

**Zeitschrift:** Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie = Revue philosophique et théologique de Fribourg = Rivista filosofica e teologica di Friburgo = Review of philosophy and theology of Fribourg

**Band:** 37 (1990)

**Heft:** 1-2

**Artikel:** The Latin Avicenna as a source for Thomas Aquinas's Metaphysics

**Autor:** Wippel, John F.

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-760839>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 15.01.2026

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

JOHN F. WIPPEL

## The Latin Avicenna as a Source for Thomas Aquinas's Metaphysics

As is well known, those seeking to study philosophy in the Arabic-speaking world during the 10th and 11th centuries were in better position to do so than were their Latin counterparts during that same period. This was so because a very small portion of classical Greek philosophical texts had been preserved in Latin translation, whereas a considerable amount of the Greek legacy had by then become available in Arabic translation. Moreover, an important philosophical movement had developed within the Arabic-speaking world. This included figures such as Al-Kindi, Al-Farabi, Avicenna, and in the 12th century, Averroes. In the 12th century a first wave of philosophical literature was translated into Latin, either directly from Greek, or from Arabic. The Arabic-Latin translations included both Greek originals then already available in Arabic, and original philosophical writings in Arabic. Not least among the original Arabic writings were important works by the Muslim philosopher Ibn Sina, or as the Latins knew him, Avicenna<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> On this see L. GARDET, «Saint Thomas et ses prédécesseurs arabes», in *St. Thomas Aquinas 1274-1974: Commemorative Studies*, ed. by A. Maurer et al. (Toronto, 1974), Vol. 1, pp. 419-20, with references to earlier studies (see nn. 4, 5) including L. GARDET – G.C. ANAWATI, *Introduction à la théologie musulmane*, 2d ed. (Paris, 1970), pp. 195-200, 244-48; J.F. WIPPEL, «Latin Translation Literature from Arabic», *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York, 1967), Vol. 14, pp. 254-256 (with additional bibliography); M.-Th. D'ALVERNY, «Avicenna Latinus I», *Archives d'Histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age* 28 (1961), pp. 281-316 (see p. 284, n. 2 for references to her earlier investigations of this); S. VAN RIET – G. VERBEKE, *Avicenna Latinus. Liber de Philosophia Prima sive Scientia Divina I-IV* (Louvain-Leiden, 1977), p. 123\*. There Van Riet notes that Avicenna's *Metaphysics* was translated at Toledo in the 12th century, after 1150. In the first

Avicenna lived from 980 until 1037, and among his many writings produced a kind of philosophical Encyclopedia known as the *Shifa*. Important parts of the *Shifa* were translated into Latin in the 12th century, including works of great interest to thirteenth-century thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas, i.e., a *De anima*, a *Metaphysics* (*Liber de philosophia prima sive divina scientia*), a *Physics*, and a small part of the *Logic*<sup>2</sup>.

In this paper I propose to concentrate on the Latin translation of Avicenna's *Metaphysics* and the influence it exercised on Thomas Aquinas. As we shall see, this influence is both positive and negative. That is to say, Thomas borrows and incorporates into his own philosophy various points already made by Avicenna, though frequently not without changing and adapting them to his own purposes. At the same time, Thomas is aware of a number of other Avicennian positions which he regards as incorrect and which he therefore rejects. Moreover, on many occasions Thomas cites Avicenna by name, thereby leaving no doubt concerning whom he has in mind. On many other occasions he does not explicitly identify Avicenna as his source even when he actually uses him. This is something Thomas's reader must discover for himself.

In order to confine this paper to reasonable length, I shall not here attempt to list all of the points on which Avicenna's influence upon Aquinas can be detected. Some general efforts have been made in this direction by others, such as Forest, Anawati, and Van Steenkiste. Instead I shall concentrate on a few points where there is a clear and

article cited in this note Gardet refers to two waves of Arabic-Latin translation dating from the 12th century, the first owing to Ibn Dâwûd-Gundisalvi, and the second to Gerard of Cremona. A third wave took place early in the 13th century and included among other translators Michael the Scot in Toledo and in Italy, and Hermann the German in Toledo (pp. 435–36).

<sup>2</sup> Until recently critical editions of the medieval Latin versions of Avicenna were not available, and the Latin reader was confined to noncritical editions: *Avicennae perhypatetici philosophi ac medicorum facile primi Opera in lucem redacta ac nuper quantum ars niti potuit per canonicos emendata* (Venice, 1508; repr. Frankfurt am Main, 1961); and *Metaphysica Avicennae sive eius Prima Philisophia* (Venice, 1495; repr. Louvain, 1961). The Latin *Metaphysics* was also included in the 1508 ed., ff. 70–109, under the title «Philosophia prima». Fortunately a critical edition of the entire Latin *Metaphysics* is now available, in 2 volumes, by S. VAN RIET, with doctrinal introductions by G. VERBEKE. For vol. 1, see the preceding note. For vol. 2 see *Avicenna Latinus. Liber de Philosophia Prima sive Scientia Divina V–X* (Louvain-Leiden, 1980).

positive influence running from Avicenna to Thomas. In the final part of the paper I shall turn to an area where Aquinas knows an Avicennian position, and reacts against it<sup>3</sup>.

### 1. *The Nature and Subject of Metaphysics*

For Aquinas, metaphysics is the science which studies being as being. In developing his view of metaphysics, he is ultimately indebted to the texts of Aristotle. Nonetheless, a number of problems were posed for later thinkers, including both Avicenna and Aquinas, by Aristotle's remarks about the nature of this discipline. Briefly stated, Aristotle seems to offer two conflicting accounts of this part of philosophy. Thus in his *Metaphysics*, Bk IV, c. 1, he refers to a science which investigates being as being, and the properties which pertain to being per se. In order to drive home his meaning, he contrasts this science with more particular ones. They cut off a portion of being and concentrate on the attributes or properties of that portion, presumably, on being as mobile in physics, or on being as quantified in mathematics. Unlike such more particular sciences, Aristotle's science of being does not restrict itself to a given kind or part of being. It studies being taken universally, and it studies it insofar as it is being<sup>4</sup>. In c. 2 of this same Bk IV of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle clarifies what he means by the term «being».

<sup>3</sup> See A. FOREST, *La structure métaphysique du concret selon saint Thomas d'Aquin*, 2d ed. (Paris, 1956), pp. 331–60; G.C. ANAWATI, «Saint Thomas d'Aquin et la *Métaphysique* d'Avicenna», in *St. Thomas Aquinas 1274–1974*, Vol. 1, pp. 449–61; C. VANSTEENKISTE, «Avicenna-Citaten bij S. Thomas», *Tijdschrift voor Philosophie* 15 (1953), pp. 457–507. For additional bibliography on Avicenna and his influence on Latin scholasticism see G.C. ANAWATI, *Essai de bibliographie avicennienne* (Cairo, 1950), section 4, «Les travaux sur Avicenne en langues autres que l'arabe», and for a French résumé of this see his «La tradition manuscrite orientale de l'œuvre d'Avicenna», *Revue thomiste* 51 (1951), pp. 407–40; also see his «Chronique avicennienne 1951–1960», *Revue thomiste* 60 (1960), pp. 630–31; «Bibliographie de la philosophie médiévale en terre d'Islam pour les années 1959–1969», *Bulletin de philosophie médiévale* 10–12 (1968–1970), p. 361; cf. pp. 343–49. For an earlier more general study see A.-M. GOICHON, *La philosophie d'Avicenne et son influence en Europe médiévale* (Forlong lectures, 1940), 2d ed. (Paris, 1951). For studies of particular doctrinal influences of Avicenna on Aquinas see my «Aquinas and Avicenna on the Relationship between First Philosophy and the Other Theoretical Sciences (*In De Trin.*, q. 5, a. 1, ad 9)», in *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas*, (Washington, D.C., 1984), Ch. II, pp. 37–53, and contributions by others as cited there on p. 37, n. 2.

<sup>4</sup> See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* IV, c. 1 (1003a 21–32).



While granting that this term is applied to different things in different ways, he singles out as its primary referent *ousia* or substance. Other things are called beings only insofar as they bear some relationship to and depend in some way upon the primary instance of being – substance. And since scientific knowledge must entail knowing something in terms of its principles and causes, Aristotle concludes that it is of being as being, i.e., of substances, that one must grasp the principles and causes<sup>5</sup>.

Well and good, we may say; but when we turn to Bk VI of the *Metaphysics*, something different seems to emerge from Aristotle's text. As in Bk IV, he begins by referring to the need to study beings as beings. Once again he contrasts this approach with that of more particular sciences which single out some particular class or kind of being and concentrate on that. They do not deal with being as such, and as being. Presumably, therefore, it is only the science we today call metaphysics that deals with being as such, and as being. But then Aristotle turns to a more thorough examination of natural philosophy and of mathematics. He notes that physics (natural philosophy) studies the kind of substances or things which do not exist in separation from matter and which are not immutable, i.e., which are mutable. Mathematics treats of things which likewise do not exist in separation from matter, but it studies them as immutable. In saying this he is thinking of our ability to study of being as quantified without our thinking of it as subject to motion. But it belongs to a third science, which he now refers to as «first philosophy» and also as «divine science», to study things which are eternal and immutable and separate (free from matter). The problem is this. Has Aristotle not now reduced his first philosophy, which still seems to be his science of being as being, to another particular science? It now seems that it does not study the whole range of being, but only one kind of being, separate or divine. How can it continue to be regarded as the universal science of being as being?<sup>6</sup>

Aristotle himself recognized the difficulty he had created, and replied that «if there is some immutable substance, the science which

<sup>5</sup> *Met.* IV, c. 2 (1003a 33–1003b 19).

<sup>6</sup> See *Met.* VI, c. 1 (1025b 3–1026a 19). At 1026a 14 I am following the original manuscript reading rather than the Schwegeler – Ross emendation, i.e., I take it that Aristotle intends to say that physics deals with things which are not separate and not immutable. For Aristotle's recognition of the difficulty of uniting into one the science of the divine and the science of being as being see 1026a 23–25.

studies this will be prior (to physics), and first philosophy, and universal insofar as it is first. And it will belong to this science to study about being as being, both what it is, and the attributes which belong to it as being»<sup>7</sup>.

In other words, even though Aristotle recognized the difficulty of uniting into one the universal science of being as being and the science of separate or divine being, he wanted to make them one and the same science. Whether or not he really succeeded in this effort is another question, of course, and one that has occasioned much controversy among specialists<sup>8</sup>.

With this we may turn to Avicenna. He is aware of this same difficulty. In the first Book or Treatise of his *Metaphysics* (*Book on First Philosophy*), he takes up the issue of the subject of metaphysics. He assumes that every theoretical science should have an appropriate subject. He identifies the subject of natural science (physics) as bodies insofar as they are subject to motion and rest. The subject of the mathematical sciences is quantity, whether simply considered as such, or in terms of that which has quantity. But the third theoretical science – divine science – investigates things which are separate from matter both in terms of their existence and in the order of definition. He then notes the need to identify more precisely the subject of divine science<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> 1026a 29–32.

<sup>8</sup> For references to recent discussions of this see I. DÜRING, *Aristoteles. Darstellung und Interpretation seines Denkens* (Heidelberg, 1966), pp. 594–99; E. KÖNIG, «Aristoteles' erste Philosophie als universale Wissenschaft von den APXAI», *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 52 (1970), pp. 225–46; J. OWENS, *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics*, 3d ed. (Toronto, 1978), pp. xiii–xxvii, 35–67, plus Part Two (for his personal interpretation of Aristotle); B. DUMOULIN, *Analyse génétique de la Métaphysique d'Aristote* (Montréal-Paris, 1986), pp. 107–74. Two important contributions by A. MANSION should also be mentioned: «L'objet de la science philosophique suprême d'après Aristote, *Métaph.* E 1», in *Mélanges de philosophie grecque offerts à Mgr A. Diès* (Paris, 1956), pp. 151–68; «Philosophie première, philosophie seconde et métaphysique chez Aristote», *Revue philosophique de Louvain* 56 (1958), pp. 165–221. For a brief survey of some medieval reactions to this problem see my «Essence and Existence», Ch. 19 in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, ed. by N. Kretzmann, A. Kenny, J. Pinborg (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 385–92.

<sup>9</sup> Van Riet ed., Vol. 1, p. 2:20–30. Here I shall cite from this edition, with occasional reference to the Arabic-French translation by G.C. ANAWATI, *La Métaphysique du Shifā'*. *Livres I à V* (Paris, 1978); *Livres VI à X* (Paris, 1985). Note that Avicenna refers to the things investigated by mathematics as being free from any species of matter or capacity for motion in their definition. On the other hand, divine science «non inquirunt nisi res separatas a materia secundum existentiam et definitionem» (italics mine), p. 2:28–30. That the

One possible candidate for the subject of this science would seem to be God. Such might be suggested by one of the titles used to describe it by Aristotle in Bk VI of his *Metaphysics*, i.e., «divine science». Nonetheless, Avicenna denies that God is the subject of this discipline. God's existence is rather one of the issues to be investigated in this science. Avicenna notes that the subject of a science is something the existence of which is taken as given by that science, not something the existence of which is to be demonstrated in that science itself. In other words, Avicenna is convinced that no science can demonstrate the existence of its subject. But he maintains that God's existence can be established only in metaphysics, not in any other philosophical science. And the question of his existence must not remain unexamined by philosophy. Therefore, if no science can demonstrate the existence of its own subject, and if God's existence can be demonstrated only in metaphysics, it follows that God cannot be the subject of metaphysics<sup>10</sup>.

Avicenna also considers as another candidate for subject of this science the causes, that is to say, all four of them taken together, not merely any one of them taken individually. He rejects this position as well. Hence Avicenna concludes that the subject of this science can only be being as being (according to the Latin translation), or the existent insofar as it is an existent (as the Arabic is often rendered)<sup>11</sup>.

things studied by divine science are free from matter in existence as well as in definition is crucial for the Avicennian view. On the need to clarify the subject of metaphysics see pp. 2–4. On p. 4 he identifies first philosophy with wisdom taken without qualification, and also notes that three characteristics which have been associated with wisdom pertain to first philosophy, i.e., that wisdom is a nobler science which deals with a nobler object, that its knowledge is more certain and fitting, and that it is the science which deals with the first causes of all (see p. 3:47–50).

<sup>10</sup> Van Riet ed., pp. 4–6. Note in particular Avicenna's claims: that God is one of the things investigated in this science (p. 4:64–65); that if this were not so, then either God's existence would be granted in this science, and investigated in some other science, or else granted in this science and not investigated in any other (both of these alternatives are to be rejected as false), see pp. 4:66–5:81; that because God's existence is investigated in this science, he cannot be the subject of this science (for no science should establish that its subject is): «Nulla enim scientiarum debet stabilire esse suum subiectum» (p. 5:83–85); more detailed proof that God's existence can be established only in this science, since it investigates things completely separate from matter: «quod ipsa inquit res separatas omnino a materia» (pp. 5:87–6:96). Cf. H. DAVIDSON, *Proofs for Eternity, Creation and the Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 284–86.

<sup>11</sup> Avicenna considers four different ways in which the causes might be regarded as the subject of this science: (1) insofar as they exist; (2) or insofar as they are causes without qualification («inquantum sunt causae absolutae»); or (3) insofar as each of the four is a

Concerning this issue, Avicenna's influence on thirteenth-century Latin thinkers is pronounced indeed. As they saw things, another and later Islamic thinker – Averroes – had in fact concluded that the subject of metaphysics is a special kind of being, i. e., separate or divine entity. While Averroes agreed with Avicenna that no science can establish the existence of its own subject, he emphatically denied that God's existence is proved in metaphysics. It is rather physics which demonstrates this by proving that there is a First Mover. By doing this, physics establishes the point that there is indeed being which is separate from matter and motion, and hands this over to metaphysics to serve as its subject<sup>12</sup>. Thus

cause according to the mode which is proper to it; or (4) insofar as they constitute a whole which results from their union. He considers and rejects in turn alternatives 2, 3, and 4 (see pp. 6:97–8:49). If one turns to alternative 1 and speaks of studying the causes insofar as they exist («inquantum habent esse») and of all that happens to them in terms of this, it will be more appropriate to conclude that being insofar as it is being is the subject of this science («oportebit tunc ut ens, inquantum est ens, sit subiectum, quod est convenientius»), see p. 8:49–52. Note that Anawati renders this: «il faut alors que le sujet premier... soit l'existant en tant qu'existant» (*ed. cit.*, p. 90:7–8). Verbeke also expresses it this way (see Van Riet *ed.*, Introduction, p. 17\*). And as we shall see below, in commenting on *Metaphysics* I, c. 5 and Avicenna's discussion there of primary concepts such as *ens*, *res*, and *necesse* (as the medieval Latin translation expresses them), M. MARMURA renders the first (which translates the Arabic *al-mawjūd*) not as «being» but as «the existent». See his «Avicenna on Primary Concepts in the *Metaphysics* of his *al-Shifā*», in *Logos Islamikos: Studia Islamica in honorem Georgii Michaelis Wickens*, R.M. Savory and D.A. Agius, eds., (Toronto, 1984), pp. 219–39. And so does G. FINIANOS in commenting on our present passage. See his *Les grandes divisions de l'être «mawjūd»* (Fribourg, 1976), p. 19. On the other hand, M. FAKHRY refers to the «primary object of this science as being qua being...» in his *A History of Islamic Philosophy* (2d ed. New York, 1983), p. 147, while presenting the Avicennian position. But in another context he refers to it as «the existing entity (*al-mawjūd*) insofar as it exists...» See his «The Subject-Matter of Metaphysics: Aristotle and Ibn Sina (Avicenna)», in *Islamic Theology and Philosophy: Studies in Honor of George F. Hourani*, ed. by M.E. Marmura (Albany, 1984), p. 139.

<sup>12</sup> For the Latin Averroes see *In I Phys.*, com. 83 (Venice, 1562–74), Vol. 4, ff. 47rb–48va: «Sed notandum est quod istud genus entium, esse scilicet separatum a materia, non declaratur nisi in hac scientia naturali. Et qui dicit quod prima Philosophia nititur declarare entia separabilia esse peccat. Haec entia sunt subiecta primae Philosophiae, et declaratum est in Posterioribus Analyticis quod impossibile est aliquam scientiam declarare suum subiectum esse, sed concedit ipsum esse, aut quia manifestum per se, aut quia est demonstratum in alia scientia. Unde Avicenna peccavit maxime cum dixit quod primus Philosophus demonstrat primum principium esse, et processit in hoc in suo libro de Scientia Divina per viam, quam existimavit esse necessariam et essentialem in illa scientia, et peccavit peccato manifesto». Also see *In II Phys.*, com. 22, ff. 56vb–57ra; *In IV Met.*, com. 1 (Venice, 1562–1574), Vol. 8, ff. 64rb–64va; com. 2, ff. 65rb–66rb; *In XII Met.*, com. 5, ff. 292vb–293va. On this see A. ZIMMERMANN, *Ontologie oder Metaphysik? Die Diskussion über den Gegenstand der Metaphysik im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert* (Leiden-Köln, 1965), pp. 116–17; J. WIPPEL, «Essence and Existence», in *Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 386–87.

we find a late thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century thinker such as Duns Scotus explicitly contrasting Avicenna and Averroes concerning this before he attempts to work out his own solution<sup>13</sup>.

As for Thomas Aquinas, he maintains that the subject of metaphysics is being (*ens*) as being, or as he also some times puts it, being in general (*ens commune*). Its subject is definitely not God<sup>14</sup>. On these points he sides with Avicenna, not with Averroes. But on one issue related to this he seems to go beyond Avicenna and beyond his own contemporaries. Avicenna does not spell out for us the precise relationship between God and being as being – the subject of metaphysics. If God is not the subject of metaphysics, is God included under being as being, its subject? It would seem so. And this view is defended by thirteenth-century thinkers such as Siger of Brabant, Godfrey of Fontaines, and at the turn of the century, Duns Scotus<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> See *Ordinatio*, Prol., pars 3, q. 2, ad 2, nn. 193–94 (Vatican ed., 1950–), Vol. 1, pp. 129–31; *Lectura*, Prol., pars 2, q. 2, ad arg., n. 97, Vol. 16, pp. 34–35; *Report. Paris. examinata*, Prol., q. 3 (Victor Doucet transcription, f. 8, p. 27): «De primo est controversia inter Avicennam et Averroem. Posuit enim Avicenna quod Deus non est subiectum in metaphysica, sed aliquid aliud ut ens, quia nulla scientia probat suum subiectum esse; metaphysicus probat Deum esse et substantias separatas esse; ergo etc. Averroes reprehendit Avicennam in commento ultimo I Physicorum: supposita maiori Avicennae, quod nulla scientia probat suum subiectum esse, quae est communis utrique, capit quod Deus est subiectum in metaphysica et quod Deum esse non probatur in metaphysica, sed in physica... Sed Avicenna bene dicit et Averroes valde male... Dico ergo ad quaestionem... quod Deus non est subiectum in metaphysica». There is some difficulty in reconciling Scotus's general position concerning this with his discussion in his *Quaestiones subtilissimae super libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis*, Bk I, q. 1 (Vivès ed., Vol. 7, pp. 11–40). So true is this that J. OWENS has suggested that here we have not Scotus's personal opinion but rather a school disputation in which «both sides of the question were treated problematically, but no decision given, at least in the extant text». See «Up to what Point is God Included in the Metaphysics of Duns Scotus», *Mediaeval Studies* 10 (1948), p. 165. For an attempt to reconcile Scotus's discussion here with what he says elsewhere see A. ZIMMERMANN, *Ontologie oder Metaphysik?*, pp. 243–58. And now see L. HONNEFELDER, *Ens inquantum ens. Der Begriff des Seienden als solchen als Gegenstand der Metaphysik nach der Lehre des Johannes Duns Scotus* (Münster, 1979), pp. 99–125 (espec. pp. 111–12; and pp. 119 ff.).

<sup>14</sup> See his *Expositio super Librum Boethii De Trinitate*, Br. Decker, ed., (Leiden, 1959), Q. 5, a. 4, p. 194 («quae habet subiectum ens inquantum est ens»); p. 195; *In duodecim libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis expositio* (Turin-Rome, 1950), Prooemium, p. 2: «Quamvis autem subiectum huius scientiae sit ens commune...»

<sup>15</sup> For discussion and references to Siger and Scotus see my treatment in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, pp. 386–90. On Avicenna concerning this also see A. ZIMMERMANN, *Ontologie...*, pp. 112–14. My references to Siger should be updated according to the recent editions of the four surviving versions of his *Quaestiones in Metaphysicam*. See *Siger de Brabant. Quaestiones in Metaphysicam* (Munich and Vienna mss.), Wm. Dunphy, ed., (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1981), Intr. q. 1 (Munich ms.), pp. 35–37; *Siger de*



For Thomas Aquinas, however, this is not the case. As he views things, we should distinguish between the subject of a science and the principles of that subject. A science such as metaphysics must take its subject as given, presumably because in the case of being, one does not demonstrate this. One discovers it. But it is the business of a given science to arrive at knowledge of the causes and principles of its subject. This means that one must strive in metaphysics to arrive at knowledge of the cause of being as being or of being in general, i.e., of everything that falls under this general notion. But God is the cause of the existence of every other being. Therefore, in metaphysics one should strive to reach knowledge of God, the principle and cause of every other being, and hence the cause of that which falls under being as being<sup>16</sup>. Hence one's metaphysical inquiry will not be completed until one reaches knowledge of God's existence. But not only is God not the subject of metaphysics. According to Thomas, God does not fall under the notion of being in general or being as being that is its subject. Hence God enters into the metaphysician's consideration only indirectly, as the principle or cause of that which the metaphysician considers directly – being as being<sup>17</sup>. Here, then, we have a case where Thomas borrows heavily from Avicenna, but also goes beyond his Islamic predecessor.

*Brabant. Quaestiones in Metaphysicam* (Cambridge and Paris mss.), A. Maurer, ed., (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1983), Intr., q. 1. (Cambridge ms.), pp. 23–25; (Paris ms.), pp. 395–96. For Godfrey's views concerning this see my *The Metaphysical Thought of Godfrey of Fontaines* (Washington, D.C., 1981), pp. 2–15, esp., pp. 8–11.

<sup>16</sup> For the distinction between the principles or causes of the subject of a science and the subject itself see *In De Trin.*, q. 5, a. 4 (pp. 192, 195); Prooemium to his *Commentary on the Metaphysics*, p. 2. On knowledge of the causes or principles of the subject as the end of the science see Prooemium, p. 2; *In De Trin.*, q. 5, a. 4, p. 192: «... cum scientia non perficiatur nisi per cognitionem principiorum...» For the point that it belongs to one and the same science to consider the causes of a given subject-genus, and that genus itself, see Prooemium, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> This is clearly implied by the two sources cited in the preceding note. In addition, for Thomas's refusal to include God under *esse commune*, see his *Commentary on the Divine Names*, *In Librum B. Dionysii de Divinis nominibus expositio* (Turin-Rome, 1950), C. V, 1. 2, n. 660, p. 245: «Secundo, quantum ad hoc quod omnia existentia continentur sub ipso esse communi, non autem Deus, sed magis esse commune continetur sub eius virtute...» While it is true that Thomas here speaks of *esse commune* rather than of *ens commune*, it is clear that the two are coequal in terms of extension. To speak of *esse commune* is to emphasize the *actus essendi* which is included in Thomas's understanding of *ens commune*. On this see my «Thomas Aquinas and Participation», in *Studies in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. by J.F. Wippel (Washington, D.C., 1987), pp. 150–51. As is indicated there, Thomas explicitly states that *ens commune* and *esse commune* are equal in extension in his *Commentary on the De Hebdomadibus*. See *In De Hebdomadibus*, lect. 2, M. Calcaterra, ed., (Turin-Rome, 1954), p. 397, n. 24.

## 2. *The Discovery of Being as Being*

If being as being is the subject of metaphysics, how does one discover this subject? According to Aquinas, some understanding of being is available to every thinking human being. In fact, he would often state, frequently with explicit reference to Avicenna, that being (*ens*) is that which is first known to the intellect and that into which the intellect resolves all its other conceptions<sup>18</sup>. Avicenna applies this to three primary notions, thing (*res*), being (*ens* or the existent [*al-mawjud*]), and the necessary, in his *Metaphysics* I, c. 5: «We will say, therefore, that thing (*res*) and being (*ens*) and the necessary are such that they are immediately impressed on the soul by a first impression, which is not taken from other things better known than these themselves.» Avicenna also draws a parallel between these primary ideas or conceptions, and first principles or judgments to which assent is given immediately<sup>19</sup>. In his *De veritate* q. 1, a. 1, Aquinas draws this same parallel between the need for first principles in the order of things which are subject to demonstration, and the need for a first conception such as being: «That which the intellect first conceives as most known, and into which it resolves all its (other) conceptions is being (*ens*), as Avicenna says at the beginning of his *Metaphysics*»<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> See, for instance, *De ente et essentia*, Prooemium, Roland-Gosselin ed., p. 1 / Leonine ed. Vol. 43, p. 369: «... ens autem et essentia sunt quae primo intellectu concipiuntur, ut dicit Avicenna in principio suae Metaphysicae...»; *In De Trin.*, q. 1, a. 3, obj. 3: «... quia ens est illud quod primo cadit in cognitione humana, ut Avicenna dicit» (Decker ed., p. 69); *De ver.*, q. 21, a. 1: «Cum autem ens sit id quod primo cadit in conceptione intellectus, ut Avicenna dicit...» (Spiazzi ed., p. 376 / Leonine ed. Vol. 22.1, p. 593); *In I Met.*, lect. 2, p. 13, n. 46: «... nam primo in intellectu cadit ens, ut Avicenna dicit, et prius in intellectu cadit animal quam homo...»; *ST I-IIae*, q., 55, a. 4, ad 1: «... id quod primo cadit in intellectu est ens: unde unicuique apprehenso a nobis attribuimus quod sit ens» (Turin-Rome, 1950), p. 242.

<sup>19</sup> Van Riet ed., Vol. 1, Tr. I, ch. 5, pp. 31–32: «Dicemus igitur quod res et ens et necesse talia sunt quod statim imprimuntur in anima prima impressione, quae non acquiritur aliis notioribus se, sicut credulitas quae habet prima principia, ex quibus ipsa provenit per se, et est alia ab eis, sed propter ea». Cf. Anawati's French translation from the Arabic for the latter part of the above: «En effet, [il en est] comme dans le domaine du jugement (*tasdiq*): il y a des principes premiers que l'on admet pour eux-mêmes et à cause desquels on admet les autres» (ed. cit., p. 106). For an English translation see M. MARMURA, «Avicenna on Primary Concepts in the *Metaphysics* of his *al-Shifa*», in *Logos Islamikos: Studia Islamica in honorem Georgii Michaelis Wickens* (Toronto, 1984), p. 222: «We say: the ideas of <the existent>, <the thing> and...»

<sup>20</sup> «Illud autem quod primo intellectus concipit quasi notissimum et in quod omnes conceptiones resolvit est ens, ut Avicenna dicit in principio suae Metaphysicae» (Leonine ed., Vol. 22.1, p. 5).



At the same time, Thomas does not believe that everyone is a born metaphysician. In fact, he seems to be rather pessimistic about there being any such thing as a metaphysics for the many. When it comes to metaphysical conclusions such as the existence of God, he writes in *Summa contra gentiles* I, c. 4, it was fitting for God to have revealed certain truths to us which unaided human reason can discover, at least in principle, and this for three reasons. Otherwise most men would never discover such truths, owing to their lack of ability, their lack of sufficient time, or simple laziness. Secondly, even those who did succeed in such an endeavor would do so only after a long period of time had passed. And finally, even for these considerable error might be intermingled with the truth they had discovered<sup>21</sup>.

It is true that in this context Thomas is speaking about sophisticated metaphysical conclusions such as our knowledge that God exists or that God is one. Even so, in supporting his argumentation in that same passage, he writes that «almost all of philosophy is directed towards the knowledge of God, and this is why metaphysics, which deals with divine things, is the last part of philosophy to be learned»<sup>22</sup>. Hence it seems that for Aquinas a considerable amount of philosophical sophistication is required even for one to begin metaphysics and even for one to discover being as being.

It seems to me, therefore, that one should distinguish two notions of being within Thomas's thinking. The first is the ordinary premetaphysical grasp of reality, or of being, which is open to everyone. But this notion is still restricted to the kinds of being with which our knowledge begins, i.e., material and changing being. In order to move on to a knowledge of being as being – the subject of metaphysics, one must free one's understanding of being from restriction to any particular kind or class of being. In order to account for this, Thomas appeals to a special kind of judgment, a negative judgment, which he refers to as «separation». Through this judgment one recognizes that that by reason of which something enjoys being is not to be identified with that by reason of which it enjoys a given kind of being, such as canine being, or living being, or changing being, or mathematical being. As a consequence, one

<sup>21</sup> See *Summa contra gentiles*, Ed. Leonina Manualis (Rome, 1934), p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> «... cum fere totius philosophiae consideratio ad Dei cognitionem ordinetur; propter quod metaphysica, quae circa divina versatur, inter philosophiae partes ultima remanet addiscenda» (p. 4).

judges that being, in order to be realized as such, need not be material and changing, or quantified, or spiritual. It need only be being. Only at this point does one discover the subject of metaphysics – being as being<sup>23</sup>.

In my opinion this is one of the most interesting and original features in Thomas's approach to metaphysics. But I would also like to suggest that in developing this, Thomas was once again influenced by Avicenna. This time the debt is not explicitly acknowledged by Aquinas. And the doctrine found in the two thinkers is not identical. Nevertheless, in Bk I, c. 2 of his *Metaphysics*, Avicenna makes a studied effort to show how it is that we can think of being as being. He notes that the subject of natural science is body, not insofar as it is being (*ens*) or existent (according to the Arabic), nor insofar as it is substance, nor even insofar as it is composed of matter and form, but only insofar as it is subject to motion and rest. The subject of the mathematical sciences is measure, whether this is understood without matter (in geometry) or as in matter (in astronomy), and number, whether this is understood without matter (in arithmetic) or as in matter (in music). Avicenna comments that it does not belong to mathematics as such to determine whether or not measure and number are understood without matter or in matter; mathematics merely accepts this as already settled, and derives appropriate attributes therefrom. The subject of logic will be second intentions, not first intentions, but without any reference to their mode of existence<sup>24</sup>.

Therefore, reasons Avicenna, there must be some science which studies substance insofar as it is being (an existent, according to the Arabic) or substance, and body insofar as it is substance, and measure and number insofar as they exist and how they exist, and which also considers the kinds of forms which do not exist in matter, or if they do, not in corporeal matter. But such a consideration cannot be carried out by any of the sciences which deal only with sensible things as such (i.e., physics), or with things which exist only in sensible matter even if these sciences abstract them from sensible matter (i.e., mathematics). Rather

<sup>23</sup> For fuller discussion of this see Ch. IV, «Metaphysics and *Separatio...*», in my *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas*, especially pp. 70–82. Cf. Thomas's remark in *In VI Met.*, lect. 1, p. 298, n. 1165, where he explicitly mentions Avicenna.

<sup>24</sup> *Ed. cit.*, pp. 9–10.

such things are included among those which have a being which is in some way separated from matter<sup>25</sup>.

And then, in terms which seem to anticipate Thomas's later discussion of separation, Avicenna comments that the existence of a substance, insofar as it is a substance, does not depend upon matter<sup>26</sup>. Otherwise there could be nothing but sensible substances. Again, it is incidental to number whether it be realized in sensible things or in things which are not sensible. Hence number, insofar as it is number, does not depend upon sensible things. Measure, too, even though its meaning is more complex, should be investigated in its different usages in terms of its relationship to existence. And to consider it in terms of its existence is not to consider it insofar as it depends upon matter. Second intentions, the subject of logic, do not depend on sensible things for their being. Therefore, all of these fall within the scope of a science which studies that whose realization (*constitutio* or closer to the Arabic, subsistence) does not depend upon sensible reality<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10. Note especially: «Deinde consideratio de substantia inquantum est ens vel est substantia, vel de corpore inquantum est substantia, et de mensura et numero inquantum habent esse et quomodo habent esse, et de rebus formalibus quae non sunt in materia, vel, si sint in materia, non tamen corporea, et quomodo sint illae, et quis modus est magis proprius illis, separatim per se debet haberi». The meaning of the next two sentences in the Latin is clearer in the Arabic-French translation. See Anawati, p. 92: «Il n'est pas possible, en effet, que cela ressortisse à la science des sensibles ni à une des sciences de ce dont l'existence est dans le sensible mais que la représentation (tawahhum) et la définition dépouillent des sensibles». See the Latin: «Non enim potest esse subiectum alicuius scientiarum de sensibilibus nec alicuius scientiarum de eo quod habet esse in sensibilibus. Nam aestimatio est exspoliatio a sensibilibus...» The Latin concludes: «haec autem sunt de universitate eorum quae habent esse separata a materia».

<sup>26</sup> *Ed. cit.*, p. 10: «Manifestum est enim quod esse substantiae, inquantum est substantia tantum, non pendet ex materia; alioquin non esset substantia nisi sensibilis.» Compare with Thomas, *In De Trinitate*, q. 5, a. 3: «Substantia autem, quae est materia intelligibilis quantitatis, potest esse sine quantitate». Thomas immediately goes on to apply his distinction between separation and abstraction: «unde considerare substantiam sine quantitate magis pertinet ad genus separationis quam abstractionis» (Decker ed., p. 186).

<sup>27</sup> Van Riet ed., pp. 10–12. Avicenna's discussion of measure is more complicated than my remark in my text might suggest, and the Latin text needs to be controlled by the Arabic-French version at one point in order for it to be coherent. Compare p. 11:99–1 with Anawati, p. 92: «Aucune d'elles n'est séparée de la matière; mais la mesure au sens premier, bien qu'elle ne se sépare pas de la matière, elle est également principe de l'existence des corps naturels. Si donc elle est principe de leur existence, il ne se peut pas que sa subsistance (*qiwām*) dépende d'eux en ce sens que la subsistance (for *substance*, in Anawati) proviendrait (au corps) à partir des sensibles, mais au contraire, ce sont les sensibles qui prennent de lui leur subsistance. La mesure est donc antérieure par essence

Avicenna concludes that the only subject which can be common to all of these and of which they may be regarded as dispositions and accidents is *esse* (the existent, according to the Arabic). Some of these are substances, some are quantities, and some fall under other predicaments. The only common feature which applies to all of them is that of being<sup>28</sup>. Therefore being insofar as it is being (*ens inquantum est ens*) or the existent (*al-mawjud*) is the subject of this science<sup>29</sup>.

In his effort to show that all of these can be studied from the standpoint of their being or their existence, Avicenna is attempting to make the same point that Aquinas does through his appeal to the

aux choses sensibles». In sum, Avicenna notes that measure may be understood as the dimension which constitutes a natural body, or else as continuous quantity which is said of a line, a surface, or of a determined body. While neither of these is separate from matter, taken in the first sense measure itself is to be regarded as a principle of existence for natural bodies. Far from depending upon them for its existence, they depend upon it for their existence. Taken in the second sense, he goes on to argue, one can consider measure either from the standpoint of its existence, or from the standpoint of its accidents. To consider it in terms of its existence is not to consider it insofar as it depends on matter.

<sup>28</sup> Van Riet ed., p. 12: «Sed non potest poni eis subiectum commune, ut illorum omnium sint dispositiones et accidentalia communia, nisi esse. Quaedam enim eorum sunt substantiae, et quaedam quantitates, et quaedam alia praedicamenta; quae non possint habere communem intentionem qua certificentur nisi intentionem essendi.» He then lists other things which should also be studied, and which are common to the sciences but treated by no particular science. He mentions the one insofar as it is one, the many insofar as it is many, the fitting, the unfitting, the contrary, etc. He notes that these, too: «nec possunt esse accidentalia alicui nisi ei quod est esse, inquantum est esse». He concludes: «Igitur ostensum est tibi ex his omnibus quod ens, inquantum est ens, est commune omnibus his et quod ipsum debet poni subiectum huius magisterii...»

<sup>29</sup> He makes the point that there is no need to inquire whether being is or what is it, as if another science were required to do this. This is rather to be taken as given. «Ideo primum subiectum huius scientiae est ens, inquantum est ens; et ea quae inquirunt sunt consequentia ens, inquantum est ens, sine condicione» (p. 13). Note how the Latin easily moves from referring to the subject of this science as *esse* (see n. 28) to speaking of it as *ens* (*inquantum est ens*). For confirmation of the distinctiveness of this perspective see Bk I, c. 2, near the end. There he notes that while this science studies different kinds of things, all of them have this in common that they are considered as separate from matter in definition and in existence: «... et propterea definitur scientia divina sic quod est scientia de rebus separatis a materia definitione et definitionibus (in definition and in existence), quia ens, inquantum est ens, et principia eius et accidentalia eius, inquantum sunt, sicut iam patuit, nullum eorum est nisi praecedens materiam nec pendet esse eius ex esse illius. Cum autem inquiratur in hac scientia de eo quod non praecedit materiam, non inquiratur in ea nisi secundum hoc quod eius esse non eget materia» (p. 16). See pp. 16–17 for a listing of four different kinds of things which may be described as or at least studied as not dependent upon matter. Even material things such as rest and motion can be studied in this science, not insofar as they are in matter, «sed secundum esse quod habent» (p. 17).

negative judgment of separation. The point is to show that being, in order to be realized as such, need not be restricted to this or that given kind such as material being, or changing being, or quantified being, and therefore that metaphysics or first philosophy should study being as such, not as restricted to material or changing or quantified being. Hence it seems to me that in developing his theory of separation, Aquinas must have drawn considerable inspiration from this Avicennian text. (I propose this while recognizing that Aquinas's explicit distinction between separation taken as a negative judgment and mere abstraction is not present in the Avicennian text.) It should also be noted that in developing other parts of q. 5 of his Commentary on the *De Trinitate*, Thomas explicitly acknowledges his debt to Avicenna<sup>30</sup>.

### 3. *Essence and Existence*

The name of Thomas Aquinas has long been associated with the theory of distinction and composition in all finite beings of two principles, an essence which accounts for their being what they are, and an act of existing (*esse*, or *actus essendi*) which accounts for the fact that they exist and is their ultimate intrinsic source of actuality and perfection. Much has been written about the central role this doctrine plays within his metaphysics<sup>31</sup>. But for the present I shall take as granted the impor-

<sup>30</sup> For at least the suggestion that Thomas may have been inspired by Avicenna in developing his theory of *separatio* see L. GEIGER, «Abstraction et séparation d'après s. Thomas *In de Trinitate*, q. 5, a. 3», *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 31 (1947), p. 27. Geiger gives no reference to Avicenna, however. For a more recent suggestion of this same influence see J.J. HALADUS, *The Negative Judgment of Separation According to Saint Thomas Aquinas's Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius* (Rome, 1979), pp. 122–27; cf. pp. 70–72. Curiously, he argues in large measure from texts of Avicenna which were not available to Thomas in Latin translation and, when using texts which were known to Aquinas, concentrates on Bk VIII of the *Metaphysics*, totally bypassing the discussion of the subject of metaphysics in Bk I. On Thomas's usage of Avicenna in q. 5, a. 1, ad 9 of his Commentary on the *De Trinitate* see my *Metaphysical Themes*, Ch. II. For Thomas's 10 explicit references to Avicenna in this same Commentary see C. VANSTEENKISTE, «Avicenna-Citaten bij S. Thomas», pp. 458–60.

<sup>31</sup> For discussion of some of these issues and for references to other secondary literature see *Metaphysical Themes*, cc. V and VI, and more recently, *Studies in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. by Wippel (Washington, D.C., 1987), ch. 6 («Thomas Aquinas and Participation»), pp. 117–58, by myself. Along with other studies by J. OWENS mentioned in the first source just cited, one should now consult his *Aquinas on Being and Thing* (Niagara University Press, N.Y., 1981), and his «Aquinas's Distinction at *De ente et Essentia* 4.119–123», *Mediaeval Studies* 48 (1986), pp. 264–87. I remain unconvinced by his continuing efforts to show that Aquinas's argumentation for real distinction between essence and existence in the *De ente* presupposes his argumentation for God's existence.



tance of this theory within Thomas's philosophy. Here I wish to turn again to the Latin Avicenna, to determine if and to what extent he may be regarded as a partial source for Aquinas.

Among contemporary students of the Arabic Avicenna, there are some who deny that he defended the kind of real distinction between essence and existence which has long been associated with his name by Western interpreters, and who insist especially that he did not regard existence as an accident or accidental reality which is superadded to essence. Others, however, continue to attribute these views to the Arabic Avicenna<sup>32</sup>. Not being an Arabic scholar myself, I shall leave examination of this issue to those who are. I shall continue to restrict myself to the only Avicenna known to Aquinas, the Latin Avicenna. And once we turn to medieval Latin thinkers, it becomes clear that not only Aquinas but many of his thirteenth-century contemporaries saw in Avicenna a defender of real distinction between essence and existence. Moreover, encouraged as they were in this reading by the Latin Averroes, thinkers such as Aquinas, Siger of Brabant, and James of Viterbo

<sup>32</sup> See F. RAHMAN, «Essence and Existence in Avicenna», *Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies* 4 (Oxford, 1958), pp. 1–16; «Ibn Sina», in M.M. SHARIF, *A History of Muslim Philosophy* (Wiesbaden, 1963), Vol. 1, (1981), pp. 481–86; «Essence and Existence in Ibn Sīnā. The Myth and the Reality», *Hamdard Islamicus* 4, pp. 3–14; P. MOREWEDGE, «Philosophical Analysis and Ibn Sina's «Essence-Existence» Distinction», *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 92 (1972), pp. 425–35; F. SHEHADI, *Metaphysics in Islamic Philosophy* (Delmar, N.Y., 1982), pp. 77–83. Shehadi's point is that existence for Avicenna is an accident in the logical sense, but not in the metaphysical sense. For some who find Avicenna defending a real or at least more than a conceptual distinction between essence and existence see A.M. GOICHON, *La distinction de l'essence et de l'existence d'après Ibn Sīnā (Avicenne)*, (Paris, 1937), pp. 130–48; G.C. ANAWATI, *La métaphysique du «Shifā»*, Vol. 1, pp. 71, 78 (where he seems to agree with the charge by Aquinas that Avicenna also mistakenly regarded existence as a kind of accident superadded to essence); J. JOLIVET, «Aux origines de l'ontologie d'Ibn Sina», in *Etudes sur Avicenne*, ed. by Jolivet and R. Rashed (Paris, 1984), p. 13 (on the distinction of essence and existence in *Metaphysics* I, c. 5), p. 15 (passing reference to the adventitious nature of existence in relation to essence, and after his presentation of *Metaphysics* I, c. 5), p. 24 (where he refers to «la distinction essentielle, mais non réelle, entre la chose et l'existant» and then to «la distanciation de celle-là (l'essence) par rapport à celle-ci (l'existence)»; M. MARMURA, «Avicenna on Primary Concepts...», pp. 225–27; «The Metaphysics of Efficient Causality in Avicenna (Ibn Sina)», in *Islamic Theology. Studies in Honor of George F. Hourani*, ed. by M. Marmura (Albany, N.Y., 1984), p. 180; «Avicenna IV. Metaphysics», in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, E. Yarshater, ed., (Routledge and Kegan Paul: London and New York), Vol. III, Fascicle 1, pp. 75–78 (this entire article is an excellent introduction to Avicenna's metaphysics; see pp. 73–79).

criticized Avicenna for viewing being (and hence, by implication, existence), as a kind of accident that is superadded to essence<sup>33</sup>.

In Bk I, c. 5 of his *Metaphysics* Avicenna writes that being (or the existent), thing, and the necessary are such that they are immediately impressed on the soul by a first impression. This we have already mentioned<sup>34</sup>. Farther on in this same chapter he remarks that the meaning (*intentio*) of being (existence according to the Arabic) and the meaning of thing are distinct. Their relationship is not like that of

<sup>33</sup> For the text from the Latin Averroes see *Aristotelis opera cum Averrois Commentariis* (Venice, 1562–1574), Vol. 8, fol. 67ra: «Avicenna autem peccavit multum in hoc, quod existimavit quod unum et ens significant dispositiones additas essentiae rei». Averroes's reference to *ens* as a disposition which is added to the essence of a thing was taken by some of the Latins as implying both that Avicenna defended real distinction between essence and existence, and that he regarded existence as a kind of accident which is superadded to essence. See, for instance, Thomas Aquinas, *In IV Met.*, lect. 2, n. 556: «Sciendum est autem quod circa hoc Avicenna aliud sensit. Dixit enim quod unum et ens non significant substantiam rei, sed significant aliquid additum. Et de ente quidem hoc dicebat, quia in qualibet re quae habet esse ab alio, aliud et esse rei, et substantia sive essentia eius: hoc autem nomen ens, significat ipsum esse. Significat igitur (ut videtur) aliquid additum essentiae». For Siger see his *Quaestiones in Metaphysicam* (Munich version), ed. by Dunphy, Introduction, q. 7, p. 42 where reference is made to Avicenna's claim that the meaning of *res* and the meaning of being (*ens*) are two different meanings (*intentiones*); pp. 43–44 where Siger refers to Albert the Great as holding that a thing (*res*) exists through a *dispositio* which is added to its essence, but in language which is unmistakably that of Avicenna, as is confirmed on p. 44; pp. 45–46 where Siger criticizes Avicenna, as he notes Averroes had already done, for not distinguishing between names which signify different *intentiones*, and those which signify the same essence but in different ways. «Et ideo credidit quod esse significet aliquid additum essentiae: unde ad modum significandi diversum credidit diversam essentiam consequi». See p. 47:93–94 for the same point against Avicenna. For the Cambridge version of Siger's *Quaestiones* see Maurer, p. 32, where Siger explicitly attributes the same view both to Avicenna and to Albert. See pp. 34 and 35 for criticisms of Avicenna. Cf. pp. 397–398 for the briefer Paris *reportatio*. For James of Viterbo see his *Disputatio prima de quolibet*, E. Ypma ed. (Würzburg, 1968), Quodlibet I, q. 4, p. 46: «Avicenna vero dixit quod ens significat intentionem seu dispositionem superadditam illi de quo dicitur, ita quod unumquodque dicitur ens non per essentiam suam, sed per aliquid superadditum, sicut res aliqua dicitur alba vel nigra per aliquid superadditum, quod est accidens illi rei. Unde posuit quod ens dicit accidens sive accidentalem dispositionem in eo de quo praedicatur». James contrasts Avicenna's view with that of Aristotle and Averroes, according to which «ens significat essentiam omnis eius de quo dicitur...» Then he goes on to speak of different ways in which *esse* is understood by various *doctores*, i.e., 13th century Masters. For more discussion of this and of James's personal view on the essence-existence distinction see my «The Relationship between Essence and Existence in Late-Thirteenth Century Thought: Giles of Rome, Henry of Ghent, Godfrey of Fontaines, and James of Viterbo», in *Philosophies of Existence, Ancient and Medieval*, P. Morewedge, ed., (New York, 1982), pp. 132–34, 146–48.

<sup>34</sup> See n. 19 above and the corresponding text.



synonyms, or different terms which have the same meaning, such as being and something (*aliquid*, or, according to the Arabic, the given or acquired). Rather the term «thing» and whatever is equivalent to it in other languages signifies something different from that which the term «being» signifies. For every reality has a nature (*certitudo*) by which it is what it is. For instance, a triangle has a nature whereby it is a triangle, and whiteness has a nature whereby it is white. He acknowledges that one might refer to a thing's nature as its particular or proper being (*esse*), but immediately distinguishes this usage of *esse* from that whereby we affirm that something exists. It is the latter usage of being or existence, that whereby something exists, that he distinguishes from a thing's nature (or essence, we might call it)<sup>35</sup>.

Avicenna repeats his point by recalling that each and every thing has a nature (*certitudo*) which is its quiddity. Again he distinguishes this nature or quiddity from that existence (*esse*) which is synonymous with the term «something», whereby we affirm that a given thing exists<sup>36</sup>. In

<sup>35</sup> «Dico ergo quod intentio entis et intentio rei imaginantur in animabus duae intentiones; ens vero et aliquid sunt nomina multivoca unius intentionis nec dubitabis quin intentio istorum non sit iam impressa in anima legentis hunc librum. Sed res et quicquid aequipollet ei, significat etiam aliquid aliud in omnibus linguis; unaquaeque enim res habet certitudinem qua est id quod est, sicut triangulus habet certitudinem qua est triangulus, et albedo habet certitudinem qua est albedo. Et hoc est quod fortasse appellamus esse proprium, nec intendimus per illud nisi intentionem esse affirmativi, quia verbum *ens* significat etiam multas intentiones, ex quibus est certitudo qua est unaquaeque res, et est sicut esse proprium rei» (pp. 34–35). For Anawati's French translation from the Arabic see pp. 107–108. For Marmura's English translation see his «Avicenna on Primary Concepts», pp. 225–26: «We say, moreover: the meaning of <existence> and of <thing> are conceived in the soul and are two meanings, while the <existent>, <the established> and <the realized> are synonyms. We do not doubt that their meaning has been realized in the soul of whoever reads this book. <The thing> or its equivalent may be used in all languages to indicate some other meaning. For to every thing there is a reality by virtue of which it is what it is. Thus the triangle has a reality in that it is a triangle and whiteness has a reality in that it is a whiteness. It is that which we should perhaps call <proper existence>, not intending by this the meaning given to affirmative existence; for the expression <existence> is also used to denote many meanings, one of which is the reality a thing happens to have. Thus [the reality] a thing happens to have is, as it were, its proper existence». With Marmura I take Avicenna as distinguishing two meanings for *esse*, actual existence (as affirmed), and a proper *esse* which as Marmura puts it «seems to be identical with a thing's quiddity or essence» (p. 226). Hence it seems the term *nisi* should be eliminated from the Latin text in the last sentence quoted above, as occurs in text A, i.e., the Arabic Cairo edition (see Van Riet ed., *ad locum*).

<sup>36</sup> «Redeamus igitur et dicamus quod, de his quae manifesta sunt, est hoc quod unaquaeque res habet certitudinem propriam quae est eius quidditas. Et notum est quod certitudo cuiuscumque rei quae propria est ei, est praeter esse quod multivocum est cum

support of this claim, he introduces another interesting point. We may speak of the nature or essence (*certitudo*) of a thing in three different ways: (1) as existing in individual things (for instance, horseness as realized in Man of War); (2) as existing in the soul (if I think of horseness in general or universally); (3) absolutely, as common to the first two ways. In other words, he is attempting to bring out the difference between thinking of a nature or essence simply considered in itself, and thinking of it insofar as it exists in an individual entity, or in the intellect as a universal<sup>37</sup>.

So far, therefore, we have textual justification in the Latin Avicenna for two points which Thomas borrows, at least in part, from the Islamic thinker. If we may reverse the order in which we have presented them, there is the possibility of viewing an essence or nature in any one of three ways, to repeat, as existing in the mind, or as existing in an individual thing, or absolutely, when it is simply considered in itself without reference to its mode of existence. Thomas in fact accepts and uses this distinction, for instance in one of his earliest works, the *De ente et essentia*, and it reappears elsewhere in his writings, for instance, in his early Quodlibet 8, q. 1 of 1257<sup>38</sup>. (However, Thomas would never

aliquid...» (p. 35). Marmura translates this: «To resume: it is evident that each thing has a reality proper to it, namely its quiddity. It is known that the reality proper to each thing is something other than the existence corresponding to what is affirmed» (p. 226). For the French see Anawati, p. 108: «Revenons [à notre sujet]. Nous dirons: il est évident que pour toute chose, il y a une nature (*ḥaqīqa*) propre, qui est sa quiddité (*mahiyya*). On sait que la nature (*ḥaqīqa*) de toute chose qui lui est propre est autre que l'existence (*al-wujūd*) qui est synonyme de l'affirmation (*al-ithbāt*).»

<sup>37</sup> «... quoniam, cum dixeris quod certitudo rei talis est in singularibus, vel in anima, vel absolute ita ut communicet utrisque, erit tunc haec intentio apprehensa et intellecta. Sed cum dixeris quod certitudo huius (...) vel certitudo illius est certitudo, erit superflua enuntiatio et inutilis» (Van Riet, p. 35). Marmura: «This is because if you said, «the reality of such thing exists either in the concrete, in the soul, or absolutely, being common to both», this would have a meaning, realized and understood. Whereas, if you said, «the reality of such a thing is the reality of such a thing», or that «the reality of such a thing is a reality», this would be superfluous useless talk» (pp. 226–27).

<sup>38</sup> For Thomas see *De ente et essentia*, c. 3 (Roland-Gosselin ed., pp. 24–26 / Leonine ed., Vol. 43, p. 374). Also see Quodlibet 8, q. 1 (Marietti ed., 1956), p. 158. According to Aquinas, the absolute consideration of nature abstracts from its existence either in singulars or in the intellect but not in such fashion as to exclude either in positive fashion, i.e., not according to abstraction by precision (see *De ente*, Roland-Gosselin ed., p. 26 / Leonine ed., p. 374). For discussion of these two texts see F. WILHELMSEN, «A Note: The Absolute Consideration of Nature in *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*, VIII», *The New Scholasticism* 57 (1983), pp. 352–61.

admit, and for that matter, neither would Avicenna, that an essence or nature, taken absolutely in itself, could exist without being realized either as actually existing in an individual, or as being present in the mind in universal fashion. As Avicenna puts it, if a thing is not realized in either of these ways, it is not a thing at all<sup>39</sup>.) Secondly, Thomas also appears to be justified in concluding from the texts we have examined that Avicenna does distinguish between essence or nature or quiddity and existence in individual existing entities. In other words, there is sufficient textual justification for Thomas to conclude that Avicenna defended a distinction between essence and existence which is not merely mind-dependent or conceptual.

But does the Latin Avicenna really view existence as if it were an accident which is superadded to essence? In *Metaphysics* V, c. 1, we read the following:

Animal will be able to be considered in itself, even though it exists with something other than itself; for its essence exists with something other than itself; therefore its essence belongs to it per se; but its existing together with something other than itself is something which *happens* to it (*accidit ei*) or something which accompanies its nature, just as does this animality and this humanity<sup>40</sup>.

The primary point of this text, when taken within its context, is not to assert that existence is accidental to essence. It is rather to show that the essence of animal, for instance, belongs to animal of itself. This consideration of animal in itself is said to be prior to the consideration of

<sup>39</sup> Van Riet ed., p. 36: «... quoniam intellectus de ente semper comitabitur illam, quia illa habet esse vel in singularibus vel in aestimatione vel intellectu. Si autem non esset ita, tunc non esset res.» Whether Henry of Ghent exercised the same restraint in assigning real being to what he calls *esse essentiae* is another matter, however. For discussion see my *The Metaphysical Thought of Godfrey of Fontaines* (Washington, D.C., 1981), pp. 66–79. Also see J. PAULUS, *Henri de Gand. Essai sur les tendances de sa métaphysique* (Paris, 1938), pp. 69–94. Cf. S. MARRONE, *Truth and Scientific Knowledge in the Thought of Henry of Ghent* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985), pp. 105–29.

<sup>40</sup> «Poterit autem animal per se considerari, quamvis sit cum alio a se; essentia enim eius est cum alio a se; ergo essentia eius est ipsi per se; ipsum vero esse cum alio a se est quiddam quod accidit ei vel aliquid quod comitatur naturam suam, sicut haec animalitas et humanitas...» (Van Riet, p. 233). For the French translation see Anawati (p. 236): «La considération de l'animal en lui-même sera possible, même s'il est avec autre chose, parce que son essence, [bien qu'elle soit] avec d'autres [reste] son essence. Son essence est à lui, par elle-même, et le fait qu'il soit avec d'autre [chose] que (for *qui*) lui est quelque chose qui lui est accidentel ou un concomitant nécessaire à sa nature, comme l'animalité et l'humanité».

animal insofar as it is rendered individual by its accidents, or insofar as it is universal and exists in the intellect. But when an essence such as that of animal is realized in either of these two ways it unites with something that is other than itself, and something which «happens» to it. By putting matters this way, Avicenna was at the least inviting his readers to conclude that a thing's individual existence is also something which «happens» to it, and therefore something accidental to that thing's essence<sup>41</sup>.

Hence, whether or not Avicenna really intended to treat of existence as if it were an accident superadded to essence, this was widely taken to be his position by his Latin readers. Thus in his Commentary on *Metaphysics* IV, c. 2, Thomas explicitly attributes this view to Avicenna. According to Aquinas, Avicenna held that both unity and being (*ens*) signify something added to the essence (*substantia*) of a thing. And Avicenna said this about being because in every thing which receives its existence from another, the existence (*esse*) of that thing and its essence differ. Therefore *esse* signifies something added to essence. To this Thomas responds in one of his better known texts<sup>42</sup>:

But in making this (first point) he (Avicenna) does not seem to have spoken correctly. Although the existence (*esse*) of a thing is other than its essence, it must not be thought that it is something superadded after the manner of an accident, but it is, as it were, constituted by the principles of the essence<sup>43</sup>.

<sup>41</sup> To put this another way, if a reader had already concluded from *Metaphysics* I, c. 5 that Avicenna defends real distinction between essence and existence, he would easily enough find confirmation for this in the present text. For the continuation of the text cited in the preceding note see Van Riet ed., pp. 233–34: «... igitur haec consideratio praecedit in esse et animal quod est individuum propter accidentia sua et universale quod est in his sensibilibus et intelligibile, sicut simplex praecedit compositum et sicut pars totum...» Avicenna also notes that a genus or species, when simply viewed in itself, is neither one nor many, but only animal or only man. Nonetheless, to be one or many accompanies such a genus or species whenever it is realized or exists in reality, «cum impossibile sit aliquid esse et non esse alterum istorum, quamvis sit comitans ipsum extrinsecus...» (p. 234).

<sup>42</sup> *Ed. cit.*, n. 556, quoted above in n. 33.

<sup>43</sup> «Sed in primo quidem non videtur dixisse recte. Esse enim rei quamvis sit aliud ab eius essentia, non tamen est intelligendum quod sit aliquod superadditum ad modum accidentis, sed quasi constituitur per principia essentiae. Et ideo hoc nomen Ens quod imponitur ab ipso esse, significat idem cum nomine quod imponitur ab ipsa essentia» (n. 558). In the last sentence in this text Thomas is referring to the convertibility of being (*ens*), though not of the act of being (*esse*), and thing (*res*), which name is derived from the essence of an entity.

In other words, Aquinas agrees with Avicenna that essence and existence differ in created entities. Nevertheless, he does not want existence (the act of existing) to be regarded as an accident. At the same time, if he rejects this part of the Avicennian theory, Thomas agrees with his Islamic predecessor on three issues relating to essence and existence: (1) an essence or nature may be considered in any one of the three different ways we have already seen, i.e., as existing in an individual, or as existing in the intellect in universal fashion, or simply or absolutely in itself. (2) Essence and existence are to be distinguished in all beings save God. (3) Though I have not yet mentioned this, the existence of any thing other than God comes to it from without, or is caused.

#### 4. *Avicenna's Theory of Emanation*

By referring to the existence of any caused being as coming to it from without we are now in position to consider an issue where Thomas knows an Avicennian position and emphatically rejects it. According to Avicenna's discussion in *Metaphysics* I, c. 6, every existent when it is simply considered in itself is either a necessary being, or else one that is not impossible, i.e., a possible being<sup>44</sup>. In fact, only God is a necessary being in the sense of that which is necessary in itself. All other entities are possible beings when they are simply considered in themselves<sup>45</sup>. Nonetheless, when a possible being receives actual existence from something outside itself, i.e., from some cause, it too then becomes a

<sup>44</sup> «Dicemus igitur quod ea quae cadunt sub esse possunt in intellectu dividi in duo. Quorum unum est quod, cum consideratum fuerit per se, eius esse non est necessarium; et palam est etiam quod eius esse non est impossibile, alioquin non cadet sub esse, et hoc est in termino possibilitatis. Alterum est quod, cum consideratum fuerit per se, eius esse erit necesse. Dicemus igitur quod necesse esse per se non habet causam et quod possibile esse per se habet causam...» (Van Riet ed., p. 43).

<sup>45</sup> Van Riet ed., p. 43: «... et quod impossibile est ut esse eius (i.e., that of the Necessary Being) quod est necesse esse sit coaequale ad esse alterius, ita ut unumquodque eorum sit aequale alteri in necessitate essendi vel comitetur... et impossibile est etiam ut in certitudine quam habet necesse esse communicet ei aliquid aliud. Quod cum certificaverimus, sequetur quod necesse esse non est relativum nec mutabile nec multiplex nec communicat ei aliquid aliud in suo esse quod est ei proprium». Cf. I, c. 7 for an extended argument to show that the necessary being (per se) is only one. See also p. 44: «Quicquid autem est cuius esse est per aliquid, cum consideratum fuerit per se, non habebit esse necessarium; quicquid autem consideratum per se sine alio non habet esse necessarium, non est necesse esse per se». Cf. p. 50:65–69.



necessary being, but necessary only by reason of something else. To put this another way, Avicenna holds that when a possible being is actually given existence by some other being, the possible being is in some way necessitated in its existence. It becomes a necessary being by reason of something else<sup>46</sup>.

As Avicenna develops this thinking in *Metaphysics* I, c. 7, a possible existent may be rendered a necessary existent by something else in one of two ways – either eternally, or only at some point in time. The kind of possible being to which this happens only at some point in time must include matter in its metaphysical structure, matter which is prior in time to the caused necessary being. The kind of possible being which is eternally produced by something else need not be composed of matter, though it may be, as in the case of heavenly bodies<sup>47</sup>. Eternally produced Intelligences are not composed of matter and form. Yet Avicenna holds that such eternally produced Intelligences are not perfectly simple. Why not, we may ask. This is so, reasons Avicenna, because that which such an eternally caused entity has by reason of itself – its possibility – is different in some way from that which it has by reason of its cause, i.e., its necessitated existence. Given this, Avicenna concludes that there is only one being which is entirely free from all potentiality and possibility when it is viewed in itself, that is to say, the being which is necessary of itself, or God. Every other being includes that which it has by reason of itself, its possible being, and that which it has by reason of something

<sup>46</sup> See p. 46: «Igitur manifestum est quod quicquid possibile est esse, non habet esse nisi cum necessarium est esse respectu suae causae». For discussion of this see M. MARMURA, «The Metaphysics of Efficient Causality in Avicenna (Ibn Sina)», in *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, pp. 179–83. See p. 180 for Marmura's comment: «If, on the other hand, the existent is in itself only possible, this means that in terms of its own quiddity it is something that can exist or not exist. Implicit here is Avicenna's distinction in contingent things between essence and existence. The quiddity or essence of the contingent does not include existence». Also see A.-M. GOICHON, *La distinction...*, pp. 136–45. Also see A. IVRY, «Destiny Revisited: Avicenna's Concept of Determinism», in *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, pp. 162–63, and his acknowledged usage there of G. HOURANI's «Ibn Sīnā on Necessary and Possible Existence», *The Philosophical Forum* 4.1 (1972), pp. 74–86. See pp. 82–84 for Hourani's English translation of the first part of *Metaphysics* I, c. 6.

<sup>47</sup> Van Riet ed., pp. 54–55: «Eius autem quod est possibile esse, iam manifesta est ex hoc proprietas, scilicet quia ipsum necessario eget alio quod faciat illud esse in effectum; quicquid enim est possibile esse, respectu sui, semper est possibile esse, sed fortassis accidet ei necessario esse per aliud a se. Istud autem vel accidet ei semper, vel aliquando. Id autem cui aliquando accidit, debet habere materiam cuius esse praecedat illud tempore, sicut iam ostendemus». See below concerning eternally produced intelligences, and heavenly bodies.

else, its existence. In light of this, it is easy enough to understand why certain thirteenth-century thinkers such as Aquinas would see in this theory another expression of Avicenna's view that essence and existence differ in every being with the exception of God<sup>48</sup>.

In explaining how many beings can derive from the one being which is absolutely necessary in itself, Avicenna is heavily influenced by the Neoplatonic tradition, and especially by the notion that from the supreme One only one effect can be produced immediately. If this is so, how can God produce a multiplicity of effects? As Avicenna remarks in *Metaphysics* IX, c. 4, among things to be accounted for in the universe are Intelligences, separated souls, and bodies. In order to account for the production of many Intelligences, many souls and many bodies, and in order to do justice to the axiom that from the One only one thing can proceed immediately, he proposes the following scheme<sup>49</sup>.

The only effect which is immediately produced by God is the highest separate intelligence, the First Intelligence. But even this First Intelligence, though it is eternally and necessarily produced by God, is a possible being in and of itself, but a necessary being by reason of God. This first produced Intelligence understands three objects: (1) God, its source; (2) itself as a possible being in itself; (3) itself as a necessary being by reason of God, its eternally producing cause<sup>50</sup>. Insofar as this First Intelligence thinks of God, it necessarily and eternally produces a

<sup>48</sup> P. 55: «Sed id cui semper accidit, eius quidditas non est simplex: quod enim habet respectu sui ipsius aliud est ab eo quod habet ab alio a se, et ex his duobus acquiritur ei esse id quod est. Et ideo nihil est quod omnino sit exspoliatum ab omni eo quod est in potentia et possibilitate respectu sui ipsius, nisi necesse esse». For Thomas see *De potentia*, q. 3, a. 16, p. 88, cited below in our text.

<sup>49</sup> «Tu scis autem quod hic sunt intelligentiae et animae separatae multae. Unde esse eorum non potest esse acquisitum ab aliquo mediante quod non sit separatum. Item nosti quod, in universitate eorum quae sunt a primo, sunt corpora, et nosti quod omne corpus est possibile esse quantum in se, et quod necessarium est per aliud a se, et nosti non esse illis viam essendi a primo absque mediante aliquo: sunt igitur ex ipso, sed mediante aliquo, et nosti quod medium non est unitas pura; *nostis etiam quod ex uno, secundum quod est unum, non est nisi unum*» (Van Riet ed., Vol. 2, p. 481). (Italics mine).

<sup>50</sup> See pp. 481–82: «Intelligentiis enim separatis non potest esse aliqua multitudo nisi quemadmodum dicam, quoniam causatum per se est possibile esse in seipso, propter primum autem est necessarium esse. Sed necessitas sui esse est secundum quod est intelligentia, et intelligit seipsum et intelligit primum necessario. Unde oportet ut sit in eo multitudo ex hoc quod intelligit se quod est possibile esse quantum in se, et ex hoc quod intelligit necessitatem sui esse a primo quod est intellectum per se (...)» Here there appears to be a lacuna in the Latin text. For this see Anawati's French translation, Vol. 2, p. 140: «enfin qu'il intellige le Premier».



Second Intelligence. Insofar as it thinks of itself as necessary by reason of God, the First Being, it produces the soul of the first or outermost heavenly sphere. And insofar as it thinks of itself as a possible being in itself, it produces the body of the outermost heavenly sphere<sup>51</sup>.

The second eternally produced Intelligence likewise eternally thinks of three objects: (1) of the First Intelligence which produces it; (2) of itself as a possible being in itself; (3) of itself as a necessary being by reason of the First Intelligence which eternally produces it. Therefore it in turn produces three effects, i.e., a Third Intelligence, and the body and the soul of the second heavenly sphere. This same process is repeated by the Third Intelligence, which in turn produces a Fourth Intelligence along with a third heavenly sphere both in terms of body and soul until, by working inward as it were, one reaches the tenth Intelligence. This is the separated Agent Intellect which plays an important role in enabling us to think or understand here on earth, and which is also a giver or producer of the forms of material things on earth. With this step the last of the heavenly spheres is also produced, that of the moon<sup>52</sup>.

(One might wonder why the Agent Intellect does not produce still another and lower intelligence. Presumably this is because the creative power of the First Necessary Being (God) cannot be communicated indefinitely to ever less perfect beings. Moreover, there is the observable

<sup>51</sup> Van Riet, pp. 482–83. See in particular: «Sub unaquaque autem intelligentia est caelum cum sua materia et sua forma, quae est anima et intelligentia inferius ea. Igitur sub omni intelligentia sunt tria in esse; unde oportet ut possibilitas essendi haec tria sit ab illa intelligentia prima in creatione propter trinitatem quae est nominata in ea, et nobile sequitur ex nobiliore multis modis. Igitur ex prima intelligentia, inquantum intelligit primum, sequitur esse alterius intelligentiae inferioris ea, et inquantum intelligit seipsam, sequitur ex ea forma caeli ultimi et eius perfectio et haec est anima, et propter naturam essendi possibile quae est ei et quae est retenta inquantum intelligit seipsam, est esse corporeitatis caeli ultimi quae est contenta in totalitate caeli ultimi». Cf. pp. 487:86–488:95.

<sup>52</sup> See Van Riet, p. 484: «Similiter est dispositio in intelligentia et intelligentia, et in caelo et caelo, quousque pervenitur ad intelligentiam agentem quae gubernat nostras animas». See p. 487: «Igitur multitudo recipientis causa est multitudinis actionis principii quod est unum in essentia. Et hoc est post completionem esse omnium caelestium, et sequitur semper intelligentia post intelligentiam, quousque fiat sphaera lunae, et deinde fiant elementa et aptantur recipere impressionem unam in specie, multam numero, ab intelligentia ultima. Si enim causa multitudinis non fuerit in agente, debet esse necessario in patiente. Oportet igitur ut, ex unaquaque intelligentia, fiat intelligentia inferior ea et esset tunc quousque possint fieri substantiae intelligibiles divisibiles multae numero propter multitudinem causarum, et usque huc perveniunt».

fact that the moon is closer to the earth than are the other heavenly bodies. Nonetheless, as already noted, the agent intellect plays an important role in life here on earth. From it flow both the substantial forms found in material things, and the intelligible forms required for our intellects to think<sup>53</sup>.)

Avicenna's theory of emanation calls for some comments. *First* of all, it is his way of showing how everything else in the universe is ultimately produced by God, but not directly or immediately. God directly and immediately produces only one effect, the First Intelligence. *Secondly*, Avicenna is strongly motivated by the Neoplatonic view that from the One only one effect can proceed immediately. To admit that two or more effects could immediately proceed from the One would be to introduce some kind of multiplicity into God, and this would compromise the divine simplicity. *Thirdly*, this is not a theory of *free* creation or production on God's part. On the contrary, the first effect, and as a consequence, all other effects, are necessarily produced. Finally, this process of necessary emanation or production never began to be. It is an eternal process, meaning thereby that it is without beginning, and that the universe itself is necessarily eternal in its existence.

With this we may turn again to Thomas Aquinas. First of all, is he familiar with Avicenna's theory? Indeed he is, and he recognizes it in its details, its presuppositions, and its metaphysical implications. As for his knowledge of its details, one can hardly do better than consult his *Disputed Questions on the Power of God*, q. 3, a. 16:

For he held that the First Being, insofar as it understands itself, produces only one effect, which is the First Intelligence. It was necessary for this (First Intelligence) to fall short from the simplicity of the First Being, namely insofar as potentiality (there) begins to be mixed with actuality in that it, as receiving its existence (*esse*) from another, is not its existence (*esse*),

<sup>53</sup> See G. VERBEKE, Introduction to Vol. 2, p. 65\*. Cf. M. MARMURA, «The Metaphysics of Efficient Causality in Avicenna (Ibn Sina)», in *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, ed. by M. Marmura (Albany, 1984), pp. 174–76. Also see B. ZEDLER, «Saint Thomas and Avicenna in the «De Potentia Dei»», *Traditio* 6 (1948), pp. 110–11; «St. Thomas, Interpreter of Avicenna», *The Modern Schoolman* 33 (1955–1956), pp. 4–6. Cf. E. FACKENHEIM, «The Possibility of the Universe in Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina and Maimonides», *American Academy for Jewish Research* 16 (1947), pp. 1–14 (to be used with some caution, since it tends to unite into one the positions of Avicenna and Al-Farabi).

but in some way is in potency with respect to it. And thus insofar as it understands the First Being, there proceeds from it another Intelligence below itself; but insofar as it understands its own potency, there proceeds from it the body of the heaven, which it moves; insofar as it understands its own actuality, there proceeds from it the soul of the first heaven; and thus, through many intermediary causes, diverse things are consequently multiplied<sup>54</sup>.

Thomas offers another detailed presentation of this theory in his *Treatise on Separate Substances*, c. 10<sup>55</sup>. And for a more general presentation of this theory without many of the details, but still based on the axiom that from the One only one thing can proceed (immediately), we may consult his earlier Commentary on the *De Trinitate*, q. 4, a. 1.

<sup>54</sup> See *De potentia*, ed. by P.M. Pession, in *Quaestiones disputatae*, Vol. 2 (Turin-Rome, 1953), p. 88: «Posuit enim, quod primum ens, in quantum intelligit se ipsum, producit unum tantum causatum, quod est intelligentia prima, quam necesse erat a simplicitate primi entis deficere, utpote in quantum potentialitas incepit admisceri actui, in quantum esse recipiens ab alio non est suum esse, sed quodammodo potentia ad illud. Et sic in quantum intelligit primum ens, procedit ab ea alia intelligentia ea inferior, in quantum vero intelligit potentiam suam procedit ab ea corpus caeli, quod movet; in quantum vero intelligit actum suum, procedit ab ea anima caeli primi; et sic consequenter multiplicantur per multa media res diversae». On one point Thomas here seems to depart from the Avicennian text which he is following (*Metaphysics* IX, c. 4), i.e., his statement that according to Avicenna the first intelligence moves the body of the first heaven («quod movet»). Strictly speaking, Avicenna distinguishes between a soul of a heavenly sphere, which indeed moves the heavenly sphere, and an intelligence which does not move the heavenly sphere in any way except as an object of desire. See Van Riet, p. 484: «... nos enim iam ostendimus quod anima cuiusque caeli est eius perfectio et eius forma, nec est substantia separata; alioquin, esset intelligentia, non anima, nec moveret ullo modo nisi ad modum desiderii...» In defense of Thomas's reading one could suggest that he has in mind nothing but motion as an object of desire in the text in question; or one could suggest that the subject of *movet* is not *intelligentia* but *corpus caeli*. But if the latter suggestion were the correct one, *movetur* would be a more natural expression than *movet*.

<sup>55</sup> See *Saint Thomas Aquinas. Treatise on Separate Substances*, ed. by F.J. Lescoe (West Hartford, Connecticut, 1963), pp. 92–93 and Leonine ed., Vol. 40, p. D 59. Note that Thomas concludes his presentation with this remark: «et haec est positio Avicennae, quae etiam videtur supponi in *Libro de causis*.» Note that in *De potentia* q. 3, a. 4 Thomas refers to the *Liber de causis*, and to the *Metaphysics* of Avicenna and of Algazel as holding some elements of the theory we have just seen, i.e., (1) that from the simple One only one thing can proceed immediately; (2) that by means of this first produced one multiplicity proceeds; (3) that God acts out of necessity of nature (*ed. cit.*, p. 46). In other words, Thomas does not here ascribe all of the particulars of Avicenna's threefold kind of emanation to the *Liber de causis* and to Algazel. B. ZEDLER («Saint Thomas and Avicenna in the <De Potentia Dei>», p. 112, n. 7) refers to propositions 6, 7, 8, 20, 23 of the *Liber de causis* (see now the ed. by A. Pattin, Louvain, no date / also in *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 28 (1966), pp. 90–203).

(There, as I have argued elsewhere, Thomas is probably following a version of the theory made known to the Latins through the Latin translation of what they called the *Metaphysics* of Algazel<sup>56</sup>.)

As for Thomas's reaction, it is not difficult to anticipate that he will have strong reservations. *First and foremost*, he rejects the Avicennian view that created things necessarily proceed from God, or that they are necessarily produced by God. Instead, he argues that God creates or produces effects external to himself owing to a decision on the part of the divine will. Because of this, God freely decides to create or not to create, and to create this rather than that among the many possible choices which are available to him<sup>57</sup>.

*Secondly*, in all but one of his earliest writings, Thomas rejects the notion that God could communicate the power to create to any creature. While Thomas always defends the view that created agents do indeed produce their appropriate effects, he denies that the power to create can be granted to them, even as instrumental causes. In other words, he rejects Avicenna's theory of mediate creation as opposed to immediate creation. God is the immediate creative cause of whatever is created<sup>58</sup>.

<sup>56</sup> «Et secundum hoc quidam posuerunt quodam ordine pluralitatem ab uno primo causari, ut ab uno primo procedat primo unum, quod cum causa pluralitatem constituat, et ex eo iam possunt duo procedere: unum secundum se ipsum, aliud secundum coniunctionem ipsius ad causam» (Decker ed., p. 135). Cf. my «Thomas Aquinas on the Distinction and Derivation of the Many from the One: A Dialectic between Being and Nonbeing», *Review of Metaphysics* 38 (1985), pp. 566–67, and nn. 8 and 9. For Algazel see *Algazel's Metaphysics*, ed. by J.T. Muckle (Toronto, Canada, 1933), Tr. V, pp. 119–21. The most notable difference between this exposition and that found in Avicenna's *Metaphysics* is that according to Algazel the emanations proceed in pairs (an intelligence and a heavenly sphere) rather than in triads (intelligence, soul of sphere and body of sphere).

<sup>57</sup> For references and for discussion see below.

<sup>58</sup> See, for instance, *De potentia*, q. 3, a. 4 (pp. 46–47), where he maintains that the power to create, even as an instrumental cause of a higher agent, would require infinite power on the part of that instrumental cause. To prove that creation requires infinite power on the part of the creative agent, even a quasi-instrumental cause, he offers five arguments. The first of these rests on his claim that *non esse* is infinitely distant from *esse*. Therefore only an infinite power can produce something from absolute nonbeing, or create. For Thomas's admission in his Commentary on the *Sentences* that creative power might be communicated by God to a creature which would act as an instrumental cause see *In II Sent.*, dist. 1, q. 1, a. 3 (Mandonnet ed., Vol. 2, p. 22). There Thomas refers to a view which denies that the power to create can be communicated to any creature, and to another position which holds that, though this power was not given to any creature, it could have been. Thomas finds the Lombard himself seeming to support the last-men-

*Thirdly*, Thomas always maintains against Avicenna and other defenders of the same position that many effects can be immediately and directly produced by God, the supreme One. To put this another way, he strongly resists the claim that from the supreme One, or God, only one effect can be produced immediately. And he insists that this position does not in any way compromise the divine simplicity<sup>59</sup>.

*Finally*, in defending the freedom of God's creative activity, Thomas denies that this must result in an eternally produced effect, or an eternal universe. In other words, he rejects any and all arguments which attempt to prove that the universe has existed or has been produced from eternity. As is well known, he also denies that human reason can prove that the world began to be. This is something the Christian can know only through revelation<sup>60</sup>.

For the moment, I would like to consider more fully two of the points just mentioned – Thomas's denial that things are produced necessarily by God; and his claim that from the supreme One more than one effect can proceed or be produced immediately.

As for Avicenna's view that God has produced necessarily the First Intelligence, Aquinas cannot accept this. He repeatedly criticizes this position, and especially in a series of articles in q. 3 of his *De potentia*. For instance, in q. 3, a. 17, he faces an objection which is taken directly from Avicenna's *Metaphysics* IX: Every effect, when taken in relationship to its cause, is necessary. This is to say, given a sufficient cause for an

tioned view. Then he comments: «Utraque autem harum ultimarum opinionum videtur habere aliquid cui innitatur». Farther on he remarks: «...et ex parte ista accipiendo creationem, potuit communicari creaturae, ut per virtutem causae primae operantis in ipsa, aliquid esse simplex, vel materia produceretur: et hoc modo philosophi posuerunt intelligentias creare, quamvis sit haereticum». Hence, if here he is cautiously open to the possibility of God's communicating the power to create to a created agent in instrumental fashion, he regards it as heretical to hold that such has indeed happened. Cf. his reply to obj. 2. As Mandonnet indicates in n. a (p. 22), what Thomas says here seems to be contrary to the view expressed in *ST* I, 45, art. 5: «... impossibile est quod alicui creaturae conveniat creare neque virtute propria, neque instrumentaliter, seu per ministerium.» But Mandonnet also comments: «Sed quam caute!» He does acknowledge that according to another reading, Thomas's expression here is less cautious: «Videtur mihi secundum aliquid vera esse».

<sup>59</sup> For texts and discussion see below.

<sup>60</sup> For fuller bibliography and discussion see my «Thomas Aquinas on the Possibility of Eternal Creation», Ch. VIII of *Metaphysical Themes*.



effect, that effect necessarily follows. But God is the sufficient cause for the universe. Therefore, since God always existed, the universe has always existed<sup>61</sup>.

In replying to this (ad 4), Thomas acknowledges that every effect bears a necessary relationship to its efficient cause, whether that cause operates by nature or whether it is voluntary. But we cannot hold that God is the cause of the universe by necessity of his nature, but by reason of his will. Therefore it is not necessary for an effect of God to be realized whenever the divine nature has existed, i.e., from eternity, but only when the divine will has determined that the effect is to exist<sup>62</sup>.

In a. 15 of this same q. 3 of the *De potentia*, Thomas had directly faced the claim that things proceed from God by necessity of nature. He offers a series of arguments to establish the opposite, i.e., to show that God produces things freely through his will<sup>63</sup>.

1. First of all, the universe must have some end. Otherwise, everything within the universe would be owing to chance. If the universe must have an end, in producing creatures God must have some end in mind. But both nature (natural agents) and the will act for an end, but in different fashion. Nature does so without understanding either the end, or its nature, or the relationship of the means to the end. Hence nature or a purely natural agent cannot present an end to itself for its consideration. Because of this, it cannot direct or move itself to an end. But an agent which acts through will can do all of this, since it belongs to such an agent to understand both the end and the means to the end. Therefore a voluntary agent acts for an end in such fashion that it presents to itself an end and in some way moves itself to the end by ordering its actions to that end. Nature rather tends to an end by being ordered and

<sup>61</sup> *Ed. cit.*, p. 91. See obj. 4.

<sup>62</sup> «Ad quartum dicendum, quod omnis effectus habet necessariam habitudinem ad suam causam efficientem, sive sit causa naturalis, sive voluntaria. Sed non ponimus Deum causam mundi ex necessitate naturae suae, sed ex voluntate, ut supra (art. 15) dictum est: unde necessarium est effectum divinum sequi non quandocumque natura divina fuit, sed quando dispositum est voluntate divina ut esset, et secundum modum eundem quo voluit ut esset» (p. 94).

<sup>63</sup> «Respondeo. Dicendum quod, absque omni dubio, tenendum est quod Deus ex libero arbitrio suae voluntatis creaturas in esse produxit nulla naturali necessitate» (p. 83). For briefer presentations of these and other arguments see *Summa contra gentiles* II, c. 23.

directed to it by some other intelligent and willing agent, as may be seen in the case of an arrow which is directed to its target by an intelligent agent. (Because of this, Thomas cites Aristotle with approval to the effect that a work of nature is a work of intelligence, i.e., to be reduced to a work of intelligence.) But what exists through another is posterior to what exists of itself. Therefore, the First Being which orders things to an end does so through will. Hence God produces things through his will, not out of natural necessity<sup>64</sup>.

2. Thomas's second argument is based on the variety present in the universe. Nature or natural agency is always determined to one thing. And since every agent produces something that is like itself, it follows that nature must tend to produce something that is exactly like itself, only one kind of effect. But how is one to account for the variety present in the universe? Equality and sameness derive from unity, and inequality derives from some kind of multiplicity. If, therefore, a natural agent fails to produce something like itself or equal to itself, this will result either from some deficiency in its productive power, or from some deficiency in the passive potency which receives its causal action. But neither of these situations can apply to God's creative activity. God requires no preexisting matter in order to create. And his productive power cannot be deficient, since it is infinite. Therefore whatever proceeds from God by nature must be equal to him, as is true of the Son according to Christian religious belief concerning the Trinity. Any creature, therefore, since it is not equal to God, can only be produced by him through his will, not by natural necessity or nature. Nor can it be argued that the divine power, because it is infinite, is determined to produce only one effect. On the contrary, because the divine power does

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 83–84. Note especially: «Natura enim, cum non cognoscat nec finem nec rationem finis, nec habitudinem eius, quod est ad finem in finem, non potest sibi praestituere finem, nec se in finem movere aut ordinare vel dirigere; quod quidem competit agenti per voluntatem, cuius est intelligere et finem et omnia praedicta. Unde agens per voluntatem sic agit propter finem, quod praestituit sibi finem, et seipsum quodammodo in finem movet, suas actiones in ipsum ordinando. Natura vero tendit in finem sicut mota et directa ab alio intelligente et volente, sicut patet in sagitta, quae tendit in signum determinatum propter directionem sagittantis... Semper autem quod est per aliud, est posterius eo quod est per se. Unde oportet quod primum ordinans in finem, hoc faciat per voluntatem; et ita Deus per voluntatem creaturas in esse produxit, non per naturam».



produce different degrees among creatures, it establishes any creature in its given degree only by free choice, not by natural necessity<sup>65</sup>.

3. Since every agent produces something that is in some way like itself, an effect must preexist in some fashion in its cause. But whatever is present in something is present in it in accord with the mode of that in which it is present. Because God himself is intellect, creatures preexist in him in intellectual fashion. But what is present in the intellect is not brought into external existence except by means of will. Therefore creatures can be produced by God only through the divine will<sup>66</sup>.

4. With Aristotle Aquinas distinguishes two kinds of action. One type remains within an agent and is to be regarded as a perfection of the agent, such as intellection, volition, or what is often referred to as immanent action. A second type, often called transitive action, proceeds from the agent into some external recipient and is to be regarded as a perfection and actualization of the recipient (see the action of heating some distinct object, for instance). God's operations should not be understood according to the second model, that of transitive action, because his action and his essence are one and the same. Therefore, God's action as such does not pass outside himself. Hence it is to be understood according to the first model, i.e., the kind found in understanding and willing. Even an action which results in the production of an effect which exists in distinction from God is intrinsic to him and identical with him. Such an action can be accounted for only if we appeal to the fact that he understands and wills. Therefore, every creature is produced by God by means of the divine will, not by necessity of nature<sup>67</sup>.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84. See the conclusion of the argument: «Unde cum divina virtus se extendat ad diversos gradus inaequalitatis in creaturis constituendos; quod in hoc gradu determinato creaturam constituit, ex arbitrio voluntatis fuit, non ex naturali necessitate».

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* Note especially: «Omne autem quod est in aliquo, est in eo per modum eius in quo est; unde cum ipse Deus sit intellectus, creaturae in ipso intelligibiliter praeexistunt... Quod autem est in intellectu, non proceditur nisi mediante voluntate...»

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* For an interesting résumé and criticism of these four arguments see William of Ockham, *Ordinatio* I, d. 43, q. 1 (*Opera theologica* 4, pp. 623–29). For discussion and a defense of Aquinas see A. PEGIS, «Necessity and Liberty: An Historical Note on St. Thomas Aquinas», *The New Scholasticism* 15 (1941), pp. 22–27, 29, 33–38. Note his references to *De pot.* 1, a. 3, and *De Veritate*, q. 23, a. 4.

In insisting that God produces creatures through his will and therefore freely, Thomas evidently does not deny that God has an end or purpose in creating. This purpose or end is ultimately the goodness of God, which he chooses to manifest in a special way through creation. As Thomas notes in replying to objection 5, God's goodness, insofar as it is itself willed and loved by God, is through the mediation of his will the cause of the creature which is produced<sup>68</sup>. As Thomas remarks in replying to objection 10, God acts insofar as he is good. Goodness is present in him in necessary fashion. But it does not follow from this that God has to create or has to communicate his goodness to other entities. For goodness results in production only by means of the divine will, insofar as it is an object of that will. But will is not constrained to choose things which are only means to its end<sup>69</sup>. Thomas's point here is that the divine will is not necessarily constrained to choose those things which are only means or ways in which God may reflect his goodness in another and finite way.

As Thomas remarks in this same work at q. 5, a. 3, God's goodness does not depend upon creatures in any way so that it could not be realized without creatures. Through the existence of creatures, nothing is added to the divine goodness<sup>70</sup>. This is so, of course, because the divine goodness is infinite in itself. As Thomas remarks in replying to

<sup>68</sup> «Ad quantum dicendum, quod bonum est proprium obiectum voluntatis; unde bonitas Dei, in quantum est ab (for *ad*) ipso volita et amata, mediante voluntate est creaturae causa» (*ibid*).

<sup>69</sup> For objection 10 see p. 82. According to the objection God operates insofar as he is good. But God is a necessary good. Therefore he operates out of necessity. For Thomas's reply see p. 85: «... dicendum, quod licet Deus operetur in quantum est bonus, et bonitas ei necessario insit, non tamen sequitur quod de necessitate operetur. Bonitas enim mediante voluntate operatur, in quantum est eius obiectum vel finis; voluntas autem non necessario se habet ad ea quae sunt ad finem; licet respectu ultimi finis necessitatem habeat».

<sup>70</sup> *Ed. cit.*, p. 136. «Similiter Deus non producit creaturas ex necessitate naturae ut sic potentia Dei determinetur ad esse creaturae, ut in alia quaestione (3, a. 15) est probatum. Similiter etiam nec bonitas Dei a creaturis dependet, ut sine creaturis esse non possit: quia per creaturas nihil bonitati divinae adiungitur.» Here Thomas is defending the view that it is not impossible for God to annihilate creatures, except under the supposition that he has ordained not to do so. See *SCG* I, c. 81, where he also offers a series of arguments to show that God does not will things other than himself out of necessity. According to the first argument, will is not directed of necessity to the means to an end, if the end can be attained without those means. Since the divine goodness can be realized without any other goods, and no other good adds anything to it, there is no necessity which compels God to will things other than himself because of the fact that he wills his own goodness. See *ed. cit.*, p. 75.

objection 4 within this same article, in creating the end of God's creative action is to manifest the bounty of the divine goodness. So too, if God were to annihilate creatures, his end could simply be to manifest the self-sufficiency of his own goodness, a goodness which is so sufficient in itself that it needs no external goods<sup>71</sup>. Hence, as he repeats in replying to objection 5, effects which follow from a will are realized when that will determines that they are to be realized. Because creatures proceed from God through his will, they exist when God wills them to exist; they do not exist whenever God's will, or God himself, actually exists. Otherwise they could not have begun to be<sup>72</sup>.

Finally, Thomas makes an interesting comment in *Summa contra gentiles* I, c. 82: «The divine intellect apprehends not only the divine *esse*, which is the divine goodness, but also other goods... It apprehends these as certain likenesses of the divine goodness and essence, not as its principles. And thus the divine will tends toward these (created) goods as being fitting for its goodness, not as being necessary for its goodness»<sup>73</sup>.

In sum, at the risk of oversimplification, one may summarize Thomas's critique of Avicenna as follows. *First* of all, Thomas is convinced that God, as an intellectual being, produces external effects only through the mediation of his will. Hence if effects are to be produced by God, this can only be owing to the mediation of his will, not out of natural necessity. *Secondly*, God's end or purpose in creating is to manifest his goodness. Because the divine goodness is infinite, nothing can be added to it. Hence external manifestation of God's goodness through creation adds nothing to God or to his goodness. Hence it is not necessary for him to create in order to achieve this end, the manifes-

<sup>71</sup> *De pot.*, q. 5, a. 3, ad 4 (p. 136) «... ut sicut in productione rerum, finis est manifestatio copiae divinae bonitatis, ita in rerum annihilatione finis esse potest sufficientia suae bonitatis, quae in tantum est sibi sufficiens, ut nullo exteriori indigeat». Cf. *De pot.*, q. 10, a. 2, ad 6 (p. 260); *ST* I, q. 19, a. 3c.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> «Intellectus enim divinus apprehendit non solum divinum esse, quod est bonitas eius, sed etiam alia bona, ut supra ostensum est. Quae quidem apprehendit ut similitudines quasdam divinae bonitatis et essentiae, non ut eius principia. Et sic voluntas divina in illa tendit ut suae bonitati convenientia, non ut ad suam bonitatem necessaria» (*ed. cit.*, p. 77). For additional discussion of this general issue, Thomas's critique of Avicenna's view of necessary emanation, see B. ZEDLER, «Saint Thomas and Avicenna in the <De Potentia Dei>», pp. 113–19.

tation of his goodness. Therefore, if God creates, this can only be because he freely chooses to do so.

As for the claim that from the One only one effect can proceed immediately, Thomas was familiar with this even in his earliest writings, for instance, in his Commentary on II *Sentences* (d. 18, q. 2, a. 2), where he refers to it in detail<sup>74</sup>. And in his early Commentary on the *De Trinitate* of Boethius, he refers to a slightly more simplified version of the same, which, as I have suggested above, seems to be taken from Algazel's presentation in his *Metaphysics*.

In the last-mentioned discussion, Thomas counters that there is another way of accounting for multiplicity in the order of being. One first effect may imitate the First Being (God) in a way in which another effect falls short of that First Being. And it may fall short of the First Being in a way in which another immediately produced effect imitates it. In this way many different effects can be produced immediately by the First Being. In fact, Thomas goes on to observe that in each of these first and immediately produced effects there will be a negation both of the First Being and of any other effect. By this I take Thomas to mean that in some way any given effect may be said not to be God and not to be any other effect<sup>75</sup>.

As I have argued in another study, to this one may apply Thomas's metaphysics of essence and act of existing, and his view that in every creature there is a composition of an essence principle and a distinct act of existing. Because the essence principle of a creature is not identical with its intrinsic act of existing (*esse*), Thomas has also written elsewhere that it may be described as nonbeing. By this he means that it is not identical with the creature's intrinsic act of existing or act of being. In other words, he ascribes to the essence of any such being what we may refer to as relative nonbeing, though certainly not absolute nonbeing. The presence of this within the creature enables Thomas to account for the fact that it is only a limited being, and that it is not identical with

<sup>74</sup> Mandonnet ed., Vol. 2, p. 463.

<sup>75</sup> See q. 4, a. 1 (Decker ed., p. 135). Note in particular: «Quod dicere non cogimur, cum unum primum possit aliquid imitari, in quo alterum ab eo deficit, et deficere, in quo alterum imitatur. Et sic possunt inveniri plures primi effectus, in quorum quolibet est negatio et causae et effectus alterius secundum idem vel secundum remotiorem distantiam etiam in uno et eodem».

God or with any other created effect<sup>76</sup>. This, therefore, allows Thomas to account for the possibility of there being more than one being, or many beings, within reality, and for their immediate creation by God. But this explanation concentrates on the side of the produced effects rather than on the side of God, their producing cause.

How does Thomas meet the Avicennian claim that from the One only one effect can proceed immediately when he turns to God, the First Cause of all else? In q. 3, a. 16 of the *De potentia* he directly challenges this claim. If this view is correct, reasons Thomas, it must be because it is the nature of such a cause when considered with reference to its effect that whenever that cause exists, its determined effect must result. Such determination might be thought to arise from the side of the material, or formal, or efficient, or final cause. But such determination for a given effect to be produced cannot arise from the side of the formal cause, for that is intrinsic to the effect itself; the form of the effect does not exist before the effect itself does. When we are dealing with God as the cause, he cannot be determined to produce any given effect from the side of the material cause. As a creative cause he needs no preexisting matter which might determine him to produce this given effect rather than any other. Nor can such a determination to produce only one effect apply to God when we view him as an efficient cause. Because God's power is infinite, it cannot be determined to produce any given effect except one that would be equal to God himself; but no effect can be equal to God. As for effects which are less perfect than God, his power could not be determined to produce this one rather than that one; for no such effect will be equal to his power<sup>77</sup>.

By process of elimination we come to the final cause. In creating or producing an effect, continues Thomas, God's end can only be his own goodness. And nothing can be added to this through the production of any effect. For the divine goodness can neither be completely represented by any effect nor totally communicated to an effect. Rather, it is quite possible for different effects to participate in the divine goodness in different ways. But there is no necessity which binds God to produce any one effect because of any compulsion on his part to communicate his goodness<sup>78</sup>.

<sup>76</sup> For discussion and references see my «Thomas Aquinas on the Distinction and Derivation of the Many from the One...», pp. 563–90.

<sup>77</sup> *Ed. cit.*, p. 87.

<sup>78</sup> «...unde nullius eorum necessitas est ex fine» (*ibid.*).



Hence, if there is any justification for the claim that God had to produce one given effect and only one, this can arise only from the side of the kind of form which is the end of the work being performed (*finis operationis*) rather than the end of God, the producing agent. By this Thomas means that if God wishes to create a given kind of effect, e.g., a human being, he must create something with a rational soul and a body endowed with organs; for this is required for a human being to be a human being. *Mutatis mutandis*, one may say the same of the universe. If God wills to create a given kind of universe, then, under that supposition, he must also produce such and such creatures without which that given kind of universe cannot be realized. And if the perfection of that universe requires both multiplicity and diversity among creatures, it will follow that because no single creature can supply the required multiplicity and diversity, God will have to produce many creatures – some composite, some simple, some corruptible, and some incorruptible. But, insists Thomas, there is no necessity which compels God to create the universe at all. With this argumentation in place, he then goes on to reject in explicit terms the Avicennian theory of emanation along with some other accounts<sup>79</sup>.

<sup>79</sup> See pp. 87–88. Note especially: «Sed supposito quod tale universum producere voluerit, necessarium fuit quod tales et tales creaturas produxerit, ex quibus talis forma universi consurgeret. Et cum ipsa universi perfectio et multitudinem et diversitatem rerum requirat, quia in una earum inveniri non potest propter recessum a complemento bonitatis primae; necesse fuit ex suppositione formae intentae quod Deus multas creaturas et diversas produceret; quasdam simplices, quasdam compositas; et quasdam corruptibiles, et quasdam incorruptibiles». Cf. *ST* I, q. 19, a. 3, for Thomas's usage of *necessitas ex suppositione*, and its application to this issue. Also see *De veritate*, q. 23, a. 4, ad 1, *SCG* I, c. 83. In an interesting article, K.P. KEANE charges Thomas with having fallen into the opposite extreme – reducing God's decision to create to an «arbitrary and radically free act of the divine will». Keane emphasizes Thomas's denial that God's will has a cause in its decision to create, and concludes that because of his understanding of creation as resulting from a «pure and ungrounded decision» of the divine will, Thomas is «a radical voluntarist where the act of creation is concerned, though he takes an «intellectualist» position on the internal structure and goodness of creation». See his «Why Creation? Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas on God as Creative Good», *The Downside Review*, n. 311 (1975), pp. 101, 106–07, 110. What Keane fails to recognize sufficiently is the important role assigned by Thomas to the divine ideas, that is, to God's knowledge of himself or of his essence insofar as it is viewed as capable of being imitated by creatures. Far from being arbitrary or capricious in his decision to create or not to create, Thomas's God is restricted to what we might call a rational choice – one modelled on God's view of possible ways in which his essence can be imitated by creatures. Within the limits of that which is possible, Thomas's God is free to determine whether to create or not to create, and whether to create this or that. For references concerning Thomas's theory of divine ideas, see the following note.

Two additional questions might be raised about Thomas's proposed solution. *First* of all, will not the fact that God intends to produce a multiplicity of creatures introduce a multiplicity of divine intentions and of divine ideas into the divine intellect, and thereby compromise God's simplicity? *Secondly*, suppose one grants that Thomas's argumentation succeeds in showing against Avicenna that God did not have to create or produce the universe at all and also that from God, the supreme One, more than one effect can be produced immediately. Has Thomas not now committed God to the necessary production of only one kind of universe, the one we know?

Thomas will meet the first objection through his theory of divine ideas. A divine idea is not something which is really distinct from the divine essence. It is simply a way in which God views himself, that is, his essence, as capable of being imitated by a creature. And when conjoined with a decision on the part of the divine will, a divine idea becomes productive, resulting in the creation of an actually existing creature at some point in time. But if a divine idea is really identical with the divine essence, so is a divine «intention» (decision) to produce a given creature. Neither introduces real multiplicity or composition into God<sup>80</sup>.

As for the second difficulty, limitations of space will not permit me to discuss this fully here. Let it suffice for the moment to reply that the kind of necessity attaching to God's creation of a given kind of universe including its given parts, etc., is only necessity *ex suppositione* or what might be called hypothetical necessity. Under the supposition that such is the case, e.g., that Socrates is sitting, then it necessarily follows that Socrates is sitting. So too, under the supposition that God wills to create this given kind of universe, then it necessarily follows that he creates this given kind of universe. But there is no absolute necessity compelling

<sup>80</sup> On Thomas's theory of divine ideas see J.F. WIPPEL, *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 166–68. For texts in Thomas see especially *In I Sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 3, ad 2 (Mandonnet ed., Vol. 1, p. 496): «Ad secundum dicendum quod rationes ideales rerum, quae sunt in Deo ab aeterno, non sunt aliud secundum rem ab ipso intellectu et essentia divina»; *ST I*, q. 15, a. 1, ad 3: «Ad tertium dicendum quod Deus secundum essentiam suam est similitudo omnium rerum. Unde idea in Deo nihil est aliud quam Dei essentia» (*ed. cit.*, p. 90); *ST I*, q. 15, a. 2 (because God perfectly knows his essence, he knows every way in which it can be participated in by creatures). Also on Thomas's theory of divine ideas see L. GEIGER, «Les idées divines dans l'œuvre de s. Thomas», in *St. Thomas Aquinas 1274–1974: Commemorative Studies*, A. Maurer, ed., (Toronto, 1974), Vol. 1, pp. 175–209. On the identity of the divine willing (and the divine will) with the divine essence see *ST I*, q. 19, a. 1c; q. 59, a. 2c.

Socrates to be seated, just as there is no absolute necessity compelling God to choose to create this kind of universe, or to choose to create any universe at all<sup>81</sup>.

Still, one might counter, God's perfection requires that if he does decide to manifest his goodness through creation, he must do so in the best possible way, i.e., by creating the best possible universe. Hence, having decided to create, he had to create this universe and, moreover, it is the best of all possible universes. Here a point mentioned earlier needs to be recalled. God's goodness is perfectly self-sufficient, according to Thomas. Hence God's manifestation of his goodness through his production of an external effect or a universe in no way adds to his goodness, or we might note, to his being. As we have suggested above, no addition can be made to that which is intensively infinite, as is God. Hence we cannot say that God plus a finite effect, no matter how good that effect may be, is better or more perfect than God without the effect. As Thomas sees things, the production of creatures is not required for God to manifest his goodness, and adds nothing to it. Therefore, God is under no compulsion either to manifest his goodness by creating, or, once he decides to create, to manifest his goodness in the best possible way.

In fact, I submit, there is no best possible way, absolutely speaking, in which God's goodness could be manifested through creation<sup>82</sup>. For no addition can be made to the divine goodness which would result in something better than God as he is in himself. And by increasing finite instances of goodness, one will never produce an intensively infinite good being. Hence, the most we can say is that, given God's decision to manifest his goodness to a given degree through the production of a given kind of effect or universe, then, under that supposition, whatever is required for that kind of universe must be produced. But the necessity in question is, once again, not absolute, but only hypothetical (*ex suppositione*)\*.

<sup>81</sup> See *ST* I, q. 19, a. 3: «Unde, cum bonitas Dei sit perfecta, et esse possit sine aliis, cum nihil ei perfectionis ex aliis accrescat; sequitur quod alia a se eum velle, non sit necessarium absolute. Et tamen necessarium est ex suppositione: supposito enim quod velit, non potest non velle, quia non potest voluntas eius mutari» (*ed. cit.*, p. 109).

<sup>82</sup> For an interesting defense of Thomas concerning this point, see N. KRETZMANN, «Goodness, Knowledge and Indeterminacy in the Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas», *The Journal of Philosophy*, Suppl. to vol. 80, n. 10 (1983), pp. 636–41. However, in the first part

of this article Kretzmann finds unsuccessful Thomas's effort to defend God's freedom to create rather than not to create at all. Kretzmann bases his case in large measure on Thomas's rather cautious usage of the Pseudo-Dionysian principle that the good is diffusive of itself. While acknowledging that Thomas interprets this principle in terms of final rather than efficient causality (see especially *De veritate*, q. 21, a. 1, ad 4), Kretzmann seems to think that Thomas really should apply it in the order of efficient causality as well. On this principle see J. PEGHAIRE, «L'axiome «Bonum est diffusivum sui» dans le néoplatonisme et le thomisme», *Revue de l'Université de Ottawa* 1 (1932), pp. 5\*–30\*. Also see K. KREMER, «Das «Warum» der Schöpfung...», in *Parusia*, K. Flasch, ed., (Frankfurt am Main, 1965), 241–64. In defense of Aquinas against Kretzmann's critique I would emphasize again the role of finality in Thomas's explanation and his view that if God necessarily wills his own goodness, he does not necessarily will any lesser good. No such lesser good can add to his goodness and, therefore, no lesser good can be viewed as an indispensable means for him to manifest his goodness. Kretzmann finds some inconsistency on Thomas's part in a passage from *De veritate*, q. 24, a. 3, which he renders: «Speaking absolutely, he [God] does not indeed will them [things other than himself] necessarily... because his goodness has no need of things that are ordered to it *except as a manifestation of it*, which can be appropriately accomplished in various ways...» Kretzmann sees this as implying that «goodness does require things other than itself as a manifestation of itself» (p. 637), though he also acknowledges that Thomas himself does not draw this conclusion. The Leonine text removes this seeming inconsistency from Thomas's text, though I assume that Kretzmann did not have access to that edition when he was preparing this article. According to that edition the text reads: «...quae quidem absolute loquendo non necessario vult... eo quod bonitas eius his quae ad ipsam ordinantur non indiget, et eius manifestatio convenienter pluribus modis fieri potest...» (Vol. 22.3, p. 688). For Thomas, of course, God's goodness is eternally manifest to himself.

\* I would like to express my thanks to Professor Thérèse-Anne Druart for having called to my attention and, in some cases, for making available to me, a number of recent studies of Avicenna's metaphysical thought.