

LAWRENCE DEWAN, O. P.  
*Dominican College of Philosophy and Theology*  
*Ottawa, Canada*

## ST. THOMAS AQUINAS AGAINST METAPHYSICAL MATERIALISM

### *Introduction*

Experienced readers of St. Thomas Aquinas know that his literary and doctrinal methods involved the establishing of sequences of presentation, used repeatedly with now one, now another adjustment. Thus, for example, he treated the problem of the divine names at least five times in his short literary career, the supply of argumentative materials remaining roughly the same, but the order or the way of distinguishing the basic issues, etc., receiving at this or that moment a new feature<sup>(1)</sup>. There has been all too little study of these constant structures and the revisions they undergo.

One area which calls for such study is the general question of immaterial creatures. St. Thomas held that the human soul and the angelic nature were not composites of matter and form, but pure forms. He presents this doctrine at all stages of his career, and so we have many and varied presentations. In the present paper we will focus upon one feature of these presentations, the use of the doctrine that form does not depend upon matter, but matter upon form.

### I. *The Sentences* <sup>(2)</sup>

The doctrine we have in mind is not found in the treatments from the very beginning. Already in the first book of the *Sentences* we find

---

<sup>(1)</sup> Cf. our paper, « St. Thomas and the Divine Names », *Science et Esprit* 32 (1980), 19-33; cf. also our « The Number and Order of St. Thomas's Five Ways », *Downside Review* 92 (1974), 1-18, where we consider St. Thomas' interest in the proper order of presentation.

<sup>(2)</sup> I.e. the *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum*. We will designate this as « the *Sentences* » (abbreviated « *Sent.* »).

an article devoted to our topic. Discussing the divine simplicity (i.e. non-composition), St. Thomas considers to what extent simplicity can be found in creatures. Thus, he is led to ask: is the human soul simple? <sup>(3)</sup>. The body of this article has the following plan:

1. Opinion § 1 - the soul is composed of matter and form: and arguments against it, based on (a) the soul's intellectuality, and (b) its incorporeity.
2. Opinion § 2 - the soul is composed of *quo est* [that by which it is] and *quod est* [that which is]:
  - a) how this composition is understood in composites of matter and form;
  - b) the ascent to simple quiddity;
  - c) simple quiddity which is identical with *esse* [being actually];
  - d) simple quiddity not identical with *esse*: created quiddity:
    - i) how *quod est* and *quo est* are found in such things;
    - ii) how potency and act are found in such things.
3. St. Thomas accepts the second opinion.

Then again, in book 2 of the *Sentences*, discussing creation, and particularly the creatures which are angels, St. Thomas raises the question: is the angel composed out of matter and form <sup>(4)</sup>. Here we have an article structured as follows:

1. The variety of opinions briefly presented, with choice made of immateriality.
2. Arguments for eliminating matter from angels: based on (a) intellectuality, and (b) incorporeity.
3. Assertion of composition, and its investigation:
  - a) quiddity as found in things composed out of matter and form;
  - b) the ascent to simple quiddity;
  - c) *esse* and its possible relations to quiddity;
  - d) *esse* and quiddity diverse in *all* creatures;
  - e) application of the *quo est* / *quod est* distinction;
  - f) application of the potency / act distinction;
  - g) to use the « matter / form » vocabulary here would be equivocal.

<sup>(3)</sup> *Sent.* 1.8.5.2 (ed. P. Mandonnet, O.P., Paris, 1929: Lethielleux, t. 1, pp. 227-232). We will sometimes refer to this as «text § 1».

<sup>(4)</sup> *Sent.* 2.3.1.1. (ed. *cit.*, t. 2, pp. 85-89). We will sometimes refer to this as «text § 2».

There is, thus, a very similar order in these two discussions. In text § 2, the *quo est / quod est* distinction is not made the primary feature, as it is in text § a. It is rather the notion of *quiddity* which dominates. However, in both, we begin the accepted doctrine with quiddity in composites, we then *ascend* to simple quiddity (which includes both God and simple creatures), and then within this domain we distinguish.

Now, the step which concerns us is precisely the moment of ascent to simple quiddity. In text § 1, we have:

Now, since it is not of the notion of quiddity or essence that it be composed, or a composite, accordingly there can be found and understood some simple quiddity not following upon the composition of form and matter<sup>(5)</sup>.

In text § 2, this move reads:

Now, that it be composed is not of the notion of quiddity inasmuch as it is quiddity: because there would never be found a simple nature, which at least in [the case of] God is false; nor is it of its notion that it be simple, since some [quiddity] is found which is composite, e.g. humanity<sup>(6)</sup>.

In text § 2, there is argument to show what is merely stated in text § 1, as to the notion of quiddity. On the other hand, in text § 2 the aspect of *moving to* the domain of simple quiddity is left unexpressed. Fundamentally, however, the thinking seems to be the same.

## II. *The De ente et essentia*

Turning now to a third text written in the same general period of his career, viz the *De ente et essentia*<sup>(7)</sup>, we find the whole of chapter 4 dedicated to immaterial reality. Ch. 2 has already presented essence in substances composed out of matter and form. Chapter 4 takes up the study of essence in separate [i.e. from matter] substances, viz

<sup>(5)</sup> *Ed. cit.*, t. 1, p. 229.

<sup>(6)</sup> *Ed. cit.*, t. 2, p. 87.

<sup>(7)</sup> The critical Leonine edition of this work has now been published, in SANCTI THOMAE DE AQUINO, *Opera omnia*, t. 43, Editori di San Tommaso, 1976: Roma, pp. 369-381.\* We will cite the *De ente* using the chapter numbering of this edition, as well as the line numbers within the chapter. It is generally dated 1252-1256, as is the *Sentences*; cf. JAMES A. WEISHEIPL, O.P., *Friar Thomas d'Aquino*, Garden City, N.Y., 1974: Doubleday, pp. 358 and 386.

soul, intelligence, and the first cause<sup>(8)</sup>. Here we find the following structure:

1. The variety of opinions.
2. Proof of immateriality (based on intellectuality).
3. Affirmation of composition of form (or quiddity) and *esse*, with its presentation:
  - a) how essence or quiddity can be form alone (with two corollaries);
  - b) how, nevertheless, there is act and potency in such creatures, not pure act;

*addenda*: i) this is not matter and form, except equivocally;  
 ii) it is a doctrine of *quo est / quod est* or *esse / quod est*;  
 iii) there is a multiplicity and hierarchy among such beings.

There is here no step involving the presentation of the essence of composite substances, presumably since the whole of chapter 2 was about that. However, the step we have already singled out in the other two texts, i.e. the ascent to simple quiddity, is given a new approach here (it is 3a in the above schema), as follows:

Whatever [items] are so related to each other that one is the cause of being [*esse*] of the other, that which has the role [*rationem*] of cause can have being without the other, but the converse does not hold. Now, the relation of matter and form is found to be such that form gives being to matter [*forma dat esse materiae*]. Therefore, it is impossible for matter to be without any form. Nevertheless it is not impossible for some form to be without matter; for form, inasmuch as it is form, does not have dependence on matter. But if some forms are found which cannot be except in matter, this happens [*accidit*] to them inasmuch as they are distant from the first principle which is first and pure act. Hence, those forms which are closest to the first principle are forms subsisting by themselves without matter; for form does not require matter according to its [form's] entire genus, as was said; and the intelligences are forms of this

---

(<sup>8</sup>) Cf. *De ente et essentia* 4.1-3: «Nunc restat uidere per quem modum sit essentia in substantiis separatis, scilicet in anima, intelligentia et causa prima». The use of the terms «*anima*», «*intelligentia*» and «*causa prima*» for the soul, angels and God is taken from the *Liber de causis*. Cf. Prop. 9 (in ST. THOMAS, *Super Librum de causis expositio*, ed. H.D. Saffrey, O.P., Fribourg/Louvain, 1954: Société philosophique/Nauwelaerts, p. 57, as well as p. 64, lines 4-26).

mode; and therefore it is not necessary that the essences or quiddities of these substances be other than the form itself<sup>(9)</sup>.

No longer are we asked to consider the notion or nature [*ratio*] of quiddity just in itself; rather, we start with an examination of the intrinsic principles of composite substance, so as to discover the nature of form as form<sup>(10)</sup>. However, before discussing this change of doctrine, let us see how St. Thomas speaks later in his career.

### III. *Later Writings* <sup>(11)</sup>

In the *Summa contra gentiles*, book 2, we have quite an elaborate development, with chapters for the various steps. Our discussion runs from at least ch. 49 to ch. 54. We find:

49. That the intellectual substance is not a body;
50. that intellectual substances are immaterial;
51. that the intellectual substance is not a material form;
52. that in created intellectual substances *esse* and *quod est* differ;
53. that in created intellectual substances there is act and potency;
54. that it is not the same to be composed out of substance and *esse*, and [out of] matter and form<sup>(12)</sup>.

This plan has much in common with the earlier texts, but as to the precise moment which we have singled out, all we find is chapter 51, that the intellectual substance is not a material form. When we look

<sup>(9)</sup> *De ente et essentia* 4.42-60.

<sup>(10)</sup> This shift, from the rather more logical consideration of quiddity, to the more physical consideration of form and matter, the principles proper to existing things, which we see here as an actual event in the life of St. Thomas, will later be used by St. Thomas to characterize the movement of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, books 7 and 8; cf. ST. THOMAS, *In Metaph.*, 8.1 (ed. Cathala/Spiazzi, § 1681-1686), and our paper, «St. Thomas, *Metaphysics*, and Formal Causality»; *Laval theologique et philosophique* 36 (1980), 285-316.

<sup>(11)</sup> For the sake of brevity, we are leaving aside such texts as *Sent.* 2.17.1.2 (t. 2, pp. 416 ff.), *In Boeth. De trin.*, 5.4. ad 4, *Quodl.* 9.4.1 and 3.8, etc.

<sup>(12)</sup> These are the titles of the chapters, titles which in the case of these chapters were written by St. Thomas himself; cf. S. THOMAE AQUINATIS, *Liber de Veritate Catholicae Fidei* etc., ed. C. Pera, P. Marc, and P. Caramello, Rome/Turin, 1961: Marietti, vol. II, p. 114, n. 1.

at the arguments given therein, we find no arguments resembling those we have been considering. Rather, what are given are arguments closely tied to the arguments for immateriality taken from intellectuality and incorporeity<sup>(13)</sup>.

The *Summa theologiae*, part 1, and the disputed question *De spiritualibus creaturis* are close to being contemporary<sup>(14)</sup>. The *ST* does not provide us with a satisfactory parallel. *ST* 1.50.2, that the composition of matter and form is not found in angels, eliminates, in the body of the article, the opinion of Avicbron (who posits matter in everything but God). However, the composition which one does find in angels is left to the reply to obj. 3, which is very rapid and does not contain a phase such as we are considering. A similar situation prevails in 1.75.5, on the human soul's immateriality: the body of the article is taken up with the elimination of the possibility of matter, while the positive doctrine of composition, treated primarily in the *ad* 4, is extremely rapid<sup>(15)</sup>.

However, the *SC* brings us back to positive findings. The first article asks whether created spiritual substance is composed out of matter and form. Here is its procedure:

1. The variety of opinions;
2. the meaning of the word « matter »;
3. the impossibility of there being matter in spiritual substances:
  - a) from the order of things;
  - b) from intellectuality;
4. explanation of potency and act as found in spiritual substances.

The argument placed here in first place (3a), for the presentation of spiritual substance as not having matter, takes the form of showing the ontological status of matter. St. Thomas says:

... For though in one same thing, which sometimes is in act and sometimes is in potency, potency is temporally prior to act, act nevertheless is naturally prior to potency. But that which

<sup>(13)</sup> We note, however, that in ch. 55, on incorruptibility, our doctrine of the nature of form is used: see below, pp. 17-18.

<sup>(14)</sup> Cf. Weisheipl, pp. 361 and 364. The dates assigned are § 1266-1268 (for the *Summa theologiae*, first part) and 1267-1268 (for the *De spiritualibus creaturis*). These works will henceforth be designated « *ST* » and « *SC* », respectively.

<sup>(15)</sup> *ST* 1.75.5. *ad* 3 touches in an oblique way on the point of doctrine we are considering.

is prior does not depend on the posterior, but rather the converse. And therefore there is found some first act without any potency; but never is there found in reality a potency which is not perfected by some act; and because of this, always in prime matter there is some form. Now, from the first absolutely perfect act, which has in itself all the plenitude of perfection, is caused being in act [*esse actu*] in all; but nevertheless in a certain order. For no caused act has the entire plenitude of perfection; but in relation to the first act, every caused act is imperfect. Still, the more perfect an act is, the closer it is to God. But among all creatures, spiritual substances are most closely approaching to God... Hence, they approach most closely to the perfection of the first act, since they are compared to inferior creatures as perfect to imperfect and as act to potency. Therefore, in no way does this scheme of the order of things have it that spiritual substances require prime matter for their being [*ad esse suum*], prime matter being that which is most incomplete among all beings: but they are elevated far above all matter and material things<sup>(16)</sup>.

While there are several important differences between this text and the *De ente* passage: most notably, the term « form » is used here only once; so also, the priority of act over potency is not directly related to form as cause of being: still, the independence of act vis-à-vis potency is used to cast light on the existence of act without potency. Also, the explanation of potency generally is distance from the first cause. The two passages are closely related<sup>(17)</sup>.

St. Thomas, we might note, in this *SC* article, seems to have sought to give priority to a more ontological argument for the spiritual creature's immateriality (as distinguished from the more operational argument from intellectuality).

Moving now to the disputed questions *De anima*, we find the query: is the [human] soul composed out of matter and form?<sup>(18)</sup>. In the body of the article we find the structure:

1. The variety of opinions, and particularly that of Avicbron;
2. its frivolousness;

---

<sup>(16)</sup> *SC* 1.

<sup>(17)</sup> The *De ente* argument in its most unmistakable form is briefly presented in *SC* 1. *ad* 6.

<sup>(18)</sup> *Qq. de anima* 6 (ed. James H. Robb, *Quaestiones de anima*, Toronto, 1968: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, pp. 106-115). Robb makes the point that the ancient title of this work is the one he uses, with the individual units called « *quaestio* »: cf. pp. 26-27.

3. its impossibility (based on soul being form of body);
4. how act and potency are found in soul.

Now, here, it is in § 4 that we find our doctrine. We read:

But how in the soul act and potency are found is to be considered as follows, proceeding from material things to immaterial things. For, in substances composed out of matter and form we find three [items], viz matter, and form, and, third, being [*esse*], of which [being] the principle is form. For matter from the fact that it receives form participates being. Thus, therefore, being follows upon the very form, nor nevertheless is the form its own being [*suum esse*], since it is its principle. And though matter does not attain to being except through form, form, nevertheless, inasmuch as it is form, does not need matter for its [form's] being, since being follows upon form itself; but it needs matter since it is such form [*talis forma*] as does not subsist by itself. Therefore, nothing prohibits there being some form, separate from matter, which has being; and in form of this grade, the very essence of the form is compared to the being [*esse*] as to its proper act...<sup>(19)</sup>.

In the series of *De anima* questions, the soul has already, at the point when this is said, been presented as subsisting and as form of the body. St. Thomas argues as he does here seemingly in order to bring out the fundamental ontology of the situation. What is peculiar to this text, as compared with the *De ente* passage, is its stress on the distinction between form and *esse*. Only in that way can it make the point that there is act and potency in form subsisting by itself.

Lastly, and most important, we come to the treatise *De substantiis separatis*, written towards the end of St. Thomas' life<sup>(20)</sup>. In it, there is a long and careful discussion of the immateriality of spiritual substances, taking the form of a refutation of the position of Avicbron. We find the order:

1. The opinion of Avicbron, together with his arguments in its favour; (ch. 5)
2. the manifest improbability of the position; (ch. 6)
3. the doctrine of St. Thomas; (ch. 7)
4. replies to the arguments of Avicbron (ch. 8).

<sup>(19)</sup> Ed. Robb, pp. 111-112.

<sup>(20)</sup> Cf. Weisheipl, p. 388, giving the dates 1271-1273. Henceforth we will designate the *De substantiis separatis* «SS», citing the chapter and the line-numbering from the Leonine edition (in *Opera omnia*, t. 40, Rome, 1969, pp. D 39- D 80).



The seventh chapter, which we have designated « the doctrine of St. Thomas », moves through three phases. At first, the conclusion being proved is that there cannot be one matter common to spiritual and corporeal substance. The arguments used by St. Thomas here include the argument from intellectuality, but the conclusion is merely that if there is matter in spiritual substances, it cannot be the same as the matter in corporeal substances<sup>(21)</sup>. Then, secondly, St. Thomas argues to the conclusion that if there is matter in spiritual substances, this matter must be a being actually [*ens actu*], and that this is equivalent to saying that there is no composition of matter and form in them. The fundamental considerations used in this discussion resemble the passage which we quoted above from the *SC*; however, the nerve of the presentation is not the priority of act over potency, as it was in *SC*, but the point that what is higher among beings must have more of the character of being [*ratio essendi*], and that it is that which is actually which is, in the unqualified sense, not that which is in potency<sup>(22)</sup>.

Thirdly, St. Thomas argues simply for the existence of forms subsisting without matter. And it is here, where the issue is being faced most directly, that we once more encounter the doctrine which especially interests us in this paper, and encounter it in the most uncertain terms. We read:

Furthermore, since act is naturally prior to potency and form to matter, potency depends in its *esse* on act and matter on form, while form does not depend in its *esse* on matter, according to [its, i.e. form's] proper character [*rationem*], as act; for what are naturally prior do not depend on what are posterior. If, therefore, there are some forms which without matter cannot be, this does not befit them from the fact that they are forms, but from the fact that they are such forms [*tales formae*], viz imperfect [forms], which cannot be maintained by themselves but require the foundation of matter. But before every imperfect thing is found something perfect, in all genera; for example, if fire is to be found in an alien matter on which fire, according to its own nature [*rationem*], does not depend, it is necessary that there be fire not sustained in an alien matter. Therefore, there are, above the forms received in matter, some forms sub-

(21) Cf. *SS* 7.19-44.

(22) Cf. *SS* 7.45-46. Here, the priority of act over potency is the term of a demonstration, the ultimate reason being that to be, actually, is to be (speaking absolutely): « ...non enim simpliciter esse dicimus quod est in potentia, sed solum quod est actu... » (50-52).

sisting by themselves, which are spiritual substances not composed out of matter and form<sup>(23)</sup>.

This time the doctrine of the independence of form as form vis-à-vis matter is supplemented in such a way as to produce an argument for the existence of perfect form, or form capable of separate existence. Nor are we here speaking, as in the SC text, of the first and perfect act which is God.

However, this is not the only use of our doctrine in SS. As we have indicated, ch. 8 contains replies to the arguments of Avicbron. The fourth reply is to the contention that, without composition of matter and form, the spiritual substances will be indistinguishable from God. The reply is lengthy and constitutes an extremely important metaphysical statement. Its plan is as follows:

1. How God is distinguished from all creatures: they contain potency, inasmuch as God is *esse subsistens*, while all else contains a composition of substance and *esse*.
2. Objection: « potency to *esse* » means that a thing, considered in itself, is *non ens*, and this is matter.
3. Reply to objection: how to distinguish the *non ens* which is matter from the *non ens* which is spiritual substance (or indeed any created form):
  - a) the basic doctrine;
  - b) application of the « *non ens* » vocabulary.

It is in the section we have designated « the basic doctrine » that we find our point of interest. This passage (lines 199-235) begins with the already seen distinction between substance and *esse* in creatures. We read:

But it must be considered that those things which participate being [*esse*] from the first being [*ente*] do not participate being according to the universal mode of being [*essendi*], according to which it is in the first principle, but particularly, according to a certain determinate mode of being, which accords with « this genus » or with « this species ». But each thing is adapted to one determinate mode of being [*essendi*] according to the mode of its own substance. (199-207).

The substance, already seen as distinct from the participated *esse*, is the source of the determinate mode of being. This doctrine of modulation

---

(23) SS 7.91-110, reading at 95 « ut » rather than « vel ».

of *esse* is now considered in things composed out of matter and form:

But the mode of each substance composed out of matter and form is according to the form, through which it pertains to a determinate species. Thus, therefore, the thing composed out of matter and form *through its form* is rendered participative of *esse* itself, from God, according to some proper mode (207-212).

The conception of a particular mode of being has been presented from the outset as related to the locating of a thing in a genus or species. The principle, in the thing, of such location is the substantial form (when we have to do with things composed of matter and form) <sup>(24)</sup>. Thus, the form is presented as principle of participation of *esse* for such things.

In the light of this conception of the role of form, the material composite is now presented once more:

Therefore, there is found in the substance composed out of matter and form a twofold order: one, of the matter itself to the form, the other of the thing itself now composed to the participated *esse*: for the *esse* of the thing is neither its form nor its matter, but something coming to the thing through the form. Thus, therefore, in thing composed out of matter and form, *the matter*, considered in itself, according to the mode of its own essence, has being in potency [*esse in potentia*], and this itself belongs to it from some participation of the first being [*ente*], but it lacks, considered in itself, the form through which it participates being actually [*esse in actu*] according to a proper mode; but *the composed thing*, considered in its own essence, indeed has the form, but it participates the *esse* proper to itself through its own form (213-228).

The effect of this presentation is primarily to exhibit the composite thing as still a mere participant vis-à-vis *esse*, and indeed as having this role of participant by virtue of its form. We can then ascend to a consideration of spiritual substance, while maintaining the presence of this sort of participation:

Therefore, because matter receives determinate actual being [*esse determinatum actuale*] through form, and not conversely, nothing prevents there being some form which receives *esse* in itself [the form], not in some subject: for the cause does not depend

---

(24) Cf. ST. THOMAS, *In Metaph.* 7.11 (ed. Cathala-Spiazzi, Rome/Turin, 1950: Marietti, § 1531), concerning Aristotle at 1037a 28-29.

on the effect, but rather the converse. Therefore, the form itself, thus subsisting by itself, participates *esse* in itself [the form], as a material form [does] in a subject (228-235).

Here, then, at the moment of ascent from the material composite to the separate substance, it is once more our argument which comes into play. It is the peculiar nature of form as such, already seen in material things, which serves to preserve the distinction between God and creatures, and which constitutes the very possibility of created separate substance<sup>(25)</sup>.

#### IV. Observations

The doctrine that form gives being to matter (*forma dat esse materiae*) is present even in the first text from the *Sentences* to which we referred<sup>(26)</sup>. It was there used to explain the appropriateness of calling the substantial form the « *quo est* ». However, only with the *De ente et essentia* do we find St. Thomas using that doctrine in a developed form for the ascent to separate substance. From the *De ente* onward, this developed doctrine undergoes vicissitudes. It is not present in the *SCG*, at any rate in the context we are studying, nor is it found in the *ST*. However, we find it « making a come-back » in the *SC*, very plainly present in the *Qq. de anima*, and extremely prominent in *SS*.

St. Thomas, in the *De ente*, called the argument from intellectuality the most powerful demonstration (*demonstratio potissima*)<sup>(27)</sup> of the complete absence of matter from some substances. In the *SS*, that argument concludes merely that if there is matter in spiritual substances, it must be of another sort than that in corporeal things<sup>(28)</sup>. Nevertheless, one could still regard it as « *potissima* », i.e. as most striking for the human mind. The primacy of the argument from the priority of form over matter (a primacy we judge from its climactic position in *SS*, c. 7) probably stems from its treating in the most direct way of the ontology of the situation, thus providing the most positive conception we have of the immaterial, i.e. as pure form.

Let us now discuss some particular issues.

<sup>(25)</sup> The reader will have remarked the resemblance of the procedure in *SS* 8.213-235 to that of the *Qq. de anima* 6 passage seen above, p. 8.

<sup>(26)</sup> Cf. *Sent.* 1.8.5.2 (*ed. cit.*, t. 1, p. 229): « Potest enim dici 'quo est' ipsa forma partis, quae dat esse materiae ».

<sup>(27)</sup> *De ente et essentia* 4.11-12.

<sup>(28)</sup> *SS* 7.19-44.

a) *The Date of the De ente et essentia*

The replacement of the argument from the notion of quiddity by the argument from the priority of form, described at the beginning of this paper, suggests that the *De ente* was written after *Sentences* 2.3.1.1. This runs counter to the view proposed by Fr. Roland-Gosselin, that the *De ente* was written about the time that St. Thomas was working on *Sentences* 1.25<sup>(29)</sup>. However, the reference to Averroes' doctrine of *quantitas dimensiva interminata* at *Sentences* 2.3.1.4<sup>(30)</sup>, which Fr. Roland-Gosselin uses to prove his point<sup>(31)</sup>, he himself points out is made by St. Thomas with hesitation<sup>(32)</sup>. Thus, it does not seem to me strong enough to oppose the view that the *De ente* treatment of separate substances constitutes an advance over *Sentences* 2.3.1.1. This, of course, does not provide any absolute date for the work.

b) *The Avicennian Background*

In his edition of the *De ente*, Fr. Roland-Gosselin appended a note to the text of our argument. In it, he first raised a question about the Aristotelian character of St. Thomas' doctrine, and then referred to a chapter in Avicenna's *Metaphysics*. We read:

The reasoning by which St. Thomas is going to establish the independence of form vis-à-vis mater could seem not very Aristotelian. But we must understand the situation. What is not Aristotelian is above all that one thinks oneself obliged to make this detour in order to justify the possibility of separate substances. Aristotle concluded to their existence with fewer precautions. On the other hand, a relation to form is essential to matter only if one takes this term [form] in its most technical sense. Often in the Middle Ages... [it] can be taken as equivalent to « *quod quid erat esse* ». Now, for Aristotle, this latter expression does not imply relation to matter...

... Perhaps he [St. Thomas] finds his inspiration in Avicenna, *Met. III* [*sic*; read « II »], 4... However, Avicenna in this chapter employs the term « *forma* » in its strict sense, and admits the existence of form so understood only in matter...<sup>(33)</sup>.

Whatever one may say about Aristotle's caution or lack of it in concluding to the existence of separate substances (and it seems to us

<sup>(29)</sup> ROLAND-GOSSELIN, M.-D. O.P., *Le « De ente et essentia » de s. Thomas d'Aquin*, Paris, 1948 (original date: 1926): Vrin, p. xxvi.

<sup>(30)</sup> *Ed. cit.*, t. 2, p. 97.

<sup>(31)</sup> ROLAND-GOSSELIN, p. xxviii.

<sup>(32)</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>(33)</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32, n. 3.

he moves very cautiously in the *Metaphysics*), Fr. Roland-Gosselin's suggestion that St. Thomas here means by « form » the quiddity requires criticism. It is true that in the *De ente* St. Thomas is presenting the doctrine in conjunction with the notion of quiddity. Thus, he introduces the conception of the separate substance as form and *esse*, but immediately interprets form as quiddity<sup>(34)</sup>. Nevertheless, in the argument itself, it is the substantial form, the « form in the strict sense » (to use Fr. Roland-Gosselin's expression), that is meant. (a) Obviously, if quiddity were meant, since quiddity in composites includes matter and form according to St. Thomas, the argument would make no sense. (b) In the argument, the form in question is the form as spoken of in the formula: « *forma dat esse materiae* »<sup>(35)</sup>. Now, in the *De ente* itself, c. 2, lines 56-57, it is explained that while the *essence* of the composite includes both *matter* and form, nevertheless the *esse* is *caused* only by the form. Clearly, this is form in the strict sense. (c) Again, in *Sentences* 1.8<sup>(36)</sup>, the formula: « *forma dat esse materiae* » is used at the moment that St. Thomas wishes to argue that the substantial form, as distinct from the quiddity, has a right to the title: « *quo est* ».

Fr. Roland-Gosselin is certainly correct in referring us to Avicenna's chapter. Indeed, his point that Avicenna employs « *forma* » in the strict sense need worry not at all, since, as we have just seen, so does St. Thomas. It is true that in his chapter Avicenna is speaking only of form which exists in matter. Still, he qualifies it as « material form » [*forma materialis*]<sup>(37)</sup>, thus at least permitting us to wonder if there is not a form which is not material.

(34) *De ente et essentia*, 4.36-40.

(35) *Ibid.*, 4.46.

(36) See above, n. 26.

(37) AVICENNA, *Metaphysica*, tr. 2, c. 4 (ed. Simone Van Riet, *Avicenna Latinus, Liber de philosophia prima sive scientia divina I-IV*, Louvain/Leiden, 1977: Peeters/Brill, p. 92, line 29; also p. 97, lines 21-22); concerning the application of the term « *forma* » to separate substances, cf. AVICENNA, *Metaphysica*, tr. 6, c. 4 (in *Opera philosophica*, Venice, 1508, fol. 93<sup>vo</sup> C): « *Forma autem aliquando dicitur omnis intentio quae in effectu est adaptata ut agat ita ut substantiae separatae etiam sint formae, et secundum hanc intentionem dicitur forma omnis dispositio, et actio quae est in recipiente unito vel composito, ita quod motus et accidentia sunt formae; dicitur etiam forma id per quod constituitur materia in effectu, et tunc substantiae intelligibiles et accidentia non erunt formae; et dicitur forma id per quod perficitur materia quamvis non constituatur per illud in effectum, sicut sanitas, et quicquid est ad quod moventur res naturaliter; et dicitur forma figura [et?] quicquid aliud fit in materiis per artificium; et dicitur forma proprie species rei et genus eius et differentia eius et hoc totum. Quia totalitas totius formae est etiam partibus ».*

Let us note some features of the doctrine of Avicenna which would suggest that it has a definite connection with what St. Thomas is saying. While Avicenna is speaking about form as found in things composed out of matter and form, his doctrine is that in such composites the form is prior to and the cause of being of the matter. The two are found always together because the one is the cause of the other, and so both are given together. The matter cannot be cause of the form because the matter has as its property being in potency [*esse in potentia*], whereas the substance of form is act [*effectus*] (<sup>38</sup>). Indeed, a problem posed by Avicenna himself is: why, if the matter is the effect of the form, does not the matter simply cease to exist when the form is no more? Surely, when the precise cause ceases to exist, the effect ceases to exist; and we see that the forms appear and disappear in generation and corruption. His answer is that the proper cause of being of the matter is the *form as form* [*forma... inquantum est forma*]. In the succession of particular diverse forms, the nature of form as such continues to be present. It should be mentioned that Avicenna is here using also the doctrine of another thing, i.e. an agent, as cause of the being of the form in the matter. The form is seen as intermediate between the agent and the matter (<sup>39</sup>).

While this doctrine has a similarity with what St. Thomas is asserting, there are also some verbal expressions in St. Thomas' presentations which, while individually insignificant, taken together suggest the Avicennian background. In the *De ente*, there is the formula: « *forma dat esse materiae* ». While this is not found in the text of Avicenna, we do find, said of the form relative to the matter: « *dat ei esse* » (<sup>40</sup>). This is called by St. Thomas the « *habitus* » between form and matter, and the term « *habitus* » is used several times by Avicenna in the chapter in this way (<sup>41</sup>). In the *SS*, the expressions « *esse in potentia* » (for what belongs to matter according to its own nature) and « *forma materialis* » are found in the second of the two passages we have examined (<sup>42</sup>), a passage which further accords with

(<sup>38</sup>) AVICENNA, *Metaphysica*, tr. 2, c. 4 (ed. Van Riet, 101.10-102.20).

(<sup>39</sup>) *Ibid.*, 99.72-100.85; also 98.43-99.61; also 101.98-(10)9.

(<sup>40</sup>) *Ibid.*, 102.30; for ST. THOMAS, *De ente et essentia* 4.46.

(<sup>41</sup>) AVICENNA, *Metaphysica*, tr. 2, c. 4 (ed. *cit.*, 92.30; 93.39, 43, 45; and especially 95.92); for ST. THOMAS, *De ente et essentia* 4.45-46.

(<sup>42</sup>) *SS* 8.221-222 (quoted above, p. 11), for « *esse in potentia* »; and Avicenna, at 101.12-13: « *Natura vero eius quod est esse in potentia est proprietas materiae...* ».

For « *forma materialis* », *SS* 8.235 (quoted above, p. 11), where the Latin reads: « *sicut forma materialis in subiecto* »; cf. Avicenna, as indicated as the beginning of n. 37.

the Avicenna chapter inasmuch as it includes the discussion of the influence of an agent. In the *Qq. de anima*, we note expression: « *forma in quantum est forma* »<sup>(43)</sup>.

An interesting aspect of this Avicennian provenance of the doctrine we have been considering is that, whereas we have become somewhat accustomed to think of Avicenna as the philosopher of « existentially neutral essence »<sup>(44)</sup>, here we find St. Thomas seeing, at least « in association » with Avicenna, a form which is far from being existentially neutral. It is rather the cause of existence of the matter<sup>(45)</sup>.

It would seem as though, at the time of the first text we considered, at *Sentences* 1.8, while St. Thomas is already possessed of the principle that form gives being to matter, nevertheless he has not yet

(43) *Qq. de anima* 6 (ed. Robb, p. 111): « ...forma tamen, in quantum est forma, non indiget materia ad suum esse cum ipsam formam consequatur esse... »; for Avicenna, cf. *Metaphysica*, tr. 2, c. 4 (ed. cit., 100.75-85).

(44) The expression is from E. GILSON, *Being and Some Philosophers*, Toronto, 1952 (2nd ed.): Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, p. 83; cf. *ibid.*, pp. 74-83; cf. also G.C. Anawati, O.P., « Saint Thomas d'Aquin et la *Métaphysique d'Avicenne* », in *St. Thomas Aquinas, 1274-1974, Commemorative Studies*, Toronto, 1974: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, vol. I, at p. 465 (in this review of studies on St. Thomas' relations with the metaphysics of Avicenna, no mention is made of the question of the relation of form to matter). Against this background, it is also interesting to note that GUY JALBERT, in *Nécessité et contingence chez saint Thomas d'Aquin...* Ottawa, 1961: Edition de l'Université d'Ottawa, p. 112, relates the doctrine: « *forma dat esse* », as found in ST. THOMAS, *Sentences* (cf. Jalbert's p. 113, n. 35, for references), to Boethius' *De hebdomadibus*, and sees it as a metaphysics distinct from that of Avicenna, so distinct that St. Thomas is described as doing his utmost to reconcile them (p. 112). Yet the doctrine of form as giving being is clear in Avicenna: « ...similiter cum forma habuerit esse forma, sequetur ex hoc ut constituat aliquid, quod aliquid coniungitur suae essentiae; et id quod constituit est res in effectu et dat ei esse, sed de hoc quiddam est cui dat esse et est non coniunctum ei, et quiddam est cui dat esse et est coniunctum ei, quamvis non sit pars eius, sicut substantia est accidentibus et complexionibus quae sequuntur et comitantur eam ». (*Metaphysica*, tr. 2, c. 4; ed. Van Riet, 102.27-33).

(45) There is no possibility of doubt that in *Metaphysics*, tr. 2, c. 4, Avicenna is speaking about actual existence when he uses the word: « *esse* »: cf. e.g. ed. cit., 100.78-85.

For Avicenna, in this chapter, the very nature of form, which he says is act (« ...substantia formae est effectus... »: 101.11-12), is to be cause of being. Thus, when he is speaking of the succession of forms in matter, and of the fact that the nature of form as form remains, he identifies that nature by the very helping the agent to constitute the matter: « ...in quantum haec secunda [forma] communicat cum prima in hoc quod est forma, scilicet in quantum adiuvat ad constituendum hanc materiam... » (ed. cit., 99.57-59).



worked out its implications. Besides the change we have already noted as between the *Sentences* and the *De ente*, there are other indications of this situation. In the very context of our text § 1, on the simplicity of the human soul, there is an objection formulated as follows:

Simple form does not have being by itself... But that which does not have being except through the fact it is in another, cannot remain after that [other]... But the soul remains after the body. Therefore, it is not simple form.

And St. Thomas replies:

Every form is some likeness of the first principle which is pure act: hence, to the extent that a form approaches more closely to a likeness of it, it participates more of the perfections of it [the first principle]. But among the forms of bodies the rational soul more closely approaches the likeness of God; and so it participates in the nobilities of God, i.e. that it understand, and that it can produce motion, and that it has being by itself; and the sensitive soul less so, and the vegetative soul still less, and so on. Therefore, I say that it does not belong to the soul... to have being by itself [*esse absolutum*] inasmuch as it is form, but inasmuch as it is a likeness of God<sup>(46)</sup>.

Here, clearly, we have the hierarchy of perfection or act that we will find in many later texts of St. Thomas. What we certainly do not have here is the doctrine that as we have form more perfect precisely as form (i.e. precisely as cause of being), to that extent we move *towards* the first principle: this however is certainly what we do have in such a text as SS 7.91-110<sup>(47)</sup>.

Moreover, in *Sentences* 2, in the *ex professo* treatment of the incorruptibility of the human soul, we find the same view of form as we have just seen in *Sentences* 1. In this context of the problem of proving incorruptibility, the contrast between the early and the later doctrines of form is startling. Here in *Sentences* 2, St. Thomas is content with the doctrine that the soul remains after death, not inasmuch as it is form, but inasmuch as it is a substance; and most tellingly, he says nothing whatsoever about the form as principle of being in his positive presentation of the soul's incorruptibility. Starting with the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, the incorruptibility will be proved by

<sup>(46)</sup> *Sent.* 1.8.5.2.obj.5 and *ad* 5 (*ed. cit.*, t. 1, p. 228 and p. 231).

<sup>(47)</sup> See above, p. 9 (at n. 23). Cf. also, e.g. *Summa Contra Gentiles* 3.69 (near the end: «Non est etiam verum quod corpora...»).

the very nature of form as form: being follows upon form as form, and thus what is essentially form is entirely being-oriented, i.e. is incorruptible. Thus, the soul is seen as incorruptible, not on the basis of some other intelligibility, but precisely on the basis of the intelligibility: form<sup>(48)</sup>.

Thus, it looks very much as though the Avicennian doctrine of the priority of form over matter in the order of being gradually was seen by St. Thomas as rich in its implications. Indeed, in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* 2.54, which has been presented in recent years as profoundly anti-Avicennian<sup>(49)</sup>, we find that, in seeking to present the form as principle of being, St. Thomas has recourse to a comparison which takes us back to Avicenna's chapter on form as cause of being. St. Thomas says that in composites of matter and form, the form is the principle of being because the form completes the substance, whose act is being: just as, for air, the transparent is the principle of illumination, because the transparent (a quality of the air) makes air the proper subject of light. Avicenna, in striving to present the role of form as cause of being (cause, i.e. together with the outside agent), says:

For many of the things which are are perfected only by the being of two causes: for illumination and light do not come about except from the lucid cause and the quality which makes the illuminated body receptive of light...<sup>(50)</sup>.

Of course, this does not warrant any facile identifying of the thought of Avicenna and St. Thomas. We should remember, for example, that St. Thomas does not agree with Avicenna on the mode of causality by which material forms are caused. He expresses his disagreement already in *Sentences* 2, and never varies on the issue<sup>(51)</sup>. This point is relevant to our topic because St. Thomas sees (and that also from *Sentences* 2) one of the roots of Avicenna's position in a misunderstanding of the mode of being of material forms. Avicenna

---

<sup>(48)</sup> Contrast *Sent.* 2.19.1.1. *ad* 4 (*ed. cit.*, t. 2, pp. 483-484) with *Summa Contra Gentiles* 2.55 (para. 3). The doctrine is also used to show God as origin of form: cf. *ibid.* 2.43 (paras. 3 and 8).

<sup>(49)</sup> Cf. JALBERT, *Op. cit.*, pp. 163-164 and 160.

<sup>(50)</sup> ST. THOMAS, *Summa Contra Gentiles* [henceforth «SCG»] 2.54 (para. 5) and AVICENNA, *Metaphysica*, tr. 2, c. 4 (*ed. cit.*, 99.61-64).

<sup>(51)</sup> ST. THOMAS, *Sent.* 2.1.1.4. *ad* 4 (*ed. cit.*, t. 2, p. 27). Notice, however, that St. Thomas' reference to Avicenna is to the *De fluxu entis*, which is not really a work of Avicenna; cf. ETIENNE GILSON, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, New York, 1955: Random House, pp. 239-240. Cf. also SCG 3.69 (paras. 4 and 21: «Rationes autem...»), and ST 1.65.4.

makes the forms themselves causable items, whereas it is only that which has being [*esse*], i.e. the material composite, which is properly caused. Thus, St. Thomas clearly suspects Avicenna of viewing the forms in matter as subsisting forms<sup>(52)</sup>. In the texts we have been reviewing St. Thomas does not say, as Avicenna does, that material forms always are found together with matter simply because a cause is accompanied by its effect<sup>(53)</sup>. On the contrary, St. Thomas' argument for the possibility of separate form is that what has the nature of cause can have being without the other, i.e. the effect<sup>(54)</sup>. He rather says that material forms always are found with matter because they *need* matter. Thus, while affirming the independence of form as form, relative to matter, St. Thomas also affirms a definite causality on the part of matter with respect to material form. Matter, while not a cause of beings as beings, is a cause within the particular domain of mobile being<sup>(55)</sup>.

What is common to St. Thomas and Avicenna here, then, is the focus on the essential natures of form and matter, with the judgment that form is essentially cause of being, and matter essentially effect of the form. What is distinct is the clearly non-subsistent character of material form for St. Thomas (so that he sees a causality on the part of matter, though only within the particular mode which is mobile being). Thus, it is remarkable that it is St. Thomas, not Avicenna, who, looking at non-separable form, is able to read in its nature the possibility of separate form<sup>(56)</sup>.

---

(52) In *ST* 1.65.4 (Ottawa ed. 400a1-13), it is made the one root of the problem.

(53) AVICENNA, *Metaphysica*, tr. 2, c. 4 (*ed. cit.*, 102.23-30).

(54) ST. THOMAS, *De ente et essentia* 4.42-45 (above, p. 4); cf. also *SS* 8.228-233 (above, p. 11).

(55) On some form as needing matter, cf. the texts quoted above, on pp. 4, 7, and 9). On matter as cause, not of beings as beings, but of a determinate genus of beings, namely mobile substance, cf. ST. THOMAS, *In Metaph.*, 3.4 (*ed. Cathala/Spiazzi*, Rome/Turin, 1950: Marietti, § 384).

(56) Need it be said that St. Thomas sees himself as being faithful to Aristotle in this doctrine of form? Cf. *SCG* 3.69, third last para.: « Non est etiam verum... », with its quotation from Aristotle; also ST. THOMAS, *In Metaph.*, 8.3 (*ed. cit.*, § 1713), where St. Thomas surely sees himself as saying what Aristotle had in mind. The union of Aristotle and Avicenna should not surprise. For the interpretation of Books 7 and 8 of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, St. Thomas leaned heavily on the distinction between quiddity or essence, and substantial form, and saw Avicenna as the faithful interpreter of Aristotle in this regard; cf. ST. THOMAS, *In Metaph.*, 7.9 (*ed. cit.*, § 1469), and our paper, « St. Thomas, *Metaphysics*, and Formal Causality » (cf. above, n. 10).

c) *Metaphysical Considerations:*

Lastly, let us consider this doctrine of St. Thomas in itself. It is of considerable importance for a metaphysics such as that of St. Thomas, which starts from the beings found in the sensible order<sup>(57)</sup>, and moves to a consideration of the supersensible. The doctrine we have been focussing upon starts with form as found in sensible things, and reads there the nature of form as form, such that form does not require matter for its existence. Can we see clearly what St. Thomas has in mind?

First of all, it does not seem that this doctrine presupposes a knowledge of the existence of God or of any other spiritual being. In the *Sentences*, where St. Thomas uses the argument from the notion of quiddity as quiddity, his statement that quiddity does not demand composition appealed to the example of the divine quiddity<sup>(58)</sup>. However, with the introduction of our argument, in the *De ente*, the possibility of form existing without matter is directly concluded to from form's role as cause of being of matter. Indeed, it is a fact that in the *De ente* argumentative sequence for the whole of chapter 4, a proof of the existence of God is incorporated (lines 90-146) after our passage (lines 41-60). However, neither argument seems to depend on the other.

In SS 7.91-110, it is merely said that since act and form are prior to potency and matter, potency and matter depend for their being on act and form; the converse is not true, since prior things do not depend on posterior things. Thus, everything is made to flow from form being *prior* to matter (though this is closely associated in the presentation with the priority of act over potency: as if this doctrine of act prior to potency were required to light up the sense of « form prior to matter »).

In SS 8, the point is that matter receives determinate actual being through form, and not conversely: thus, form is seen as *cause* of matter (lines 228-233), and thus as able to exist without matter. The essence of matter has been seen to involve *esse in potentia* (220-222), while through form it participates *esse in actu* in a particular or proper mode (223-225). The form was seen as determinative of *esse* inasmuch as it (the form) is the principle of location in a species. The whole picture involves the descent of *esse* from God. — Here, there can be no doubt that the existence and nature of God is taken for granted, and the issue is the possibility of immaterial creatures.

(57) Cf. *ST* 1.84.8. *ad* 1 (Ottawa ed., 523a9-13); 1.87.3. *ad* 1; 1-12-12 (73b9-13).

(58) See above, p. 3.

Still, the precise point of doctrine, that the cause does not depend on the effect, and that the form is cause of being of the matter, seems to be taken as quite intelligible in itself, not as flowing from the doctrine of God.

Let us, then, examine this doctrine just in itself, as to what St. Thomas has in mind. According to St. Thomas, metaphysics begins with the consideration of the distinct substances which confront us (the unity proper to individual things, their true entity, the diversity of things)<sup>(59)</sup>. Even within this initial moment, he distinguishes steps. First, it is the intrinsic entity of this or that thing which arrests us; secondly, the distinctness of this from that; thirdly, the unity of each thing with itself; fourthly, the multiplicity of things<sup>(60)</sup>.

A key subsequent step, following the consideration of substances as substances, is the discovery, through the phenomenon of generation and corruption, of the nature of matter<sup>(61)</sup>. However, as to just what this leads to, one might easily err. One might think that, the substance now having been shown to be composite, the reality of form would then come to light. Form would thus be known in third place, after substance and matter. This does not seem to be the view of St. Thomas. There is no doubt that it is through a consideration of generation and corruption that one comes to a view of matter. However, it seems rather his doctrine that one sees form right from the start, i.e. that the original grasp of substance or *ens* is a grasp of form as such, and that what follows upon the introduction of the role of matter is, first, that form has not only the ontological wealth required of a cause, but also a subjected being to which it does stand related as cause; and secondly, that form, in generable and corruptible things, is, for the most part<sup>(62)</sup>, something inherent rather than subsistent, is a weak cause of being, has a status measured by and thus in a way caused by the *esse in potentia* which characterizes matter in its own essence.

That form as such is known from the start, according to St. Thomas, we see indicated as follows. (1) In presenting the notion

---

(59) Cf. SS 6.88.92: « Tollit demum, et ut finaliter concludam, praedicta positio etiam philosophiae primae principia, auferens unitatem a singulis rebus et per consequens veram entitatem simul et rerum diversitatem ». St. Thomas is here bringing the crowning accusation against the position of Avicbron.

(60) Cf. ST 1.11.2. *ad* 4.

(61) ST. THOMAS, *In Metaph.* 8.1 (*ed. cit.* § 1689), and our paper: « St. Thomas, Metaphysics, and Formal Causality ».

(62) I.e., save in the case of the human soul: cf. SCG 2.68, as a whole. This is an extremely important text.

of *ens*, St. Thomas teaches that it abstracts from all matter<sup>(63)</sup>. The word «*ens*» names a conception of perfection taken absolutely, not as including any mode of participating the perfection<sup>(64)</sup>. Our original knowledge of *ens* is the seed of metaphysics<sup>(65)</sup>. (2) In presenting the way death is unnatural for living things, St. Thomas teaches us to conceive of form precisely as what pertains to maintenance of a thing in existence, and even to perpetuation of existence to whatever extent that is possible. Clearly, by «form» is meant that principle which is responsible for our catching sight of something as that which *belongs* in the realm of beings, as that which merits the title: «a being»<sup>(66)</sup>.

The beings that we know first are known as beings, i.e. according to their own unqualified affirmations of themselves: and this is to grasp form in abstraction from matter<sup>(67)</sup>. However, secondly, we are led, through the experience of generation and corruption, to locate in them that which is merely «a being in potency»: so that the originally discerned «substance» is now seen as *cause* of being with respect to the matter. This being «cause of being» is what belongs to form according to the originally seen perfection. Being belongs to it as its own. Being in potency has being through it.

Thus, it is the very fact that the nature of matter only comes to light through the experience of generation and corruption, that enables us to place matter in the secondary, derivative condition it has with respect to form. At once one can move to the judgment: matter cannot exist without form, but form, by its very nature as form, can exist without matter. This does not suffice to posit the existence of such separate form. All it says is that by the very nature of form, the notion of separate form is an intelligible possibility. With form, we are dealing with a nature whose intelligibility does not require existence in matter.

(63) Cf. ST 1.85.1. *ad* 2 (ed. Ottawa, 525b32-37).

(64) Cf. ST 1.13.3. *ad* 1.

(65) Cf. ST 1.2.66.5. *ad* 4, together with 1.2.51.2. *ad* 3 (ed. Ottawa, 980a 25-26) and 1.2.63.2. *ad* 3; cf. also our paper, «St. Thomas and the Ground of Metaphysics»; *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 44 (1980), 144-154.

(66) Cf. ST 1.2.85.6 (ed. Ottawa, 1181b 6-13).

(67) The abstraction proper to the first grasp of *ens* is not a conscious *setting-aside* of matter so as to consider form alone. Such an operation would suppose matter as already actually known. The original abstraction is a consideration of form, with matter not considered. However, it is an *abstraction* precisely because it does not have the cognitive mode of saying that what is apprehended exists in the way it is apprehended. Cf. ST 1.85.1 (ed. Ottawa, 524b 21-29) and *ibid.*, *ad* 1 (524b 47-50).

It appears to me that this doctrine is directly connected with the view that metaphysics has as its subject « that which can be without matter ». *Ens commune* is usually said to be « what can be without matter » because it is *sometimes found* without matter<sup>(68)</sup>. However, this gives rise to the idea, in some commentators, that *ens* is at first a physical notion, and that only with the proof of the existence of separate entity do we have the birth of *ens*, as the subject of metaphysics<sup>(69)</sup>. This position is difficult to reconcile with St. Thomas' doctrine that *ens*, the first apprehension of the mind, is the seed of metaphysical wisdom<sup>(70)</sup>. The doctrine we have been considering in this paper suggests that *ens* is apprehended with the apprehension of substantial form, and that we understand that this nature does not depend, in its own nature, on matter, even before we have demonstrated the existence of any separate form. Matter is seen, as soon as it is seen, as ontologically dependent on form. Form is known from the start as ontologically self sufficient. When it is subsequently discovered that in the beings that we first know, form is necessarily inherent in matter, this condition of form calls for explanation (such as « distance from the first principle »)<sup>(71)</sup>.

---

(68) Cf. *ST* 1.85.1. *ad* 2 (*ed.* Ottawa, 525b 34-37): « ...sicut ens... et alia huiusmodi, quae etiam esse possunt absque omnia materia, ut patet in substantiis immaterialibus ». The remark of St. Thomas, *In Metaph.*, *prooemium* (towards the end): « Quia secundum esse et rationem separari dicuntur, non solum illa quae nunquam in materia esse possunt, sicut Deus et intellectuales substantiae, sed etiam illa quae possunt sine materia esse, sicut ens commune. Hoc tamen non contingeret, si a materia secundum esse dependerent », seems to imply the same point as the first-mentioned text.

(69) Cf. e.g. JAMES A. WEISHEIPL, « The Relationship of Medieval Natural Philosophy to Modern Science: the Contribution of Thomas Aquinas to its Understanding », in *Manuscripta* 20 (1976), at pp. 193-195.

(70) See above, n. 65. A text to be noted as well is St. Thomas, *In Ethic. ad Nic.*, 6.5 (*ed.* Pirotta, § 1181): « Universalissima autem principia sunt etiam quoad nos magis nota, sicut ea quae pertinent ad ens in quantum est ens: quorum cognitio pertinet ad sapientiam sic dictam [sc. simpliciter]... » (our italics).

We do not mean to deny the priority of natural philosophy over metaphysics in the order of acquisition of intellectual virtues.

(71) See above, p. 4.