal way, in an objective concept of being and within the noetic order.¹³⁴ This means that as a *ratio entis*, understood metaphysically, essence or *esse essentiae* can refer equally to particular and universal beings, real and possible, finite and infinite, created and even uncreated (i.e. God), but it does so only in relation to existence (*secundum esse*), not in relation to reason itself.¹³⁵ For Suárez, what is knowable (*ens cognitum*), and therefore the object of the knowing reason itself, seems to encompass something more than just real beings, but unites in the concept of *cognoscibile* also beings of reason (*entia rationis*).¹³⁶ Suárez's position seems moderate, because while he denies that there is a single common (essential) concept for real being and the being of reason, the latter can never be known without the former. This means that they share a common cognitive order *secundum rationem*, and although the subject of metaphysics is real being or the concept of real being, the analysis of the being of reason is part of this science.¹³⁷ This could indicate a certain drift

¹³⁴ Cf. John P. Doyle, "Suarez on the Reality of the Possibles," *The Modern Schoolman* 45, no. 1 (1967): 29–48, <https://doi.org/10.5840/schoolman19674512>.

¹³⁵ Suárez, *Disputationes metaphysicae*, disp. I ("De natura primae philosophiae seu metaphysicae"), sec. 1, n. 26.

¹³⁶ Cf. John P. Doyle, "The Borders of Knowability: Thoughts From or Occasioned by Seventeenth-Century Jesuits," in *Die Logik des Transzendentalen: Festschrift für Jan A. Aertsen zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Martin Pickavé, *Miscellanea Mediaevalia* 30 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 644–46 (more 643–58), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110204582.7.643>.

¹³⁷ It is a common knowledge that, in the first paragraphs of *Disputationes*, Suárez argues (disp. I, sec. 1, n. 4–6) for the exclusion of being of reason from the subject of metaphysics, but in the last disputation (LIV) he clearly indicates that it is an object included in metaphysical considerations, and even necessary for the whole of his doctrine of real being. Cf. Suárez, *Disputationes metaphysicae*, disp. LIV, prol.). On Aristotle in relation to this, see Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, lib. VI, 1027b34–1028a3. Suárez also claims that beings of reason possess a second intelligibility. See Francisco Suárez, *De anima*, ed. Carolo Berton, *Opera Omnia*, 2–3 (Parisiis: Apud Ludovicum Vivès, Bibliopolam editorem, 1851), vol. 2, lib. IV, a. 1., n. 4. In the Jesuit schools of the 17th century, thinkers sought to distinguish between *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* intelligibility. A being of reason has *extrinsic* intelligibility, while a real being has *intrinsic* one. See John P. Doyle, "Extrinsic Cognoscibility: A Seventeenth-Century Supertranscendental Notion," *The Modern Schoolman* 68, no. 1 (1990): 57–80, <https://doi.org/10.5840/schoolman19906812>.

towards the concept of *ens commune* in Suárez's theory overall, especially in his metaphysics of cognition (*theoria animae*), though this possibility would require further in-depth research into this area alone.

To date, there is still a noticeable lack of comprehensive studies on Catholic and non-Catholic metaphysics and logic textbooks from the period between the 16th and 18th centuries, including pre-Kantian, Jesuit, Protestant, or strictly Lutheran commentaries and textbooks. They presumably may contain derivative theories or references to *ens commune*, which could contribute something new to the topic. Despite the reluctant, though not entirely fruitless, progress in this field, a comparative scrutiny has yet to be undertaken to render this potentially ultimate concept of being in metaphysics, the *ens commune*, worthy of attention for contemporary and discerning thinkers.

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doi.org/10.5840/schoolman19906814; John P. Doyle, "Suárez on the Unity of a Scientific Habit," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 65, no. 3 (1991): 311–34, esp. 327–33, <https://doi.org/10.5840/acpq199165312>, where the author raises the issue whether beings of reason in themselves are scientifically knowable or merely *per modum entis*.

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