

## Nature, Specific Difference, and Degrees of Being: Metaphysical Background to Aquinas's Anti-Monophysite Arguments

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ACCOUNTS of the Incarnation that place a premium on metaphysical coherence traditionally take the Declaration of the Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451) as their point of departure. The central statement of the council states:

Following therefore the holy Fathers, we confess one and the same our Lord Jesus Christ, and we all teach harmoniously [that he is] the same perfect in Godhead, the same perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man, the same of a reasonable soul and body; *consubstantial with the Father in Godhead and the same consubstantial with us in manhood*, like us in all things except sin; begotten before ages of the Father in Godhead, the same in the last days for us; and for our salvation [born] of Mary the virgin *theotokos* in manhood, one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, unique; *acknowledged in two natures without confusion, without change, without division, without separation—the difference of the natures being by no means taken away because of the union, but rather the distinctive character of each nature being preserved, and [each] combining in one Person and hypostasis—not divided or separated into two Persons, but one and the same Son and only-begotten God, Word, Lord Jesus Christ*; as the prophets of old and the Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us about him, and the symbol of the Fathers has handed down to us.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “The Chalcedonian Decree,” in *Christology of the Later Fathers*, ed. Edward Rochie Hardy (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), 373. Also important is Cyril of Alexandria’s third letter to Nestorius, contained in the same volume, 34–54. On St. Thomas’s knowledge and use of Chalcedon, see G. Geenen, “En marge du

Insofar as the hypostatic union is concerned, this declaration requires two things. First, against the Eutychian or monophysite position, it demands that the *integrity* of both the human and divine natures be respected. There can be no confusion of the two natures, nor can one change into the other or into some new composite nature. Second, against Nestorianism, Chalcedon holds that Christ's *unity* be respected. The conciliar declaration preserves this unity by insisting that the human and divine natures must both belong to one and the same person. There can be no talk of the Incarnation entailing a new Person in Christ. Aquinas's treatment of both of these errors is informative. In the present article, however, I shall restrict myself to a discussion of his argument against the monophysite position, which holds that in the Incarnation the human and the divine nature in some manner become one new nature.

One of the most interesting aspects of Aquinas's treatment of theological issues is the degree to which it is informed by his metaphysics. In light of this fact, the present article addresses two issues: first, the meaning of nature in Aquinas's metaphysics; and second, how Aquinas applies this metaphysics in his Christological arguments against monophysitism.

Contemporary metaphysicians have distinguished two approaches to essentialism: a modal approach and a definitional one. I will begin by arguing that Aquinas's account of nature should be understood as a development of the definitional account. This will be clarified through examining Aquinas's explanation of the etymological development of the term *natura* (nature) and the corresponding division of the various senses of the word, giving special emphasis to the latter. I will then show that even though he is writing in the context of a Christological treatise and often drawing upon the understanding of earlier Christian writers, St. Thomas presents his treatment of nature in a *philosophical* manner. I will conclude this section by examining Aquinas's ontology of nature as it is developed in the early work *De Ente*, in the later work *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, and in related texts.

Having set out Aquinas's philosophical account of nature, I will go on to examine how he applies this to a specific Christological controversy, namely, the question, "Whether the union took place in the nature?"

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Concile de Chalcédoine. Les textes du Quatrième Concile dans les oeuvres de saint Thomas," *Angelicum* 29 (1952): 43–59. On the historical circumstances of the council and the accuracy of Cyril's interpretation of Nestorius, see Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in the Christian Tradition*, vol. 2, trans. James Bowden (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1975). Grillmeier's work is the most detailed account of patristic and early conciliar Christology.

Aquinas's various treatments of this question offer one of the most explicit applications of the concept of nature within his Christology. I will focus on a comparison of the early treatment found in the *Sentences Commentary*, with the later ones of the *Summa contra Gentiles* and the *Summa theologiae*. The concluding section will attempt to highlight the significance of this material for an adequate understanding of the relation between philosophy and theology.

### The Meaning of Nature

Although there are a number of ways to understand the essence or nature of a thing, two views are common today. Modern accounts of essentialism are generally modal in nature, while the traditional Aristotelian accounts have usually been definitional.

Amongst contemporary philosophers it is common to account for essence in terms of modality.<sup>2</sup> This view can be stated as: “*x* is essentially *F* if and only if necessarily whatever is *x* has the property *F*; equivalently, *x* must be *F* to exist at all.”<sup>3</sup> On the modal view, the essence of a thing is understood in terms of the totality of its necessary properties. Anything necessary to *x*, that is anything which always and everywhere coincides with *x*'s being the case, is an essential property.

Philosophically, several problems have been pointed out with the modal conception. Notably, from the perspective of Thomistic metaphysics, it risks making existence itself an essential property of everything, whereas St. Thomas is very clear that existence is only essential in the case of God. There may be properties that are necessary for a thing to be a thing of this or that kind, for example, rationality is necessary for a man to be a man. However, existence itself does not enter into the essence of anything other than God. One can, for example, imagine a phoenix, a man, or the nature of any other created thing without having

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. “Essentialism,” *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, ed. Ted Honderich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 250 and “Essentialism,” *Handbook to Metaphysics*, ed. Hans Burkhardt and Barry Smith (Munich: Philosophia Verlag, 1991), 252–53. Both articles focus entirely on variations of modal essentialism to the exclusion of definitional essentialism.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Yablo, “Essentialism,” *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Craig, vol. 3, 417. One might be able to salvage this account philosophically by understanding necessity in this definition not merely in terms of a property that always and everywhere coincides with *x*'s being the case, but with that without which the thing could not be. However, since the objection to Aquinas that I intend to consider presumes that essential properties are simply those that always coincide with the thing, it is not necessary for us to consider this alternative in detail.

any knowledge of whether such things actually exist.<sup>4</sup> Every created thing *has* existence, but only God *is* his own existence.<sup>5</sup>

Further, as Kit Fine has pointed out, the modal account entails that each thing has a virtually infinite number of unusual and extraneous essential properties. For instance, it would be part of the essence of any object that every other object has its own essential properties, for this is necessarily the case throughout the existence of any object whose essence we might chose to investigate. Thus, it would be part of the essence of Socrates that the Eiffel tower be essentially spatio-temporally continuous, or that  $2 + 2 = 4$ .<sup>6</sup> Yet, clearly this is not the sort of thing we usually have in mind when speaking about the essence of a thing.

In contrast with modal essentialism, the Aristotelian approach accounts for essence in terms of a thing's definition. This can be stated formally as: "*F* is essential to *x* if and only if to be *F* is part of 'what *x* is,' as elucidated in the definition of *x*."<sup>7</sup> This seems to reflect Aristotle's position accurately. In the *Metaphysics* he states: "Clearly, then, definition is the formula of the essence."<sup>8</sup> This entails that a thing's essence is the ontological correlate of its definition. Likewise, in the *Topics*, Aristotle distinguishes between a thing's essence, its properties, and its accidents. He argues that the definition signifies that part of a thing that is its essence.<sup>9</sup> A property is something that, while not being essential, can only belong to a thing of that kind. Hence, having the capacity to learn grammar is a property of being a man; for all men, and only men, possess this characteristic.<sup>10</sup> Aquinas uses the Latin term *propria* to refer to these characteristics, although he also calls them *per se* accidents.

In the discussion of the *Topics*, Aristotle also offers two definitions of "accident." The first is that an accident is something that, although not a

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<sup>4</sup> *De Ente et Essentia*, ch. 4. The edition used is: S. Thomae de Aquino, *Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita*, vol. 43: *De Ente et Essentia* (Rome: Editori di San Tommaso, 1976), 315–81.

<sup>5</sup> *ST I*, q. 3, a. 4. The edition used is: S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Summa theologiae*, ed. P. Caramello, 3 vols. (Rome: Marietti, 1952–56).

<sup>6</sup> Kit Fine, "Essence and Modality: The Second Philosophical Perspectives Lecture," *Philosophical Perspectives* 8 (1994): 6.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Yablo, "Essentialism," 417.

<sup>8</sup> *Metaphysics*, 1031a13. Unless otherwise noted all references and translations from Aristotle refer to *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

<sup>9</sup> *Topics*, 101b20. "Since, however, of what is proper to anything part signifies its essence, while part does not, let us divide the proper into both the aforesaid parts, and call that part which indicates the essence a definition."

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 102a18–30.

definition, a property or a genus, nevertheless belongs to a thing. The second is that an accident is something that may either belong or not belong to any individual thing. For example, being seated or being white are accidents of Socrates as they may belong or not belong to him. Aristotle suggests that the latter definition is preferable, since it does not presuppose an understanding of concepts of definition, property, and genus in the way that the former definition of accident does.<sup>11</sup> It is also worth noting that there is a further sense in which accidents can be understood as opposed to substance or as opposed to genus, species, difference, and property.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, even rationality, which as the specific difference of man is part of the essence, could be considered accidental in a sense if we consider it as opposed to substance. Likewise, the capacity to learn grammar is unique to men, but it is hardly what constitutes man as man.

In light of these distinctions, it is clear that on Aristotle's view the essence of a thing is understood in terms of what falls under the definition.<sup>13</sup> Aquinas explicitly endorses the kinds of distinctions Aristotle makes in this respect. For example, in the *Summa*, he explains the notion of a property as follows: "A property is not [an aspect] of a thing's essence, but it is caused from the species' essential principles: hence it is a medium between an essence and an accident."<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, Aquinas is obviously committed to the distinctions between a thing's essence, its properties, and its accidents.

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 102b2–12.

<sup>12</sup> *ST I*, q. 77, a. 1, ad 5.

<sup>13</sup> The best account of the distinction between a definitional account of essence and a modal one is found in Fine, "Essence and Modality," p. 2. For a thorough study of Aristotle's view in light of contemporary essentialism, see David Charles, *Aristotle on Meaning and Essence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000).

<sup>14</sup> *ST I*, q. 77, a. 1, ad 5. "Proprium enim non est de essentia rei, sed ex principiis essentialibus speciei causatur: unde medium est inter essentiam et accidens sic dictum." *In III Sent.*, d. 35, q. 2, a. 3, qc. 1 c. "Proprium essentiale dicitur definitio, proprium autem non essentiale vocatur nomine communi proprium." "Proprium dupliciter dicitur, uno modo simpliciter et absolute, quod uni soli convenit, sicut risibile homini; alio modo dicitur aliquid proprium non simpliciter, sed ad aliquid, ut si dicatur, quod rationale est proprium homini in comparatione ad equum, licet et alii conveniat, scilicet angelo." The edition of Aquinas's *Sentences Commentary* used in this article is from S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Opera Omnia*, ed. Roberto Busa, vol. 1 (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1980). Cf. *De potentia*, q. 10, a. 4, ad 7; *In I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 1, a. 1, ad 1; *ST I*, q. 3, a. 6; *I*, q. 77, a. 6; and *I*, q. 54, a. 3, ad 2. The edition of the *De potentia* is S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Quaestiones disputatae*, t. 2: *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia*, 10th ed., ed. P. M. Pession (Rome: Marietti, 1965).

The modal account of essence asks for an exhaustive list of necessary properties, whereas the definitional account is more like a sortal concept, a means for classifying individuals into kinds or sets. As Fine argues, the modal conception of essence on its own is not sufficient to deal with the metaphysical problems of identity and universals, while the definitional account is a highly refined version of the modal one: “It is like a sieve which performs a similar function but with a much finer mesh.”<sup>15</sup>

Although Aquinas explicitly endorses a definitional theory of essence, Richard Cross attributes the modal view of essence to Aquinas.<sup>16</sup> There is, however, simply no evidence for this in the texts. Aquinas would, of course, accept the claim that all essential properties are necessary. However, given the distinction he accepts between properties and accidents, he would reject the view that all necessary properties are essential. Aquinas’s explicit acceptance of a definitional account of essence allows him to assert that being a necessary property of a thing is not sufficient for that property to be included within the thing’s essence. Further, essential principles are distinguished from non-essential properties (i.e., *per se* accidents) as a cause is distinct from its effect. This is due to the fact that a thing’s properties are caused by its essential principles.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, a thing’s essential features are its primary necessary features, while its properties are necessary results of these essential features.

Aquinas’s usual manner of approaching the meaning of “nature” is through the etymology of the term. This is, however, derivative, having its original source in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* V, 4. Nevertheless, Aquinas’s use of Aristotle’s etymology is sufficient to indicate the wide range of senses that the term “nature” has in his philosophy. In dealing with the

<sup>15</sup> Fine, “Essence and Modality,” p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Cross, “Aquinas on Nature, Hypostasis, and the Metaphysics of the Incarnation,” *The Thomist* 60 (1996): 194–96. As I have suggested above, Cross’s criticism of Aquinas’s claim that a hand enters into communion with the *esse* of the *supposit* requires the presupposition of a modal notion of essence, which, in fact, Aquinas would reject. On the issue of communion in *esse*, see my article “Aquinas on the Metaphysics of *Esse* in Christ,” *The Thomist* 66 (2002). Both Aristotle and Aquinas, however, seem to appeal to modality to account for accidents, insofar as an accident is something that a thing may or may not have. Cf. *Topics*, 102b6–7. For a more detailed discussion of Aquinas’s position cf. Gyula Klima, “Contemporary Essentialism vs. Aristotelian Essentialism,” *Mind, Metaphysics and Value in the Thomist and Analytical Traditions* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 175–94.

<sup>17</sup> *ST I*, q. 77, a. 1, ad 5. It is crucial to note that Aquinas explicitly endorses the definitional view of essence in many places, e.g., *SCG I*, ch. 24 and *ST I*, q. 29, a. 2, ad 3. The edition of the *SCG I* I have used is: S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Summa contra Gentiles*, 3 vols., ed. C. Pera et al. (Rome: Marietti, 1961).

manner in which the union of natures in Christ took place, Aquinas begins by considering the possibility that the union occurred in the nature. In the *Summa* the article begins, as is typical of Aquinas's other accounts, with a presentation of the etymology of the term "nature":

For a clear understanding of this question, it is necessary to consider what a nature is. Therefore, it should be known that the name "nature" was said or understood from "being born" (*nascendo*). Hence this name was first imposed for signifying the generation of living things, which is called nativity or sprouting forth so that nature is said as if [it meant] "about to be born" (*nascitura*).<sup>18</sup>

The etymology Aquinas is using here is entirely traditional. Yet, what is important for us to note is not so much the content of the etymology itself as the way Aquinas introduces it into the discussion. He tells the reader that clarifying the *quid sit* of nature is necessary (*oportet*) in order to have a clear understanding of the question. Admittedly, the phrase he uses to introduce the presentation, *ad huius quaestionis evidentiam*, is common in Aquinas. Nevertheless, it is important in this context, insofar as it grants a certain priority to clarifying the meaning of the term within the process of resolving the theological dispute. Until this terminological matter is set straight, an adequate answer to the theological dilemma cannot be attained.

The importance of this introduction becomes clearer as St. Thomas completes the etymology by telling the reader of the historical development of the *philosophical* senses of the term:

Next, the term "nature" was transferred to signify the principle of this generation. And since the principle of generation in living things is an intrinsic principle, the term "nature" was extended further for signifying any intrinsic principle of motion, according to what the Philosopher says in the *Physics*, "nature is the principle of motion in that in which it is per se and not accidentally." Now this principle is either matter or form. Hence sometimes nature is called form, but sometimes it is called matter. And because the end of natural generation, in that which is generated, is the essence of the species, which the definition signifies, the essence of this kind of species is also called the "nature." And Boethius defines nature in this way in the book *Concerning the Two Natures* saying:

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<sup>18</sup> *ST III*, q. 2, a. 1 c. "Respondeo dicendum quod ad huius quaestionis evidentiam, oportet considerare quid sit natura. Sciendum est igitur quod nomen naturae a nascendo est dictum vel sumptum. Unde primo est impositum hoc nomen ad significandum generationem viventium, quae nativitas vel pullulatio dicitur: ut dicatur natura quasi nascitura."

“Nature is the specific difference informing each and every thing,” that is, that which completes the definition of the species.<sup>19</sup>

In this text St. Thomas’s use of the term “nature” to designate the essence or form of a thing is presented as being derived from nature’s primary meaning as a principle of motion.<sup>20</sup> From this original sense, Aquinas notes, it was later used to refer to any intrinsic principle of motion and then to a thing’s substantial principles of matter and form.

The etymological aspect of Aquinas’s discussion presents a somewhat simplified account of the discussions of the term “nature” given in Aristotle and Boethius. Boethius’s discussion is brief and clearly organized, so I will begin with a summary of it, before moving on to Aristotle’s more complex account.

Boethius’s set of distinctions is as follows:

- (B1) “Nature belongs to those things which, since they exist, can in some way be apprehended by the intellect”;<sup>21</sup>
- (B2) “Nature is either that which can act or that which can be acted upon;”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *ST III*, q. 2, a. 1 c. “Deinde translatum est nomen naturae ad significandum principium activum huius generationis. Et quia principium generationis in rebus viventibus est intrinsecum, ulterius derivatum est nomen naturae ad significandum quodlibet principium intrinsecum motus: secundum quod Philosophus dicit, in *II Physic.*, quod natura est principium motus in eo in quo est per se et non secundum accidens. Hoc autem principium vel forma est, vel materia. Unde quandoque natura dicitur forma: quandoque vero materia. Et quia finis generationis naturalis est, in eo quod generatur, essentia speciei, quam significat definitio, inde est quod huiusmodi essentia speciei, vocatur etiam natura. Et hoc modo Boetius naturam definit, in libro de Duabus Naturis, dicens: Natura est unamquamque rem informans specifica differentia, quae scilicet complet definitionem speciei.” Also see *In III Sent.*, d. 5, q. 1, a. 2, and *In Metaph.*, 5.4, l. 5, 808–822 and 824–826; *SCG IV*, ch. 53; and *ST I*, q. 29, a. 1, ad 4. The edition of *In Metaph.* is: S. Thomae Aquinatis, *In duodecim libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis exposition*, 2nd ed, ed. M. R. Cathala, R. M. Spiazzi (Rome: Marietti, 1971).

<sup>20</sup> David B. Twetten, “Back to Nature in Aquinas,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 5 (1996): 215–16.

<sup>21</sup> *Contra Eutychen*, I, l. 8. “Natura est earum rerum quae, cum sint, quoquo modo intellectu capi possunt.” All references to, and translations of, Boethius are from *The Theological Tractates and The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. H. F. Stewart, E. K. Rand, and S. J. Tester for Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, I, l. 57. “Natura est vel quod facere vel quod pati possit.”



- (B3) "Nature is the principle of movement per se, and not accidental;"<sup>23</sup>  
 (B4) "Nature is the specific difference that gives form to anything."<sup>24</sup>

From these divisions of the term "nature" Aquinas chooses to emphasize the two of the greatest philosophical importance (i.e., B3 and B4) in order to highlight the sense of the term at issue when we discuss the human and divine natures in Christ. In this context, it is B4, nature as the specific difference informing each and every thing, which is being used. Moreover, St. Thomas tells us that this sense is equivalent to a host of other terms: "So, therefore, we are now speaking of nature insofar as nature signifies the essence, or that which is, or the quiddity of the species."<sup>25</sup>

It is important to clarify the relation between the accounts of nature in Aristotle and Boethius, for although Boethius is one of the first to explicitly apply this sense of nature to the Incarnation, he was not the first to identify it as a unique sense of the term. In fact, the account in the *Contra Eutychen* closely follows the treatment of nature in *Metaphysics* Δ, 4. Accordingly, I will now investigate Aristotle's account of nature.

#### *Nature in Aristotle's Physics and Metaphysics*

Aristotle offers two relevant accounts of nature: one in the *Physics* and the other in the *Metaphysics*. In the *Physics* II, 1, the term "nature" is said to have the following senses:

- (A1) "Nature is the principle of something and the cause of anything being moved and being at rest in [something] in which [it is found] primarily per se and not accidentally;"<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., I, l.41. "Natura est motus principium per se non per accidens."

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., I, l.25. "Natura est unam quamque rem informans specifica differentia."

<sup>25</sup> *ST* III, q. 2, a. 1 c. "Sic ergo nunc loquimur de natura, secundum quod natura significat essentiam, vel quod quid est, sive quidditatem speciei."

<sup>26</sup> *Phys.*, II, 1, 3; 192b22. "Est igitur natura principium alicuius et causa movendi et quiescendi in quo est primum per se et non secundum accidens." For Aristotle's *Physics* I have translated from the Latin text as found in the Marietti editions of St. Thomas's commentaries except where otherwise noted. Marietti uses the text of William Moerbeke. I have also consulted the *Aristoteles Latinus* where necessary. The numbers in the references are (1) to the book of Aristotle's text, (2) to the chapter, and (3) to the paragraph numbers in Marietti. So the reference above, for example, should be read as book 2, chapter 1, Marietti paragraph #3. For Aquinas's commentary I refer to: S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Opera omnia iussu impensaue Leonis XIII. P. M. edita*, t. 2: *Commentaria in octo libros Physicorum Aristotelis* (Rome: Ex Typographia Polyglotta S. C. de Propaganda Fide, 1884).

- (A1a) “The primary material subject for each thing having a principle of motion and change in themselves;”<sup>27</sup>
- (A1b) “The form and species which is according to [our] concept;”<sup>28</sup>
- (A2) “But further, nature taken in the sense of “generation” is the way *to* a nature.”<sup>29</sup>

Aristotle’s motive for making these distinctions in the *Physics* is to distinguish between things that are by nature and things that are by art. To this end, he explains each of these senses in more detail. Aquinas, however, only refers to Aristotle’s treatment of nature as a principle of motion in order to contrast it with the sense of nature at work in the Christological discussion.<sup>30</sup>

In the *Metaphysics* Aristotle gives five senses of the term “nature,” but identifies one sense as primary and proper. According to Aquinas, Aristotle reduces the other senses of the term to this primary one: “the substance of things existing by nature,” that is to say the form.<sup>31</sup> Of the various senses of nature, this one is most closely related to B4 from Boethius, which is singled out by Aquinas as what is meant by the term “nature” in Christology.

St. Thomas explains Aristotle’s teaching by means of the example of the parts of man and his nature:

<sup>27</sup> *Phys.* 193a28 ff.; II, 1, 10. “Uno quidem modo natura sic dicitur, prima unicuique subiecta materia habentium in seipsis motus principium et mutationis.”

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, “Alio autem modo forma et species, quae est secundum rationem.” The translation from the Greek by Hardie and Gray renders the passage as follows: “Another account is that ‘nature’ is the shape or form *which is specified in the definition of the thing.*”

<sup>29</sup> *Phys.*, 193b13; II, 1, 14. “Amplius autem, natura dicta sicut generatio via est in naturam.”

<sup>30</sup> On the concept of nature in the *Physics* and its importance for Aquinas and the medievals, see Helen S. Lang, *Aristotle’s Physics and Its Medieval Varieties* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), ch. 1; Helen S. Lang, “Thomas Aquinas and the Problem of Nature in *Physics* II, 1,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 13 (1996): 410–32; James A. Weisheipl, OP, “The Concept of Nature,” in *Nature and Motion in the Middle Ages* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1985), 1–23; and James A. Weisheipl, “The Concept of Nature: Avicenna and Aquinas,” in *Thomistic Papers*, ed. Victor B. Brezik, CSB (Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1984), 65–81.

<sup>31</sup> *Metaph.* 1014b17; V, 5, 413. The five senses are: (1) “Natura vero dicitur uno quidem modo nascentium generatio”; (2) “Uno vero modo, ex quo generatur primum generatum inexistente”; (3) “Amplius unde motus primus in quolibet natura entium, et est in eo in quantum id existit”; (4) “Amplius autem natura dicitur ex quo primo aut est aut fit aliquid entium natura, cum informis sit et immutabile a sua propria potestate”; (5) “Existentium natura substantia.”

For example, we might say that the nature of man is not only the soul, but humanity and the substance which the definition signifies. For in this way *Boethius* says that nature is the specific difference informing each and every thing. For the specific difference is that which completes the substance of the thing and gives a species to it. But just as the form or matter was called nature because it is the principle of generation, which is called nature according to its first imposition; so, species and substance are called nature, because it is the end of generation. For generation is terminated at the species of the thing generated, which results from the union of form and matter.<sup>32</sup>

Notice that this passage is entirely in keeping with the account presented above. The specific difference completes the substance, and it is in virtue of this difference that the substance is a member of this or that species. Clearly, this difference is what locates a thing within a specific class of beings and consequently confers upon it a specific “grade” of being. To classify something as a member of a species is to assert that it holds a specific place within the hierarchy of beings. In this process the “target” of metaphysical attention is the nature which a thing is determined to through the specific difference.

The stress which Aquinas places on the metaphysical import of the specific difference in his account of nature should not be overlooked. In fact, the importance of nature in Aquinas’s metaphysics primarily rests upon the relation he sees between the specific difference as expressed in the definition and the essence of a thing. “The specific difference is that which completes the substance of the thing and gives a species to it.”<sup>33</sup> This understanding is largely due to the fact that he follows Aristotle and *Boethius* in their definitional account of the essence or nature of a thing.

It is important to be precise about the function of the specific difference in this context. *Boethius*’s account of nature as the specific difference which informs each and every thing simply means that the specific difference is one of the ways in which we can speak about a nature. Yet, it should not be taken to mean that the nature is simply identified with

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, V, 5, 822. “Ut si dicamus quod hominis natura non solum est anima, sed humanitas et substantia quam significat definitio. Secundum hoc enim *Boethius* dicit, quod natura est unumquodque informans specifica differentia. Nam specifica differentia est, quae complet substantiam rei et dat ei speciem. Sicut autem forma vel materia dicebatur natura, quia est principium generationis, quae secundum primam nominis impositionem natura dicitur; ita species et substantia dicitur natura, quia est finis generationis. Nam generatio terminatur ad speciem generati, quae resultat ex unione formae et materiae.”

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, “Nam specifica differentia est, quae complet substantiam rei et dat ei speciem.”

the specific difference. Strictly speaking the nature of man is humanity, not rationality. On Aquinas's understanding we have to emphasize the fact that the specific difference is what informs each thing, thereby establishing it in some nature. The difference considered as a second intention, just like the genus or the species, is a concept, not a reality; though when rationality is used as a term of first intention it obviously does signify an existing property in some individual. Furthermore, the specific difference has its very foundation in the nature which is in things:

Just as a genus is a kind of intention which the intellect posits concerning the form understood; so too is a difference, and all things which signify second intentions. Nonetheless, to this understood intention corresponds a certain nature which is in particular things, although insofar as it is in particulars, this nature does not have the character of a genus or a species. Accordingly, I say that Boethius does not intend to say that the difference, insofar as the intention of difference applies to it [sc. difference], is a nature, but with respect to what is in the thing itself, namely the quiddity of the thing which the difference completes.<sup>34</sup>

Accordingly, on Aquinas's interpretation, it is not the difference as a concept of second intention which Boethius intends to identify with the nature. Rather, it is the quiddity in the thing itself that is completed and constituted by the difference under consideration in Boethius' account.

Returning to the texts from the *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, we should note that Aquinas finds his own doctrine of the structure of beings as an ordered hierarchy in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Aquinas's reasoning for this doctrine appears to be taken from Aristotle, or more precisely Aristotle as understood by St. Thomas. It is interesting that Aquinas should choose to cite Boethius at this point in his commentary. References to Christian authors within the Aristotle commentaries, though not unprecedented, are relatively rare. The use of Boethius on this point is important if we are to come to terms with Aquinas's own understanding of the philosophical sources he uses in theology. In this case, although Aquinas refers us to Boethius for the understanding of nature in Christology, this passage from Aquinas's commentary on the *Metaphysics* clearly shows that he sees the

<sup>34</sup> *In III Sent.*, d. 5, q. 3, a. 1, ad 1. "Sicut genus est quaedam intentio quam intellectus ponit circa formam intellectam; ita etiam differentia, et omnia quae significant secundas intentiones. Tamen huic intentioni intellectae respondet natura quaedam quae est in particularibus; quamvis secundum quod est in particularibus, non habeat rationem generis vel speciei. Secundum hoc dico, quod Boetius non intendit dicere, quod differentia secundum quod accidit ei intentio differentiae, sit natura, sed quantum ad id quod est in re ipsa, scilicet quidditas rei quam differentia complet."

remote origin of this account of nature not in Boethius alone, but in Aristotle as well.<sup>35</sup> According to St. Thomas himself, the definition of nature which we use in speaking about Christ is to be understood in the same way as it was articulated by Aristotle. In the case of nature it is clear, then, that St. Thomas does not change the signification of the term in light of Christian revelation. Rather, he adopts the traditional philosophical understanding developed by Aristotle in order to illumine the revealed mystery.

The treatment of nature is not merely an incidental exception. Recall that scholars who follow Gilson and Fr. Owens hold that what distinguishes Aristotle's metaphysics from Aquinas's is that the latter has a doctrine of being, while the former does not. On Gilson's reading Aristotle's metaphysics is essentialist, whereas in Aquinas essence is merely a limit on existence. Essence appears to be needed only to make the existence of creatures possible.<sup>36</sup> As we have seen, Aquinas does not have such a limited view of the metaphysical function of a nature. It is true that the nature or form does limit matter, contracting it to be a thing of this kind rather than that, just as the sculptor in giving bronze the form of David excludes any of the other possible forms it could have received when it was just an amorphous lump. But this limiting function is secondary; it is more important that the form gives the thing its specific perfection. What is primary in the sculptor's act of informing the bronze is not that he excludes other possible forms, but that he confers the perfection proper to the form which he creates in the matter.

The manner in which the specific difference is related to a thing's place in the grades of being is taken up in Aquinas's argument for the immateriality of angels, against those who follow Ibn Gabirol in positing

<sup>35</sup> The identification of Aristotle's account with Boethius can also be found at Q. Q., q. 2, a. 2 c.

<sup>36</sup> Etienne Gilson, *Introduction à la philosophie chrétienne* (Paris:Vrin, 1960), 170–71. It is also worth noting that this view of essence leads Gilson to deny that God has an essence, a claim that directly contradicts Aquinas's position. For a thorough critique of Gilson's claim that God transcends essence cf. Lawrence Dewan, OP, "Etienne Gilson and the *Actus Essendi*," *Maritain Studies* 15 (1999): 70–96. On essence as limit, also see W. Norris Clarke, SJ, *The One and the Many: A Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 80–84. A similar approach is the attempt to reduce essence to a mode of existence: cf. W. E. Carlo, "The Role of Essence in Existential Metaphysics," in *Readings in Metaphysics*, ed. J. Rosenberg (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1963). A very helpful critique of this minimalistic account of essence is that of John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 190–92. Wippel cites several other authors who defend the position criticized here at p. 190, n. 37. Obviously, this is a point that requires further investigation in its own right.

spiritual matter as a principle of potency in separate substances. In this context, St. Thomas provides a helpful explanation of the importance of the specific difference to understanding the natures of created things. Aquinas is responding to an objection that argues that everything under a genus is composed of the genus and the difference which, when added to the genus, makes the species. This is problematic because, according to Aristotle, the genus is related to matter as the difference is to form. This means that an angel, being in the genus of substance, would appear to be composed of matter and form. In response Aquinas argues:

It is the difference which constitutes the species. But each and every thing is constituted in a species, insofar as it is determined to some special grade in beings, since the species of things are like numbers, which differ through the addition and subtraction of unity, as is said in VIII *Metaphys.* Now, in material things what determines to a special grade, namely form, and what is determined, namely matter, are different; hence, the genus is taken from one, the difference from another. But in immaterial things there is no difference between the determining thing and the thing determined, but each and every one of them holds a determined grade in beings according to itself. And, thus, genus and difference are not taken according to different things in them, but according to one and the same thing. Yet, this differs according to our consideration; for insofar as our intellect considers that thing as indeterminate, the notion of the genus is considered in them; but, insofar as it considers it as determinate, the notion of difference is considered.<sup>37</sup>

This passage illustrates the complex role of the specific difference within the metaphysical analysis of individual things. It is the form of the

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<sup>37</sup> *ST* I, q. 50, a. 2, ad 1. “Ad primum ergo dicendum quod differentia est quae constituit speciem. Unumquodque autem constituitur in specie, secundum quod determinatur ad aliquem specialem gradum in entibus; quia species rerum sunt sicut numeri, qui differunt per additionem et subtractionem unitatis, ut dicitur in VIII *Metaphys.* In rebus autem materialibus aliud est quod determinat ad specialem gradum, scilicet forma, et aliud quod determinatur, scilicet materia: unde ab alio sumitur genus, et ab alio differentia. Sed in rebus immaterialibus non est aliud determinans et determinatum: sed unaquaeque earum secundum seipsam tenet determinatum gradum in entibus. Et ideo genus et differentia in eis non accipitur secundum aliud et aliud, sed secundum unum et idem. Quod tamen differt secundum considerationem nostram: in quantum enim intellectus noster considerat illam rem ut indeterminate, accipitur in eis ratio generis; in quantum vero considerat ut determinate, accipitur ratio differentiae.” On the difference between species and form, see Lawrence Dewan, OP, “St. Thomas, *Metaphysics and Formal Causality*,” *Laval théologique et philosophique* 36 (1980): 309–10. This article also has a useful section on substantial form.

thing that is the root of its specific difference, and consequently gives rise to the nature itself.

Further, the substantial form of a corporeal thing determines the matter placing it in “a special grade of beings” and, thereby, constituting it in some species. Since the form of material things does the determining and the matter is determined, the form and matter are distinct. However, since there is no matter in immaterial things, that which does the determining and what is determined are the same thing, namely the form, even though we can consider this form in different ways. Hence, in one way we can consider the form as providing the genus, but we can consider it in another manner as providing the difference, though these are but two aspects of one and the same thing.

In this light, it is important to recognize that the comparison of the genus-species relation to the matter-form relation is analogical in nature. This is obvious as the latter distinction is real in character, while the former is merely conceptual.<sup>38</sup> Further, the nature—for example, the humanity—is a formal part of a thing, whereas genus, species, and difference terms each signify in the mode of a whole. As Aquinas argues:

Genus is not compared to difference as matter is to form in the sense that the substance of the genus remains one in number when the difference is removed; just as the substance of matter remains the same in number when the form is removed. For genus and difference are not parts of the species: otherwise they would not be predicated of the species. But just as the species signifies a whole, i.e., a composite of matter and form in material things, so the difference signifies a whole, and likewise the genus. But a genus term denotes a whole because it is like matter; but, the difference term denotes a whole because it is like form; and a species term denotes a whole because it is like both matter and form together. Just as in a man the sensitive nature is related materially to the intellective nature, for that which has a sensitive nature is called “an animal,” but one who has an intellective nature is called “rational,” but what has both is called “a man.” Thus, the same whole is designated by all three of these terms, but not from the same characteristic. Hence it is clear that, since there is no difference unless it designates

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<sup>38</sup> *ST I*, q. 3, a. 5 c. “Species constituitur ex genere et differentia. Semper autem id a quo sumitur differentia constituens speciem, se habet ad illud unde sumitur genus, sicut actus ad potentiam. Animal enim sumitur a natura sensitiva per modum concretionis; hoc enim dicitur animal, quod naturam sensitivam habet, rationale vero sumitur a natura intellectiva, quia rationale est quod naturam intellectivam habet, intellectivum autem comparatur ad sensitivum, sicut actus ad potentiam. Et similiter manifestum est in aliis.” Also see *ST I*, q. 50, a. 4 ad 1; *I*, q. 85, a. 3 ad 4; and *I*, q. 85, a.5 ad 3.

a genus, having removed the difference, the substance of the genus cannot remain the same. The same animality would not remain if there were another soul constituting the animal.<sup>39</sup>

Difference terms and species terms signify in the manner of a whole. This is why they can be predicated of a substance; for example, "Peter is rational" or "Peter is a man." Yet, these terms signify the same reality, though in different ways. Nevertheless, there is a causal aspect at work here insofar as the difference constitutes a thing in some species and the species determines the thing to some particular grade of being.

Further, all the grades of perfection must be ordered to some one principle. In material substances all the different grades which cause distinct species are ordered to matter as their first principle. In immaterial sub-

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<sup>39</sup> *ST I-II*, q. 67, a. 5 c. "Non enim comparatur genus ad differentiam sicut materia ad formam, ut remaneat substantia generis eadem numero, differentia remota; sicut remanet eadem numero substantia materiae, remota forma. Genus enim et differentia non sunt partes speciei, alioquin non praedicarentur de specie. Sed sicut species significat totum, idest compositum ex materia et forma in rebus materialibus, ita differentia significat totum, et similiter genus, sed genus denominat totum ab eo quod est sicut materia; differentia vero ab eo quod est sicut forma; species vero ab utroque. Sicut in homine sensitiva natura materialiter se habet ad intellectivam, animal autem dicitur quod habet naturam sensitivam; rationale quod habet intellectivam; homo vero quod habet utrumque. Et sic idem totum significatur per haec tria, sed non ab eodem. Unde patet quod, cum differentia non sit nisi designativa generis, remota differentia, non potest substantia generis eadem remanere, non enim remanet eadem animalitas, si sit alia anima constituens animal." Also see *In II Sent.*, d. 3, q. 1, a. 5 c. "Sed hoc differenter contingit in substantiis compositis et simplicibus: quia in compositis possibilitas est ex parte materiae, sed complementum est ex parte formae; et ideo ex parte materiae sumitur genus, et ex parte formae differentia: non autem ita quod materia sit genus, aut forma differentia, cum utrumque sit pars, et neutrum praedicetur; sed quia materia est materia totius, non solum formae; et forma perfectio totius, non solum materiae; ideo totum potest assignari ex materia et forma et ex utroque. Nomen autem designans totum ex materia, est nomen generis; et nomen designans totum ex forma, est nomen differentiae; et nomen designans totum ex utroque, est nomen speciei: et hoc patet si consideretur quomodo corpus est genus animati corporis, et animatum differentia: semper enim invenitur genus sumptum ab eo quod materiale est, et differentia ab eo quod est formale: et inde est quod differentia determinat genus sicut forma materiam. In simplicibus autem naturis non sumitur genus et differentia ab aliquibus partibus, eo quod complementum in eis et possibilitas non fundatur super diversas partes quidditatis, sed super illud simplex: quod quidem habet possibilitatem secundum quod de se non habet *esse*, et complementum prout est quaedam similitudo divini *esse*, secundum hoc quod appropinquabilis est magis et minus ad participandum divinum *esse*; et ideo quot sunt gradus complementi, tot sunt differentiae specificae."



stances, however, the order of different species is established by comparison to God, the most perfect being.<sup>40</sup> Yet, the fact that there is an order to one principle in each case does nothing to account for the *distance* of each species from that principle. Rather, this is determined by the nature of the thing, which is brought about through its specific difference.

Accordingly, whether material or immaterial beings are under consideration, it is the nature, in the sense we are discussing, which constitutes something as a member of a species, thereby establishing it in a "special grade of beings." This is discussed most fully in the context of Aquinas's rejection of the doctrine of the plurality of substantial forms. The claim that there are a plurality of substantial forms in individual things was developed from Aristotle's distinction between the vegetative soul, the animative soul, and the intellective soul. Many medievals argued that since the higher forms of life had all the perfections of the lower (i.e., a man has intellect, but also the motion proper to animal life and the nutritive aspects of plant life), they must have both the higher and lower substantial forms. This meant that each level of perfection required its own substantial form. Thus, a man has not only an intellectual soul, but also an animative and vegetative soul as well.

Aquinas, to the contrary, argued that in each case the highest form was sufficient to account for the operations of the lower perfections. Thus, the rational soul accounts for a man's being and living as well as his thought and there is no need to posit additional substantial forms to allow for these. St. Thomas argues that if form is a principle of a thing's act of being and a thing's unity follows upon its being, then there can only be one substantial form in any substance. If there were more than one substantial form, it would follow that there is more than one act of being and, thus, more than one substance.<sup>41</sup> This entails that the higher form is not

<sup>40</sup> Edward P. Mahoney, "Metaphysical Foundations of the Hierarchy of Being According to Some Late-Medieval Philosophers," in *Philosophies of Existence, Ancient and Medieval*, ed. Parviz Morewedge (New York, 1982), 170. Cf. *Q.D. De spiritualibus creaturis*, q. 1, a.1 c., ad 8, and *Q.D. De anima*, q. 7, c., ad 5. The editions used here are: Thomae de Aquino, *Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P.M. edita*, t. 24/2: *Quaestio disputata de spiritualibus creaturis*, ed. J. Cos (Rome-Paris: Commissio Leonina-Éditions Du Cerf, 2000), and Thomae de Aquino, *Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P.M. edita*, t. 24/1: *Quaestiones disputatae de anima*, ed. B. C. Bazan (Rome-Paris: Commissio Leonina-Éditions Du Cerf, 1996). Mahoney does a good job of establishing the importance of degrees being ordered to some one principle (cf. Mahoney, 224–25, n. 39). Unfortunately, he makes no mention of the importance of the nature or specific difference in establishing a species's distance from that principle.

<sup>41</sup> Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 333. Wippel provides a thorough and penetrating account of Aquinas's position on the unity of substantial form on pp. 327–51.

merely added on to the lower one, but exercises the functions of the lower form in accordance with its own nature. It follows from this that form, as a principle of being, is what establishes a substance's place within the hierarchy of being. This doctrine is clearly presented by Aquinas in the case of the order found in material things:

Diverse grades of perfection are seen in material things, viz. being, living, sensing and understanding. But always the one added to the prior one is more perfect. Therefore, the form which gives only the first grade of perfection to matter is most imperfect and the second and the third and so on, is most perfect; and yet it is immediately [united] to matter.<sup>42</sup>

Here again it is the form that gives the grade or degree of perfection to a thing that is proper to its species, be it inanimate, animate, or intelligent. Thus, in focusing on the role of the specific difference, Aquinas is also pointing to the importance of a metaphysical account of nature or form and of hierarchy in the account of the hypostatic union.

A final point made in St. Thomas's commentary on this passage is noteworthy. This is the fact that nature in the present sense is said to have a universal character. Commenting on this aspect, Aristotle had said, "Metaphorically speaking every substance in general is called nature because of the form or species, for the nature of a thing is a kind of substance."<sup>43</sup> It is significant that Aristotle views the application of the term "nature" to all *ousia* as a metaphor. Yet, as Lawrence Dewan has pointed out, this designation does not have the derogatory implications of its current usage. Elsewhere Aquinas seems to interpret similar cases, such as the application of *lux* to spiritual things, as metaphorical *only* when the term's use is considered in relation to its first imposition, and not with respect to the way in which it has been subsequently used.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *ST I*, q. 76, a. 4, ad 3. "Ad tertium dicendum quod in materia considerantur diversi gradus perfectionis, sicut *esse*, vivere, sentire et intelligere. Semper autem secundum superveniens priori, perfectius est. Forma ergo quae dat solum primum gradum perfectionis materiae, est imperfectissima: sed forma quae dat primum et secundum, et tertium, et sic deinceps, est perfectissima; et tamen materiae immediata." Also see *ST I*, q. 76, a. 5, ad 3. Such passages are not isolated incidents in Aquinas's thought. In fact, they are characteristic of his entire approach to the relation between form and being, an approach which Lawrence Dewan, OP, has aptly characterized, with reference to Aquinas's proof for the existence of God, as "Fourth Way metaphysics."

<sup>43</sup> *Metaphysics*, 1015a11–13. Cf. *In Metaphys.* 5, 5, 823.

<sup>44</sup> Lawrence Dewan, OP, "Nature as a Metaphysical Object," an unpublished paper presented at The Thomistic Institute, University of Notre Dame, 2001, p. 1 of typescript. The example of *lux* is found at *ST I*, q. 67, a. 1. On the difference between

Accordingly, on this view, “metaphor” simply indicates the use of a term in relation to its etymological development.

Aquinas explains that the term “nature” has this metaphorical use because it can be used to denote the species:

According to a kind of metaphorical and extended use of the term, every substance is called nature; for the nature which we called the term of generation is a certain substance. Thus every substance is similar to what we call nature. Boethius also sets out this sense. *But, it is by reason of this sense that the term nature is distinguished from other common terms. For it is common just as substance also is.*<sup>45</sup>

The universality of nature in this sense is important to recognize, as it highlights nature’s properly *metaphysical* character. Aquinas emphasizes this point in the opening of the present text when he asks why a discussion of nature is included in a metaphysical treatise, when it seems to pertain to the philosophy of nature instead. His answer is, of course, that in one of its senses nature is predicated of every substance and, consequently, it is a fitting object for properly metaphysical inquiry. This is significant, again, because it is the sense of nature which he identifies as relevant to the Incarnation in which this metaphysical dimension is at work.

In summary, Aquinas’s commentary on the *Metaphysics* offers us two valuable insights into the term “nature” as it is applied to questions concerning the Incarnation. First, and most importantly, he indicates that the sense of nature that is at work in discussions of the Incarnation has been understood by Boethius and Aristotle in the same way. This shows that in Aquinas’s view the concept of nature has its origins in Aristotle and that he does not, at least consciously, shift its sense in explaining the mystery of the Incarnation. Second, the sense of nature in question has a properly metaphysical character. In this sense it extends to all beings as such.

### **Clarifications: The *De Ente et Essentia***

Before turning to Aquinas’s application of “nature” to the Incarnation, it is important to examine the relation of the concept of “nature” to other

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things said metaphorically and properly cf. *ST* I, q. 13, a. 3, ad 1 and ad 3. Cf. Ralph McInerny, *Studies in Analogy* (The Hague, 1968), 39–44, 82, 84.

<sup>45</sup> *In Metaphys.* 5, 5, 823. “Et ex hoc secundum quamdam metaphoram et nominis extensionem omnis substantia dicitur natura; quia natura quam diximus quae est generationis terminus, substantia quaedam est. Et ita cum eo quod natura dicitur, omnis substantia similitudinem habet. Et hunc modum etiam ponit Boetius. Ratione autem istius modi distinguitur hoc nomen natura inter nomina communia. Sic enim commune est sicut et substantia.”

terms that seem to pick out the formal aspect of a thing. Aquinas's most thorough account of these occurs in his early work *De Ente et Essentia*. The text, however, raises some problems in light of the account provided above. First, the *De Ente* seems to contradict the *Metaphysics Commentary* by holding that the metaphysical sense of nature is not to be understood in terms of the specific difference (i.e., B4), but rather in the sense of whatever can be conceived by the intellect (i.e. B1). Second, the *De Ente* appears to be inconsistent with the *Summa's* presentation of the relation between nature and the related concepts of essence, quiddity, form, among others. Once each of these problems is resolved, it will be useful to introduce a brief account of Aquinas's understanding of the ontology of nature, as this will be an issue that comes up at several points in the sections that follow.

Aquinas begins the *De Ente* by distinguishing between *ens* in the sense of a being divided by the ten categories and *ens* as it signifies the truth of propositions. He then turns to the meaning of the term *essentia*. Essence is derived from the meaning of *ens* in the first sense (i.e., as divided by the ten categories). St. Thomas then argues that this entails that "it is necessary that essence signify something common to all natures, through which diverse beings are placed in different genera and species, just as humanity is the essence of a man, and so on concerning other things."<sup>46</sup>

This clearly points to the definitional character of essence and the role of the essence in determining the genus and species of a thing. Nevertheless, while St. Thomas immediately makes these connections explicit, his method of doing so appears to be somewhat confused in comparison with the approach he takes much later in the *Commentary on the Metaphysics*:

Since that which establishes a thing in its own genus or species is what we signify through the definition indicating what the thing is, from there the term "essence" was changed by philosophers to the term quiddity, and this is what the Philosopher, in book 7 of the *Metaphysics*, frequently calls "what something was to be," that is, that which makes a thing to be what it is. It is also called form, insofar as the perfection or determination of each thing is signified through its form, as Avicenna says in book 2 of his *Metaphysics*. This is also understood by another term, "nature," taking nature in the first of the four senses which Boethius assigns in the book Concerning the Two Natures. Namely, insofar as anything is called a nature which can be understood by the intellect in any

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<sup>46</sup> *De Ente et Essentia*, I, ll., 22–25. "Oportet ut essentia significet aliquid commune omnibus naturis, per quas diuersa entia in diuersis generibus, et speciebus collocantur, sicut humanitas est essentia hominis, et sic de aliis."

way. For a thing is intelligible only through its own definition and essence: and thus the Philosopher also, in book 5 of the *Metaphysics*, says that every substance is a nature.<sup>47</sup>

Aquinas's identification of Boethius's definition of nature B1 with Aristotle's claim that there is a sense in which every substance is a nature is peculiar insofar as it appears to contradict what he says in the *Metaphysics Commentary*, where he identifies Aristotle's universal sense of nature with B4. Yet, in the *De Ente* passage quoted above, after referring to B1 Aquinas immediately returns to B4: "For a thing is intelligible only through its own definition and essence: and thus the Philosopher also, in book 5 of the *Metaphysics*, says that every substance is a nature." Hence, Aquinas's approach is to tie together the issue of intelligibility which is predominant in B1 with the emphasis in B4 upon the fact that a nature is an ontological correlate to the definition of a thing. In the final analysis, although the *De Ente* is less clear than the *Commentary on the Metaphysics*, there is no reason to think that the two accounts are incompatible.

In fact, the *De Ente* treatment goes on to articulate the unique character of nature in contrast to quiddity and essence in a way that refocuses the discussion upon the properly metaphysical aspect of the issue:

Now the term "nature," taken in this way, seems to signify the essence of a thing insofar as it has an order and an ordination to the thing's own operation, for no thing lacks its own operation. But, the term "quiddity" is taken from what is signified by the definition: but "essence" is used insofar as through it and in it a thing has being (*esse*).<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> *De Ente et Essentia*, I, ll. 27–45. "Et quia illud per quod *res* constituitur in proprio genere uel specie est hoc quod significatur per diffinitionem indicantem quid est *res*, inde est quod nomen essentie a philosophis in nomen quiditatis mutatur; et hoc est etiam quod Philosophus frequenter nominat quod quid erat *esse*, id est hoc per quod aliquid habet *esse* quid. Dicitur etiam forma, secundum quod per formam significatur certitudo uniuscuiusque rei, ut dicit Auicenna in II Methaphisice sue. Hoc etiam alio nomine natura dicitur, accipiendo naturam secundum primum modum illorum quatuor quod Boetius in libro De duabus naturis assignat: secundum scilicet quod natura dicitur omne illud quod intellectu quoquo modo capi potest, non enim *res* est intelligibilis nisi per diffinitionem et essentiam suam; et sic etiam Philosophus dicit in V Methaphisice quod omnis substantia est natura."

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*: "Tamen nomen nature hoc modo sumpte uidetur significare essentiam rei secundum quod habet ordinem ad propriam operationem rei, cum nulla *res* propria operatione destituatur; quiditatis uero nomen sumitur ex hoc quod per diffinitionem significatur. Sed essentia dicitur secundum quod per eam et in ea ens habet *esse*."

Yet, if this text helps solve this difficulty, it raises a further one, as the distinction it draws between nature and essence seems to be in conflict with St. Thomas's explicit identification of these terms in his discussion of nature in the *Summa theologiae* III, q. 2, a. 1. In that text he states that Boethius said that, "Nature is the specific difference informing each and every thing, which, of course, completes the definition of the species. Therefore, in this way we now speak of nature, insofar as nature signifies the essence, or that which is, or the quiddity of the species." The distinctions made in the *De Ente*, however, point to different aspects of the same thing, so there is no real contradiction.<sup>49</sup>

Moreover, these distinctions are in keeping with other accounts in the *Summa theologiae*. For example, in the context of asking whether the three divine Persons are of one essence, an objector argues that since the divine nature and the divine essence are the same, it suffices to say that the three Persons are of one nature. Aquinas responds to this by stating:

Since nature designates the principle of an act, but essence is taken from being, things can be said to be of one nature which agree in some act, just as all things giving heat, but things can only be said to be of one essence which have one being (*esse*). Thus, the divine unity is better expressed by saying that the three persons are of one essence, than if it were said that they are of one nature.<sup>50</sup>

His concern seems to be that asserting a oneness of nature would be ambiguous, for it could be misinterpreted as meaning that the Divine Persons only agree in their acts. In order to emphasize that the three Persons of the Trinity also agree in their *esse*, we ought to say that they have one essence, rather than saying that they have one nature.

In this respect it is important to note that Aquinas does not have a rigidly fixed philosophical vocabulary. His tendency to identify nature, essence, quiddity, in one context only to distinguish them in another is easier to understand once one recognizes the degree to which he relies upon etymological factors in making these distinctions. Nature is used to denote a principle of action and operation due to the connotations of

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<sup>49</sup> For a handy list of the contrasts between the terms essence, form, quiddity, and nature, see Roy J. Deferrari, *A Latin-English Dictionary of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1960), 358.

<sup>50</sup> *ST* I, q. 39, a. 2, ad 3. "Quia natura designat principium actus, essentia vero ab essendo dicitur, possunt dici aliqua unius naturae, quae conveniunt in aliquo actu, sicut omnia calefacientia: sed unius essentiae dici non possunt, nisi quorum est unum esse. Et ideo magis exprimitur unitas divina per hoc quod dicitur quod tres Personae sunt unius essentiae, quam si diceretur quod sunt unius naturae."

the term that arise from the fact that its original imposition was to denote the generation of living things. The term “essence,” however, is *taken from* being (*essendo*).<sup>51</sup> Hence, problems of the kind raised above with respect to the Trinity arise because of the implications usually associated with the different terms due to their respective etymological origins. This merely concerns the suitability of each term in making the doctrine comprehensible; that is to say that for Aquinas this is a matter of pedagogy, not doctrine.

Further, these kinds of distinctions were entirely traditional. The distinction between essence and nature, for example, is put even more forcefully in redaction L of Alexander of Hales's *Glossa*. Alexander is replying to the claim that the two natures in Christ make him two. In response he argues:

There are two natures in Christ, yet it does not follow that there are two essences, nor is there one essence, because an essence is that by which a thing is, but a nature is that which becomes; and, thus, there is no essence in Christ. For [in him] man is God and God is man, and thus he is one being.<sup>52</sup>

Here we find Alexander arguing that Christ assumed a nature, but not an essence. He seems to be trying to avoid positing two essences in Christ, as this would entail that Christ is two beings.<sup>53</sup> Consequently, Alexander goes much further than Aquinas ever does, denying that the term essence can be properly applied to Christ at all! A similar position, very compatible with Aquinas's own, is taken in the *Summa theologica* attributed to Alexander. In this text a similar objection is solved by noting that nature and essence are the same in reality, but differ in *ratio*; nature refers to things in relation to a process of becoming, while essence refers to things with respect to their being.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>51</sup> *ST* I, q. 39, a. 2, ad 3 and I, q. 29, a. 1, ad 4.

<sup>52</sup> Alexander of Hales, *Glossa in Quatuor Libros Sententiarum Petri Lombardi*, 4 vols. (Quaracchi, Florence: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1951–57), III, 6, 25d (L). “Ad secundum dicendum quod duae naturae sunt in Christo; non tamen sequitur quod duae essentiae; nec una, quia essentia est quo *res* est, natura autem ut quae fit; et non est in Christo essentia. Est enim homo Deus et Deus homo, et ideo unus ens.”

<sup>53</sup> Walter H. Principe, CSB, *Alexander of Hales' Theology of the Hypostatic Union* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1967), 139.

<sup>54</sup> Ps. Alexandri de Hales, *Summa Theologica*, Vol. IV (Quaracchi: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1948), III, tract. 1, q. 4, tit. 1, d. 2, cap. 1.2, sol. “Ad quod dicendum quod, quamvis sint idem re natura et essentia, tamen differunt ratione. Natura enim respicit rem in fieri, essentia vero respicit rem secundum *esse*. Quia ergo non

Upon closer consideration, there is no need to presume that there is any inconsistency in Aquinas's tendency to distinguish these terms in one place only to identify them in another. Like most medieval authors, St. Thomas rarely offers systematic expositions of his terminology. Rather, he articulates the various senses of his terms only when forced to do so by the dynamic of this or that specific problem. Thus, we find him emphasizing distinctions in one context that he ignores in another. This need not entail any inconsistency, for it may simply be the result of those distinctions being important to solve one problem, but not another. Moreover, the terms in question—that is, form, nature, quiddity, and so on—each have a plurality of senses that include analogous uses. The various senses of nature articulated by Aristotle and Boethius illustrate this point clearly. Consequently, it is in no way unusual that the sense of these terms will agree in some uses but differ in others.

### **Against a Union in Nature**

Having set out St. Thomas's definition of nature and specified the sense in question here, it can now be shown how this is applied to his argument that the union could not take place in the nature. After setting out the problem Aquinas is trying to resolve, I will provide an account of the central texts, making relevant comparisons where needed. It is important to note that I intend to examine how these texts reveal Aquinas's use of philosophy within theological practice itself. In order to facilitate this, I will conclude with a summary highlighting the different ways in which properly philosophical notions and methods are applied to this issue.

### *The Problem of the Mode of Union*

Aquinas's most direct application of his metaphysical account of nature to Christology occurs in his answer to the problem of the mode through which Christ's humanity and divinity are united. What is at stake here is nothing less than the unity of Christ as an individual and the fact that he is both man and God. The difficulty that presents itself is how to reconcile the tension implicit in the Chalcedonian decree outlined in the introduction. It will be recalled that Chalcedon requires two things. First, the integrity of the two natures has to be respected. This is to say that whatever account of the Incarnation we offer, Christ must be both truly human and truly divine. Second, the unity of the two natures has to be

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fruit in *esse res* assumpta ante assumptionem ideo non debet concedi 'assumpsit humanam essentiam,' sed debet concedi 'assumpsit humanam naturam,' quia assumebatur *res*, non quae erat, sed quae fiebat."



taken into account. This means that there must be some one thing or person that has both of these natures.

Medieval theologians generally began by presuming that there was some sort of union between the humanity and divinity in Christ and that the real question was to determine whether this union took place in the nature or in the person. St. Thomas's approach to the issue of the mode of union highlights this fact. In his *Commentary on the Sentences* he treats the problem in terms of three distinct aspects: (1) the mode of union itself; (2) the mode of union on the part of the one assuming; and (3) the mode of union on the part of the thing assumed.<sup>55</sup> This threefold structure is retained in the *Summa theologiae*.<sup>56</sup> While this division of the Lombard's text was not original with Aquinas, it was by no means followed by all commentators on the *Sentences*. St. Bonaventure, for example, comments upon Peter Lombard's text simply in terms of the one assuming and the thing assumed, omitting entirely the separate consideration of the mode of union itself.

Aquinas routinely uses the etymological considerations we discussed in the previous section to introduce his arguments for the claim that the hypostatic union did not occur in the divine nature.<sup>57</sup> Although the treatment in the *Summa theologiae* III, q. 2, a. 1 does not mention any specific author as holding the view that the union occurred in the nature rather than the person, parallel texts make it clear that St. Thomas intends his argument to be a refutation of Eutyches and the Monophysites. On that view, the Incarnation took place from (ex) two natures, but not in two natures. Accordingly, the the human and divine natures are both transformed through the union into some *tertium quid*.<sup>58</sup>

As we saw in the previous section, Aquinas identifies the specific difference as the sense of nature germane to the Incarnation. It should be noted that this view was not original. It was, in fact, pointed out by Boethius himself that Christological controversies made use of the term "nature" in this sense: "Thus although nature is predicated or defined in so many ways, both Catholics and Nestorius hold that there are in Christ two natures according to our last definition, but the same differences

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<sup>55</sup> *In III Sent.*, d. 5 prolog.

<sup>56</sup> *ST* III, q. 2 prolog.

<sup>57</sup> This issue and Aquinas's arguments will be discussed in detail below.

<sup>58</sup> On the position of Eutyches and the circumstances leading up to his condemnation cf. Aloys Grillmeier, SJ, *Christ in the Christian Tradition*, 2nd edition, trans. John Bowden, vol. 1 (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), 523–26. It is also worth noting that St. Thomas's understanding of Eutyches's position seems to be relatively accurate, although this is not overly important given our present purpose.

cannot apply to God and man.”<sup>59</sup> Consequently, this view became commonplace in medieval Christology.<sup>60</sup>

### *The Structure and Method of Aquinas’s Approach*

In the *Summa theologiae* article, the shift from the account of nature to the modes of union is very rapid.<sup>61</sup> While this text indicates that the definition of nature discussed in the previous section is central to what follows, it does not provide much guidance in determining St. Thomas’s method.

Fortunately, the *Summa contra Gentiles* provides a clearer statement of Aquinas’s general approach to this issue. In this work St. Thomas follows a more historical order than he does in the *Summa theologiae*. After having set out the position of Eutyches, the condemnation of Chalcedon and the meaning of nature, he states:

If, therefore, as Eutyches posited, the human and the divine nature were two before the union, but one nature was produced in a union from them, *it is necessary that this be in one of the ways according to which one thing is apt to be brought about from many things.*<sup>62</sup>

In this passage St. Thomas’s method is suggested. If one nature were brought about through a union of the human and divine natures, then this had to occur in one of the ways in which many things can be made one. This, of course, presumes that we can list fully the different ways in which this can take place, and this is what Aquinas proceeds to do. In fact, this is the strategy he follows in all treatments of this issue throughout his career.

*From a methodological perspective, the important point to be made is that Thomas assumes that the first thing to do in discussing this theological problem is to establish the relevant metaphysical principles by seeking out a relevant natural analogue.* To this end, he provides a catalogue of the various possibilities

<sup>59</sup> *Contra Eutychen*, I, l.60 ff. “Cum igitur tot modis vel dicatur vel definiatur natura, tam catholici quam Nestorius secundum ultimam definitionem duas in Christo naturas esse constituent; neque enim easdem in deum atque hominem differentias convenire.”

<sup>60</sup> E.g. S. Albertus Magnus, *De Incarnatione*, ed. Ignatius Backes (Aschendorff: Monasterii Westfalorum, 1958), tr. 3, q.3, a. 4 sol. It is not, however, universally accepted. Cf. Robert Kilwardby, *Quaestiones in librum tertium Sententiarum*, Teil 1, ed. Elisabeth Gössmann (München: Verlag der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaft, 1982), III, d. 5.

<sup>61</sup> *ST III*, q. 2, a. 1 c. It is simply introduced by the statement: “Hoc autem modo accipiendo naturam, impossibile est unionem Verbi incarnati esse factam in natura.”

<sup>62</sup> *SCG*, III, 35, 3730. “Si igitur, ut Eutyches posuit, humana natura et divina, fuerunt duae ante unionem, sed ex eis in unione conflata est una natura, oportet hoc esse aliquo modorum secundum quos ex multis natum est unum fieri.”

for such an analogue in terms of the different kinds of natural unions found in experience. In this case, Aquinas determines that all possibilities for such an analogue are inappropriate. Nevertheless, his first move is to evaluate the possibilities for a natural analogue, and the fact that he moves from the lack of such an analogue for a union in the nature to the claim that the Incarnation cannot occur in that way points to the importance of philosophy within Thomas's account. This method is especially appropriate to the present case, since Christ's human nature *qua* nature is precisely the same as any other instance of a human nature.

Aquinas derives his catalogue of the different possibilities for a union of natures from Aristotle's *On Generation and Corruption*. Yet, in this work Aristotle has no intention of offering an exhaustive catalogue of the different modes of union. Rather, he is attempting to argue that Empedocles's atomistic notion of mixture as a juxtaposition of undivided, but not indivisible, parts is not a genuine account of mixture.<sup>63</sup> In the course of his argument Aristotle lists three possibilities that figure prominently in Aquinas's anti-Monophysite arguments. The first possibility is the atomistic account in which mixture is simply a *synthesis* or juxtaposition of undivided parts, as, for example, when a handful of barley and wheat are mixed together. According to Aristotle this is not a genuine mixture at all, because the constituent parts are not altered in any way.<sup>64</sup> A further alternative is a *mixis* which can be understood in terms of predominance. In this case, a smaller ingredient is corrupted by a greater one, as occurs when a few drops of wine are put in ten thousand gallons of water.<sup>65</sup> Finally, Aristotle's own alternative to the atomists is that there is a kind of *mixis* in which the ingredients cease to exist actually, but continue to exist potentially.<sup>66</sup> Although,

<sup>63</sup> A very useful account of Aristotle's arguments in their historical context can be found in Richard Sorabji, *Matter, Space and Motion* (London: Duckworth, 1988), 66–72.

<sup>64</sup> Aristotle, *On Generation and Corruption*, 327a35–b6 and 328a1–5.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 328a22–28; also *Sense and Sensibilia*, 446a7–10, and *Politics* 1262b17.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 327b22–31. Note *ST* I, q. 76, a.4, ad 4: "Et ideo dicendum est, secundum Philosophum in I De generat., quod formae elementorum manent in mixto non actu, sed virtute. Manent enim qualitates propriae elementorum, licet remissae, in quibus est virtus formarum elementarium. Et huiusmodi qualitas mixtionis est propria dispositio ad formam substantialem corporis mixti, puta formam lapidis, vel animae cuiuscumque." There is considerable controversy over the meaning Aristotle's claim that the original ingredients "remain in" a compound. Alan Code and Richard Sharvey hold that Aristotle does not have the philosophical resources to distinguish between a compound and a mere aggregate. Alan Code, "Potentiality in Aristotle's Science and Metaphysics," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 76 (1995): 405–18; Richard Sharvey, "Aristotle on Mixtures," *The Journal of Philosophy* 80 (1983): 439–57. James Bogden maintains that the elements undergo a substantial

Aristotle is notoriously unclear about what this might mean, he appears to suggest that it is a case in which at least some powers and qualities of the original ingredients remain, while the ingredients themselves do not. At very least he indicates that a *mixis* of this kind results in a *tertium quid*, which has a nature distinct from any of its original components. The typical example is the mixture of the four elements in bringing about a corporeal substance. Aquinas's own reading of these kinds of mixtures emphasizes the fact that the ingredients serve as extremes, while the resulting mixture is a mean between the original ingredients that is distinct from any of them.<sup>67</sup>

In his arguments against the Monophysites, Aquinas follows Aristotle's threefold account of mixture quite closely. Nevertheless, there is a significant development when we look at the way in which Aquinas specifically formulates the distinctions he makes. The chart below allows for a

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change. In this way they are numerically distinct from the elements in the compound. Neither the element nor the elemental qualities are actually present, though the qualities are present in some potential or virtual fashion. See Bogden, "Fire in the Belly: Aristotelian Elements, Organisms, and Chemical Compounds," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 76 (1995): 570–604. Mary Louise Gill's reading seems to agree with Aquinas's understanding of the text. However, she argues that Aristotle's claim that the elements are not present, but their powers entail that the compound is a bundle of contradictory qualities. See Gill, *Aristotle on Substance: The Paradox of Unity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989). Kit Fine responds that the elements in a compound are neither true substances nor true powers, but some other kind of form. See Fine, "The Problem of Mixture," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 76 (1995): 266–69.

<sup>67</sup> *De mixtione elementorum*, ll. 123 ff. The edition used here is: S. Thomae De Aquino, Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita, t. 43: De mixtione elementorum ad magistrum Philippum de Castro Caeli (Editori di San Tommaso, Roma, 1976), 131–57. On the importance of the doctrine of the mean in Aristotle's account of mixture cf. Gad Freudenthal, *Aristotle's Theory of Material Substance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 11–12. Note that the medieval accounts in light of this position of Aristotle were considerably more complicated. Aquinas's own view seems to have undergone some change on this point. In II Sentences he seems to endorse Avicenna's suggestion that the substantial forms of the original ingredients remain in a mixture. (*In II Sent.*, d. 12, q. 1, a. 4. Cf. Avicenna, *Sufficientia*, tr. 1, ch. 6 in *Avicene perhypateticis philosophi: ac medicorum facile primi opera in luce redacta: ac nuper quantum ars niti potuit per canonicos emendata. Logyca, Sufficientia, De celo mundo, De anima, Da animalibus, De intelligentijs, Alpharabius de intelligentijs, Philosophia prima* [Frankfurt am Main: Minerva, 1961 (1508)]). Yet, this is explicitly denied in IV Sentences and later texts. Cf. *In IV Sent.* d. 44, q. 1, a. 1, qc. 1, ad 4; *Super Boet. De trin.*, q. 4, a. 3, ad 6; Q. Q. I, a. 6, ad 3; Q. D. *De anima*, a. 9, ad 10. On Aquinas's development cf. Laura Landen, *Thomas Aquinas and the Dynamism of Natural Substances*, unpublished Ph.D. diss. (Catholic University of America, 1985); Steven Baldner, "St. Albert the Great and St. Thomas Aquinas on the Presence of Elements in Compounds," *Sapientia* 54 (1999): 41–57.

<i>Sentences</i>	<i>Summa contra Gentiles</i>	<i>Summa theologiae</i>
One nature results without the joining of one nature to another intervening.	By order alone.	Two things remain in perfect integrity.
One of the natures is changed into another.	By order and composition.	Something is made of many things perfect, but changed.
One nature is composed from two.	By a mixture.	A thing is constituted of things not mixed or changed but imperfect. <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> It should be noted that I have not included the treatment in the *Disputed Question Concerning the Nature of the Word Incarnate*. The divisions given in that work are fragmentary and do not parallel the categories in the works listed above; rather, they tend to fall within the sub-divisions of these different categories. This is partly a result of the fact that the relevant article of that work runs together issues which Aquinas is careful to treat separately elsewhere. The problem posed in *De Unione* a. 1, is “Whether this Union was brought about in the person or in the nature?” Elsewhere Aquinas devotes an article to the nature and the person separately. Further, Aquinas’s discussion in this article focuses more explicitly on the various Christological heresies and their condemnations than the other works. The summary nature of the discussion, its tendency to run together issues that are treated separately elsewhere and its relatively poor organization lead me to believe that the *Disputed Question* may well be an early work. Torrell, on the basis of the as yet unpublished findings of the Leonine Commission concerning the ancient catalogues, tells us that its authenticity can no longer be questioned. He dates it as a late work (April or May, 1272) due to the “connection” between the discussions of the unity Christ’s esse in a. 4 and *ST III*, q. 17, a. 2. In light of this relation Torrell says, “it is highly implausible that Thomas would have inserted this dispute in his teaching program, outside of any link with works underway or foreseen for the immediate future.” Consequently, he sees it as almost contemporaneous with the beginning of the *Tertia Pars*. The problem with this is that it seems unlikely that St. Thomas would change his elsewhere firm position that Christ has one esse in writing a preparatory work for the *Summa*, only to revert to his original position in that work itself. Reading the *De unione* as an early work mitigates this concern as it is more believable that it was written at a stage where his views were not yet fixed than to claim that he wavered on the issue during the writing of the *Summa*. This view also fits with the fact that a. 1, as we have said, seems to be less developed than the parallel discussions. Jean-Pierre Torrell, OP, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1: *The Person and His Work*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 206 and 336–37. The edition of the *De unione* used here is: S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Quaestiones disputatae*, t. 2: *De unione Verbi incarnate*, ed. M. Calcaterra and T.S. Centi, 10th ed. (Rome: Marietti, 1965), 417–35. In the *Sentences* Aquinas also discusses different forms of union in determining whether the Incarnation is possible. See *In III Sent.*, d.1, q.1, a.1 sol.

comparison of the different treatments of the ways in which many things can be made one as it is presented in Aquinas's works.

It is easy enough to recognize the influence of Aristotle's account of mixture in these divisions. Since the close parallel between the *Sentences Commentary* and the *Summa theologiae* is not found in the *Summa contra Gentiles*, I will deal with its account before proceeding to compare the other two works.

### **The Union of Natures in the *Summa contra Gentiles***

We have already seen that St. Thomas introduces the *Summa contra Gentiles* discussion with an account of his method. He is going to explain the ways in which one thing can come about from many, in order to show that none of them can apply to the Incarnation. The first way in which many things may become one is through order alone, as when a city comes about from many houses or an army from many soldiers.

The second way is by order and composition, as when a house results from its parts and its walls. Aquinas argues that neither of these is adequate to provide a *unitas naturae*, because a thing whose form is merely order or juxtaposition is not a natural thing. Consequently, one could not say that there was one nature as a result of the Incarnation, if the change came about in either of these ways.<sup>68</sup>

The third manner in which many things can become one is by way of a mixture. This notion had been applied by Eutyches to Christology.<sup>69</sup> St. Thomas considers this possibility in all his texts on this problem and the *Summa contra Gentiles* is his most detailed examination of it. Here Aquinas rejects its applicability to the Incarnation on the basis of three distinct arguments. The first reason is that there must be some common matter amongst things that are mixed and they must be capable of acting upon one another. This is impossible given the immateriality of the divine nature and the fact that it cannot be acted upon.<sup>70</sup>

Aquinas's second argument follows from the principle that there cannot be a mixture between things in which one greatly exceeds the other. This is derived from Aristotle's discussion of change in *De generatione et corruptione*. St. Thomas borrows Aristotle's example that to place one measure of wine in a thousand measures of water does not constitute a mixture, rather the wine would be destroyed. Similarly, Thomas notes, wood that is brought into contact with fire does not constitute a mixture, since the wood is

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<sup>68</sup> SCG, III, 35, 3728.

<sup>69</sup> Boethius, *Contra Eutychen*, ch. 7.

<sup>70</sup> SCG, III, 35, 3728.

destroyed by the superior power of the fire.<sup>71</sup> This example nicely illustrates Aristotle's claim that, "when there is a certain equilibrium between their 'powers of action,' then each of them changes out of its own nature toward the dominant: yet neither becomes the other, but both become an intermediate with properties common to both."<sup>72</sup> Returning to the example, we can see how bringing wood into fire does not, ultimately, result in either wood or fire, but ashes since, as the passage from Aristotle just cited states, "both elements change out of their own nature." The water and wine example is similar to the fire and wood example insofar as neither provide instances of a genuine mixture; in both cases one element is destroyed by the superior quantity or power of the other element. Likewise in the case of the hypostatic union, since there is so great a difference between the human and divine natures, no mixture of the two is possible.

Finally, St. Thomas notes that if there were a mixture of the two natures in Christ neither nature would remain. This would entail that after the Incarnation, Christ would be neither human nor divine, but some third nature, which is contrary to the faith.<sup>73</sup>

On the basis of these arguments Aquinas rejects the position of Eutyches and notes that the only other ways to assert that the two natures become one in the union is to fall into either the heresy of the Manicheans, by claiming that what seems human in Christ is just a fantasy, or that of Apollinaris, by saying that the divine nature was converted into the human. In this passage these options are simply dismissed as having been refuted elsewhere in the text.<sup>74</sup> Finally, St. Thomas concludes by supplying a series of further considerations against the possibility of the two natures becoming one in the Incarnation. These points generally fall within the divisions set out in the *Sentences* and the *Summa theologiae*, so I will omit extended discussion of them here. Instead, I will turn to a direct comparison of the arguments from these other two texts.

### **The Union of Natures in the *Sentences Commentary* and the *Summa theologiae***

The problem under consideration is presented slightly differently in the two works under consideration. In the *Sentences Commentary*, Aquinas

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 3732.

<sup>72</sup> Aristotle, *De generatione et corruptione*, 328a25–30. The image of "power" is clearly closer to the issue of the Incarnation than the mixture of physical quantity. This is clarified in Thomas's conclusion that the divine nature infinitely excels the human, because the divine *power* is infinite.

<sup>73</sup> SCG, III, 35, 3732.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

asks “whether there is one nature in Christ or many?”<sup>75</sup> whereas in the *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas assumes that there is a plurality of natures and proceeds to show that the Incarnation cannot be a union in these natures.

Given the question posed in the *Sentences Commentary*, Aquinas begins treating this problem by showing that the Incarnation cannot be a union of two natures resulting in one nature. The question itself presents two possible results of a natural union (i.e., there would be either one nature in Christ or many). Thomas’s procedure is, therefore, to show that neither of these modes of union is applicable to the Incarnation. If the first were the case, it would require that the union result in either one of the natures alone or some other nature composed from both. He notes that the result of the union could be one nature in only two different ways. The first is “with no joining of one nature to another intervening.” This could mean that either the human nature or the divine nature is present as a result of the union, but not both. But, if there were only the divine nature, the Incarnation would not involve anything new and it would, therefore, amount to nothing. However, if there were only the human nature, Christ would not be different from other men and, again, there would not really be an “Incarnation” in any meaningful sense.<sup>76</sup>

In the second way, one nature would “pass over” into the other. This is impossible, given the immateriality of the divine nature and the fact that it does not share a human nature in matter. If the divine nature passed over into the human nature, the immutability of the divine nature would be destroyed, while conversely, if the human were changed into the divine, the truth of the passion and of Christ’s physical acts would be undermined.<sup>77</sup>

The account above has clear parallels with Aquinas’s second series of arguments against the possibility of a mixture of natures in the *Summa contra Gentiles*. However, it is set out more systematically here. The divisions can be viewed as follows:

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<sup>75</sup> *In III Sent.*, d. 5, q. 1, a. 2c. “Relictis ergo omnibus aliis significationibus naturae, secundum hanc tantum significationem quaeritur, utrum in Christo sit una natura vel plures.”

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* “Si altera earum tantum, hoc erit dupliciter. Uno modo nulla adjunctione interveniente unius ad alteram; et sic si sit divina tantum, nihil novum accidit in hoc quod Verbum caro factum est, et incarnatio nihil est. Si vero sit humana tantum, non differt Christus ab aliis hominibus, et perit incarnatio.”

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* “Alio modo altera naturarum transeunte in alteram; quod non potest esse: quia quae non communicant in materia, non possunt in invicem transire; divina autem natura penitus est immaterialis, nedum ut communicet humanae in materia. Praeterea si divina natura transiret in humanam, tolleretur simplicitas et immutabilitas divinae naturae; si vero humana verteretur in divinam, tolleretur veritas passionis, et omnium quae corporaliter operatus est Christus.”



If the union results in one nature alone this is either:

- a. by the joining of one nature to the other and the result would be:
  - i. Divine nature only; or
  - ii. Human nature only.

Alternatively:

- b. by one nature passing over to the other and, thus, either:
  - i. Divine nature becomes human; or
  - ii. Human nature becomes divine.

None of this appears in the discussion of this question in the *Summa theologiae*, where it is assumed that the Incarnation must result in two natures. However, the second set of divisions in the *Sentences* does parallel the *Summa*, although the order is slightly different. The *Sentences* treatment can be represented as follows:

One nature composed from two:

- Sa. A third nature is composed from two without the originals remaining (e.g., mixture of elements); or
- Sb. from two natures remaining:
  - Sbi. by proportion (i.e., succession or contact); or
  - Sbii. According to formation (e.g., one man from soul and body).

The *Summa* article, on the other hand, argues that one thing can result from a union of two or more in one of three ways:

- ST1. from two complete things that remain in their perfection (e.g., nails and wood united in a house);
- ST2. from several things that are perfect, but changed (e.g., a mixture of elements); or
- ST3. from two imperfect things that are neither mixed or changed (e.g., the body and soul).

According to these divisions, Sa corresponds to ST2, while Sbi corresponds to ST1, and finally, Sbii corresponds to ST3. For convenience, I will compare the texts following the order of the *Sentences Commentary*, contrasting it with the *Summa* account at each step.

*Sa and ST2: The Incarnation as a mixture*

In the *Sentences Commentary* Aquinas considers the possibility that one nature may be composed from two. There are two ways in which this might be possible. First, a third nature could be composed from two natures that do not remain in the thing themselves after the union, as occurs in a mixture of the four material elements. Here we are back on the same ground covered in the *Summa contra Gentiles*. In the *Sentences* this position is rejected because it posits a divine nature that is material and changeable. This is argued on the basis of the principle that a mixture is only possible amongst things that share in matter and that can act upon each other.<sup>78</sup>

The *Sentences Commentary* is paralleled by the later text from the *Summa* where Aquinas considers the possibility of a natural union in which something comes about from things that are perfect but changed. Again the central example is a mixture of elements. Accordingly, if the Incarnation were brought about in this way, it would result in a kind of combination (*complexio*).

All criticisms of this view in the *Summa theologiae* rest upon the fact that the elements in a mixture are changed in some way. St. Thomas provides three arguments against this kind of union. First, the divine nature is immutable, so it cannot be changed into something else. Further, nothing else can be changed into it, as it cannot be generated. Second, the mixed thing that results from a mixture is not the same species as any of the original elements. This entails that if the Incarnation were a kind of mixture, Christ would be neither human nor divine, but some other nature resulting from the combination of these two. Third, natures that differ greatly cannot be mixed, for the species of one will be absorbed by the other, as a drop of water is absorbed in a flagon of wine. This is even more obvious in the case of the Incarnation as the divine nature infinitely exceeds the human nature. Thus, “there cannot be any mixture, but only the divine nature will remain.” Clearly, these considerations rule out the notion of “mixture” as applicable to the Incarnation.<sup>79</sup> Since these arguments have been discussed above, I will not discuss them further here.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. “Si autem esset una natura composita ex duabus, hoc posset *esse* dupliciter. Uno modo quia tertia natura componeretur ex duabus naturis non manentibus, sicut ex quatuor elementis componitur mixtum; et secundum hoc poneretur divina natura passibilis et materialis, quia mixtio non est nisi eorum quae communicant in materia, et nata sunt agere et pati ad invicem; et tolleretur fides confitens Christum *esse* verum Deum et verum hominem.”

<sup>79</sup> *ST* III, q. 2, a. 1 c. “Sed hoc non potest *esse*. Primo quidem quia natura divina est omnino immutabilis: ut in Prima Parte dictum est. Unde nec ipsa potest converti in aliud, cum sit incorruptibilis: nec aliud in ipsam cum ipsa sit ingenerabilis. Secundo, quia id quod est commixtum, nulli miscibilium est idem specie: differt

*Sbi and ST1: The Incarnation as commensuration*

Another possibility for a natural union is that something could be composed of two natures that remain in the thing after the union.<sup>80</sup> In the *Sentences* the possibility that two natures remain after the union is considered in two ways. The first is by commensuration. Here the two natures are said to become one either because there is an ordered succession of one after the other in time, as the various notes in a symphony are distinct sounds yet are one piece of music, or because there is a physical continuity between the two, as wood and nails make up a chair while retaining their own nature. However, if the Incarnation were a union by commensuration, it would entail that the divine nature is corporeal, since succession and contact are properties that belong only to physical things.

The first possibility considered in the *Summa theologiae* for a natural union is that one thing comes about out of two perfect (or complete) things remaining unchanged (*ex duobus perfectis integris remanentibus*). Aquinas explains that this kind of change can only come about through composition, order, or figure. Composition is illustrated by the example of many stones that can be brought together without any order to form a heap or pile. A house, however, is constructed from stones and beams when they are arranged in an order fashioned to some figure.<sup>81</sup>

The impossibility of this kind of union is proved by means of three arguments. The first refutation follows from the fact that none of the modes of union mentioned (i.e., composition, order, or figure) are substantial forms. Rather, they are all accidental. Consequently, if the union took place

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enim caro a quolibet elementorum specie. Et sic Christus nec esset eiusdem naturae cum Patre, nec cum matre. Tertio, quia ex his quae plurimum distant non potest fieri commixtio: solvitur enim species unius eorum, puta si quis guttam aquae amphorae vini apponat. Et secundum hoc, cum natura divina in infinitum excedat humanam, non potest esse mixtio, sed remanebit sola natura divina.”

<sup>80</sup> This consideration does not come up in the divisions of the *Summa contra Gentiles* set out above, though it is touched upon in the series of comments that follow the text we have examined.

<sup>81</sup> *ST III*, q. 2, a. 1 c. “Uno modo, ex duobus perfectis integris remanentibus. Quod quidem fieri non potest nisi in his quorum forma est compositio, vel ordo, vel figura: sicut ex multis lapidibus absque aliquo ordine adunatis per solam compositionem fit acervus; ex lapidibus autem et lignis secundum aliquem ordinem dispositis, et etiam ad aliquam figuram redactis, fit domus. Et secundum hoc, posuerunt aliqui unionem esse per modum confusionis, quae scilicet est sine ordine; vel commensurationis, quae est cum ordine.” Some, including Sergius Grammaticus, applied such illustrations to the Incarnation in arguing that the union occurred either without order, i.e., by a confusion of natures, or with order, i.e., by commensuration. On Sergius Grammaticus, the Marietti editors refer us to M. Jugie, “Eutyches et Eutychieanism” in *Dict. Théol. Cath.* V, 1605–606.

in this way, it could not be a per se union, but only an accidental one. Here we should note that Aquinas is deeply concerned to avoid saying that the assumed nature adds either a new substantial or a new accidental being to the Word.<sup>82</sup>

The second reason is that “unions of this kind do not make a thing one simply, but only in a certain respect; for they remain many things actually.”<sup>83</sup> When things are united by composition, order, or figure they remain what they were originally. The stones when placed in a pile, for example, individually remain stones; the bricks and beams that make up a house remain bricks and beams even after the construction of the building. While they can be said to become one thing in a certain respect, nevertheless they remain many considered absolutely.

Finally, a form which is brought about by composition, order, or figure is not a “nature,” but it is closer to a work of art. Aquinas’s example is the form of a house. This is a result of the art of the craftsman, rather than a nature.<sup>84</sup>

#### *Sbii and ST3: The Incarnation as Formation*

The final possibility considered in the *Sentences Commentary* is a union by formation, as a single thing arises from a body and a soul. This is inadequate to account for the Incarnation because the union of body and the soul does not arise from two acts or two potencies, but from an act and a potency. However, the divine and human natures are each a being in act. This is not, of course, to say that there are two substantial beings in Christ, but rather that Christ is both God and a man; both of these terms signify the same being, though in a different way. Further, there is no potency in the divine nature and, thus, it cannot be composed with another thing or nature, as it is self-subsisting being by its very nature.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>82</sup> *ST III*, q. 2, a. 1. On this point see my article cited above in note 16.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, “Quia ex huiusmodi non fit unum simpliciter, sed secundum quid: remanent enim plura actu.”

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, “Quia forma talium non est natura, sed magis ars: sicut forma domus. Et sic non constitueretur una natura in Christo, ut ipsi volunt.”

<sup>85</sup> *In III Sent.* d. 5, q. 1, a. 2c. “Uno modo secundum commensurationem vel continuationis vel contiguationis; et secundum hoc poneretur divina natura corporea: quia continuatio et contactus corporum est. Alio modo secundum informationem, sicut ex anima et corpore fit unum; et hoc etiam non potest esse: quia per modum istum non fit unum ex duobus actibus nec ex duabus potentiis, sed ex actu et potentia, secundum Philosophum: divina autem natura et humana, utraque est ens actu. Praeterea divina natura non habet aliquid potentialitatis, nec potest esse actus veniens in compositionem alicuius, cum sit esse primum infinitum per se subsistens. Patet igitur quod quocumque modo ponatur una natura in Christo, sequitur error: et ideo Eutyches, qui hoc posuit, ut haereticus condemnatus est.”

In the *Summa* this is also presented as the third and final possibility. In this later discussion such a union is described as being made up of things that are neither mixed, nor changed, but imperfect. It must be noted that the term “perfect” is used in the sense of complete.<sup>86</sup> Hence, in calling a nature imperfect Aquinas has in mind a part of a nature that is not sufficient to be a full-fledged nature on its own, but must enter into union with some other part or parts to form a perfect nature. The example of this is again, the union of the soul and the body. Neither the body nor the soul constitutes a perfect nature on its own; rather, it is only when they are united that there is a perfect human nature present. In the *Summa*, Aquinas’s emphasis is clearly on the point that neither of these are perfect or complete on their own: rather it is when they are united that they form a perfect or complete nature. Against this possibility St. Thomas argues that the human and divine natures each have their own perfect character.<sup>87</sup> That is to say, each nature is complete in and of itself and, therefore, does not stand in need of anything beyond itself to perfect it as both the body and the soul, considered individually, do.

The second argument against this kind of union is from divine incorporeality. This entails that the human and divine natures cannot constitute a thing as its quantitative parts in the way that the hands, feet, legs, and arms make up a body. Neither is it possible for the relation to be one of form and matter, since the divine nature cannot be the form of anything. This would be particularly inappropriate in the case of a corporeal thing, which is multiplied in matter, as it would follow that the resulting species would be shared amongst a plurality of things and there would be several Christs.

Lastly, as we have seen elsewhere, Christ would neither be human nor divine if the union took place in this way. The argument for this is that difference varies the species of a thing. This is seen in the example of numbers where the addition of any unity varies the number. Where there is a new specific difference there is also a new species. Accordingly, if the union took place in this way we would have a new species which was neither man nor God.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>86</sup> On this see the discussion of *perfectus* below.

<sup>87</sup> *ST* III, q. 2, a. 1c. “Utraque natura est secundum suam rationem perfecta, divina scilicet et humana.”

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, “Sed hoc dici non potest de incarnationis mysterio. Primo quidem, quia utraque natura est secundum suam rationem perfecta, divina scilicet et humana. Secundo, quia divina et humana natura non possunt constituere aliquid per modum partium quantitativarum, sicut membra consitituunt corpus: quia natura divina est incorporea. Neque per modum formae et materiae: quia divina natura non potest esse forma alicuius, praesertim corporei. Sequeretur etiam quod species resultans esset communicabilis pluribus: et ita essent plures Christi. Tertio, quia

### General Comparison of the Texts

In comparing the *Sentences* treatment with the account provided in the later *Summa contra Gentiles*, two points of development are worth noting. First, the later discussion gives greater attention to the possibility that one nature can arise from many through order alone or order with composition. Second, it also provides a more detailed analysis of union through mixture. Both of these areas may bear witness to a growing philosophical sophistication and a greater familiarity with the Aristotelian texts on the part of Aquinas. The *Sentences* discussion, however, does have its own merits. It organizes the material following a logical order of progression rather than the historical order adopted by the *Summa contra Gentiles*. Consequently, the issue of a union resulting in one nature is discussed before the possibility of a union in the person, whereas the later work treats the heresy of Nestorius before that of Eutyches. This strength of the *Sentences* is carried over to the *Summa theologiae*, where it is refined even further. Moreover, both the *Sentences* and the *Summa theologiae* have the merit of attempting to embrace all the ways in which one thing can become many within a series of fairly systematic divisions, while the *Summa contra Gentiles* simply completes its discussion with a more haphazard list of considerations. This is probably due to its ordering the discussion in historical terms.

In the *Summa theologiae*, St. Thomas uses much the same strategy as he did in the earlier works, while making subtle changes to his manner of presentation. His approach is, yet again, to categorize the various ways in which two or more things can become one and to show how none of these is appropriate to the union of the human and divine natures in Christ. In this late text he sets out three modes of union and gives three distinct arguments against the possibility of each kind.

However, there is one important way in which the *Summa* text is unique. This is in its focus upon the perfection or imperfection of the natures to be united. The terms St. Thomas is using are the adjectives *perfectus* and *imperfectus*. While there are advantages to retaining a straightforward translation of these terms as “perfect” and “imperfect,” respectively, there is also a danger, insofar as this may, to some extent, mask the sense of the Latin to the contemporary reader. The most familiar English use of the term “perfect” has the sense of being exemplary or in a state of excellence. The Latin term, especially in the present context, primarily

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Christus neque esset humanae naturae, neque divinae: differentia enim addita variat speciem, sicut unitas in numeris, sicut dicitur in VIII *Metaphys.*” See the comments on specific difference in the previous section.

connotes being “complete” or “finished.” In fact, Aquinas uses the term as a synonym of *completus*, *omnis*, and *totus*.<sup>89</sup> Once again, Aquinas calls a nature imperfect in the sense that none of its parts constitute a complete nature on their own, but only in union with another part or parts.

This sense of the term is clarified by Aquinas in his *Commentary on the Divine Names*. Speaking of the application of the term “perfect” to God, he says that we should not understand it merely in the mode of signification of the word (*modum significationis vocabuli*). In this sense “a thing is called perfect just as [it is] completely done, as we say that we *have walked* when we have completed walking.” In this way things which are not finished or over with cannot be called perfect. “But since things that are done arrive at the end of their own perfection, when they attain the nature and power of their own species, from that [fact] *the name ‘perfect’ was taken for signifying everything which attains its own power and nature*. In this way God is called perfect, insofar as he maximally exists in his own power and nature.”<sup>90</sup> Clearly, the use of the term *perfectus* as it applies to the natures that are united in the Incarnation is intended to signify completion in this latter sense.

Although Aquinas’s introduction of the term “perfectus” is more of a terminological than a doctrinal development,<sup>91</sup> nevertheless it remains the most significant departure from the earlier works. Indeed, the notion of perfection becomes an important point of reference in the discussion, as Aquinas is concerned to compare the state of the things before and after the different kinds of union in terms of how they retain, or fail to retain, the perfection proper to their species. Clearly, this has important implications for the doctrine of the Incarnation, since it is crucial that both of the natures remain in the fullness of their perfection. Aquinas’s strategy is to show that this is not possible given the ways in which two or more things

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<sup>89</sup> Deferrari, *A Latin-English Dictionary of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 779–80.

<sup>90</sup> S. Thomas Aquinatis, *In librum beati Dionysii De divinis nominibus expositio*, ed. Ceslari Pera, OP (Rome: Marietti, 1950), II, 1, 114. “Perfecta, non est accipiendum secundum modum significationis vocabuli, quo perfectum dicitur quasi complete factum, sicut perambulasse nos dicimus, quando ambulationem complevimus; unde quod non est factum, non potest secundum hanc rationem dici perfectum; sed quia *res* quae fiunt, tunc ad finem suae perfectionis perveniunt, quando consequuntur naturam et virtutem propriae speciei, inde est quod hoc nomen perfectum assumptum est ad significandum omnem rem quae attingit propriam virtutem et naturam. Et hoc modo Divinitas dicitur perfecta, inquantum maxime est in sua natura et virtute.”

<sup>91</sup> In light of this, I have consistently retained the translation “perfect” in order to stay as close as possible to the original Latin. The reader should, however, be cautioned that in this context it is especially this latter sense of completeness or integrity that is meant.

can be made one. In each mode of change the true perfection of one or both of the natures is compromised. Another development, to which the introduction of the term “perfection” probably contributes, is the clearer presentation of the ways in which many things can become one.

### **Conclusion: The Role of Philosophy**

It remains for us to step back from the details of the texts in order to examine how St. Thomas incorporates properly philosophical elements into his discussion and the role they play. In dealing with the question of whether the union of two natures in Christ took place in the nature, Aquinas makes use of philosophy in two ways. First, he uses it to articulate his understanding of the term “nature.” The various senses he assigns to this term are philosophical. This is not only due to the fact that they are derived from the pagan authority of Aristotle, but more important because they are capable of being naturally known and are presented on that basis. This is the case even in the writings of Boethius, where the issue emerges in the context of a work that is both Christian and theological. Hence, within the science of theology philosophy has the important role of articulating the various senses of terms whose objects are capable of being naturally known.

In Thomas’s discussion the function of revelation in this case is simply to determine which of the senses of nature might serve as a suitable analogue for the Incarnation. This determination is, obviously, made on the basis of theological considerations, not philosophical ones. Nevertheless, the explanation of that sense of nature is made by Aquinas in a philosophical, that is to say naturally knowable, manner. Nature is to be understood as the *quod quid erat esse*, the specific difference informing each and every thing. This account of nature is known *philosophically* and clearly not through revelation. Nevertheless, the claim that this sense is the one that should be used in discussions of the Incarnation is a *theological* claim made in light of revealed facts. It should be noted, however, that this account of nature is largely a preliminary sketch that Aquinas will refine in the process of resolving various concrete Christological problems.

Second, philosophy not only gives the meanings or, more properly, significations of such terms, it also draws out the implications of those terms, and of the philosophical theories of which they are a part, for the resolution of the theological issue under discussion. This aspect is seen in Aquinas’s attempts to explain the various ways in which two or more things can be made one. Here St. Thomas is setting out *purely philosophical positions* in showing how two things can be made one. The articulation of these different modes of union is a properly philosophical task pertaining



to the metaphysician or the natural philosopher. Only once this has been done is a properly theological element introduced into the discussion.

The aim of this classification is to determine the suitability of each kind of union as a natural analogue for the Incarnation. St. Thomas judges that each of the three ways in which two things can become one are inappropriate to account for the Incarnation. As a theologian Aquinas has to hold that two natures, human and divine, are to be found in Christ. This is a commitment of faith, which is, of course, made on the basis of scriptural and ecclesiastical authority. Hence, it is only in judging that none of the ways two things can become one in a nature are appropriate to the Incarnation that a properly theological function is being carried out in the articles under discussion here. What is interesting about this is that it shows the need for a natural analogue as a point of reference in the theological argument. All of St. Thomas's treatments of this issue are concerned with assessing the suitability of the various forms of natural union for this explanatory function. This procedure is utterly characteristic of St. Thomas's manner of explaining revealed mysteries. It is true that in this case his conclusion is purely negative. Yet, what is important *methodologically* is the way in which he arrives at this claim.

In conclusion, philosophy enters into the present discussion insofar as it articulates senses of the concept of nature and spells out the implications of this concept and the theories of union. Theology's tasks, in contrast, are to specify the sense of nature appropriate to the discussion of Christ's human and divine natures and to determine whether any of the various modes by means of which the human and divine in Christ could be united in one nature are in accord with scriptural revelation and sacred tradition.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> I would like to thank E.J. Ashworth, Joseph A. Novak and the reader for *Nova et Vetera* for comments that have helped to improve this article considerably.

