

PHILIP-NERI REESE, O.P.

**Separate Substances and the Principles of Being as Being:  
Aquinas's (†1274) Aporia and Flandrensis's (†1479) Answer\***

*It is because of wondering at things that humans, both now and at first,  
began to do philosophy. At the start, they wondered at those  
of the puzzles that were close to hand, then, advancing  
little by little, they puzzled over greater issues.*

ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, 982b11-14 (trans. Reeve)

Despite the attention paid in recent years to the *prooemium* to Aquinas's commentary on the *Metaphysics*, it has nevertheless gone virtually unnoticed that he there identifies the principles of being with separate substances, in the plural, and not just with God<sup>1</sup>. This idea that the angels ought to be counted among the principles of *ens inquantum ens* is not at all easy to square with Aquinas's account of the subject-matter of metaphysics: how could the angels both fall under that subject and be the principles thereof? While recent interpreters of Aquinas offer few resources for answering this question, the same is not true when we turn to his Renaissance commentators. The purpose of this article is to draw attention to (1) Aquinas's oft-overlooked aporia, and (2) the even more oft-overlooked answer given to it by the 15<sup>th</sup> century scholastic metaphysician, Dominic of Flanders. As we shall see, Dominic's solution is that, unlike God, the angels both fall under being, insofar

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<sup>1</sup> The only modern interpreter of Aquinas to tackle this aporia is G. DOOLAN, *Aquinas on Separate Substances and the Subject Matter of Metaphysics*, «Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale», 22, 2011, pp. 347-382. It is an excellent article, and lamentably under-read. What this article will show is that Doolan's solution is not novel – Dominic of Flanders had already proposed it five hundred years before Doolan.

as they are immaterial beings in the category of substance, and serve as principles of being, insofar as they cause the very *grade* of being under which accidents and corruptible substances fall — thus causing accidents and corruptible substances *in their very being*.

The article will proceed in three main parts: §1 will (a) introduce the aporia we find in Aquinas, (b) present two possible ways of explaining that aporia away, and (c) reject the first of those explanations; §2 will then reject the second attempt to explain away the aporia by offering an analysis of the *prooemium* to Aquinas's *Metaphysics* commentary that requires the aporia to be genuine; finally, §3 will present Dominic of Flanders's answer to Aquinas's aporia, according to which the angels' causal role as celestial movers renders them not only cosmological principles of change, but ontological principles of being. By way of provocation, I will also suggest that Dominic might have made an even stronger claim, namely, that were it not for angelic movement of the heavenly spheres, being *qua* being would in fact be otherwise than it is, since the categories of being would be otherwise than they are. A concluding §4 will then provide a brief summary of the overarching argument of the article.

## I. AQUINAS'S APORIA

In the *prooemium* to his commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Aquinas makes a puzzling claim that has gone virtually unnoticed by modern interpreters. The claim is this: «separate substances are the universal and premier causes of being».<sup>2</sup> It is Aquinas's use of the plural that makes this claim so puzzling. He seems to be saying that separate substances *in general*, and not just God in particular, serve as the principles of being *qua* being<sup>3</sup>. In other words, it looks like Aquinas is saying that created separate substances — i.e.,

<sup>2</sup> «Nam praedictae substantiae separatae sunt universales et primae causae essendi». THOMAS AQUINAS, *In Duodecem Libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis Expositio*, ed. M.-R. CATHALA, R. M. SPIAZZI, Marietti, Turin - Rome 1964, *prooemium*, 2a. (Hereafter: Aquinas, *In Met.*) All translations from the Latin are my own. Since the Marietti edition does not provide numbers for the *prooemium* but does display the text in dual columns, I will refer to the text by way of page number and column letter (e.g., 1a).

<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting that this question differs from that of how created substances can be causes of *esse*. One can affirm Aquinas's claim in SCG III.66 that *esse* is an effect common to every agent without thereby affirming that *ens inquantum ens* is an effect common to every agent. But as we shall see, the answer to how separate substances are causes of *esse* will play a key role in Flandrensis's answer to how they are causes of being *qua* being. For more on creatures as causes of *esse*, see J. F. WIPPEL, *Thomas Aquinas on Creatures as Causes of Esse*, «International Philosophical Quarterly», 40, 2000, pp. 197-213.

the angels — are somehow principles of *ens commune*<sup>4</sup>. This generates the following puzzle:

### Aquinas's Aporia

1. The angels fall under *ens commune*.
2. The angels are the universal and premier causes of *ens commune*.
3. The angels are the universal and premier causes of that under which they fall.

But how could (3) be true? Just as a universal and premier cause of *ens mobile* cannot itself be an instance of *ens mobile*, neither does it seem that a universal and premier cause of *ens commune* could itself be an instance of *ens commune*. Or, to give another example, it would seem that the universal and premier cause of accidental being is not some accident, but rather *substance*. In each case, the reasoning is the same: if the universal and premier cause of *x* were also something that falls under *x*, then *x* will be the cause of itself. This is precisely what seems to be happening with the angels in (1)–(3), above. I will refer to this puzzle as 'Aquinas's aporia'.

I can see only two ways of avoiding the aporia: either we deny one of its premises or we nuance its conclusion. The first option, in effect, denies that the aporia is genuine. The second option admits that it is genuine and attempts to offer a resolution. If we take the first route, we have only two choices: either we deny premise (1) or we deny premise (2). We can start by trying to deny premise (1).

Is it possible to claim that, for Aquinas, the angels do *not* fall under *ens commune*? At first glance this might look like a live option. We know that Aquinas insisted on the fact that God does not fall under *ens commune*<sup>5</sup>. Per-

<sup>4</sup> That Aquinas identifies *ens commune* as the subject-matter of metaphysics, and therefore with being as being, see J. F. WIPPEL, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C. 2000, pp. 11–22.

<sup>5</sup> Regarding God's not falling under *ens commune*, see *In De Causis*, prop. 6. I am grateful to Gregory Doolan for drawing my attention to this text. See DOOLAN, *Aquinas on Separate Substances and the Subject Matter of Metaphysics* cit., pp. 359–360. For other examples of scholarly consensus on this point, see WIPPEL, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas* cit., pp. 3–22; L. DEWAN, *What Does It Mean to Study Being 'as Being'?*, in *Form and Being: Studies in Thomistic Metaphysics*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C. 2006, pp. 13–34; R. MCINERNEY, *Praeambula Fidei: Thomism and the God of the Philosophers*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C. 2006, pp. 210–218. The idea that God does not fall under any of the categories is linked to Aquinas's teaching that God does not fall under any genus (of which the categories are the highest). See, for example, *In I Sent.* d. 8, q. 4, art. 2; SCG I, chap. 25; *De Potentia* q. 7, art. 3; and ST I.3.5.

haps the same is true of the angels. If so, it would seem to provide us with a tidy solution: all purely immaterial beings, whether angelic or divine, would be principles of *ens commune* while not being contained under *ens commune*. Aporia undermined.

The problem with this approach is that although some scholastics do seem to have held a position like it, Aquinas did not<sup>6</sup>. To begin with, we have already seen him refer to the angels as ‘separate substances’. If, however, they fall under the category of substance, then they must also fall under *ens commune*. But wait, could our interlocutor not insist that the angels, like God, are called ‘substance’ by analogy, without that implying that they fall under the category of substance<sup>7</sup>? I think not. At least from a logical point of view, Aquinas is clear that the angels are called ‘substance’ in the same way that hylomorphic substances are called ‘substances’ — and that would seem to entail that they fall under *ens commune*<sup>8</sup>.

Rather than pursue this line of dialectic further, I propose a change of tack. I want to offer three independent arguments, each of which proves the truth of premise (1) and proceeds from premises that Aquinas unquestionably held. These arguments are as follows:

### Argument from Participation

- a. Every being that participates *esse* falls under *ens commune*<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> For evidence of scholastics denying that angels fall under any of the categories, see FRANCISCO SUÁREZ, *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, disp. I, sect. 1, n. 18, in *Opera Omnia*, vol. XXV, ed. C. BERTON, Paris 1866. After reporting a fifth opinion on the subject matter of metaphysics, he says «Alter sensus esse potest, si ponamus, iuxta aliorum opinionem, substantias omnes immateriales in nullo praedicamento collocari ...».

<sup>7</sup> That God is not contained under the genus ‘substance’, see ST I.3.5, ad 1; that ‘substance’ can nevertheless be predicated of God, see ST I.13.11, *corpus* (where Aquinas defends Damascene’s description of God as «an infinite sea of substance»). For a careful analysis of the distinction between substance as a logical and as a metaphysical genus, see G. DOOLAN, *Aquinas on Substance as a Metaphysical Genus*, in Id. ed., *The Science of Being as Being: Metaphysical Investigations*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C. 2011, pp. 99–128. It should also be noted that Aquinas himself does not use the phrase ‘metaphysical genus’. He does, however, contrast a ‘natural genus’ with a ‘logical genus’. See, e.g., ST I.88.2, ad 4.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, ST I.88.2, ad 4 and *de spiritualibus creaturis* art. 5, *corpus*.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, ST I.44.1 ad 1, where Aquinas says that «huiusmodi ens non potest esse, quin sit causatum». It is clear from the context that the ‘huiusmodi ens’ in question is *ens commune*. Moreover, Aquinas’s argument for this conclusion runs as follows: «ex hoc quod aliquid per participationem est ens, sequitur quod sit causatum ab alio». *Ens commune*, then, is being by participation — i.e., what participates *esse*.

- b. All angels are beings that participate *esse*.<sup>10</sup>
- c. All angels fall under *ens commune*.

### Argument from Subsisting Being

- a. Everything that is not *ipsum esse subsistens* falls under *ens commune*.<sup>11</sup>
- b. No angel is *ipsum esse subsistens*.<sup>12</sup>
- c. All angels fall under *ens commune*.

### Argument from the Division of Potency and Act

- a. Everything divisible by potency and act falls under *ens commune*.<sup>13</sup>
- b. All angels are divisible by potency and act.<sup>14</sup>
- c. All angels fall under *ens commune*.

Given these arguments, anyone who wants to maintain that Aquinas denies premise (1) will have to either (a) maintain that Aquinas's metaphysical commitments are flagrantly inconsistent, or (b) show that each of the above arguments somehow goes wrong. Since (a) is uncharitable and (b) is implausible, we should assume that premise (1) in Aquinas's aporia is true<sup>15</sup>.

The upshot of the forgoing considerations is this: if we want to say that Aquinas's aporia is not genuinely aporetic, then the only way for us to do so will be to deny premise (2) (i.e., that the angels are the universal and premier causes of *ens commune*). But how could we deny that Aquinas thinks the angels are universal and premier causes of being, when we have seen him say precisely this in the *prooemium* to his commentary on the *Metaphysics*? There are two possible arguments that one might give. The first I will call the 'slip-of-

<sup>10</sup> This participation is what guarantees the fact that even immaterial created beings are in some way composite, and so fall short of the simplicity of God. See, for example, *De substantiis separatis* ch. 9, n. 48, where Aquinas explicitly attributes participation in *esse* to created separate substances.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, *Super Sent.* I, dist. 8, q. 4, art. 1, ad 1; *ST* I.3.4, obj. 1 and ad 1; *ST* I-II.66.5, ad 4.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, *De ente et essentia*, c. 5.

<sup>13</sup> See *SCG* II, ch. 54.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> If separate substances fall under *ens commune*, and *ens commune* is the subject-matter of metaphysics, and metaphysics is a science, does this mean that we can have scientific knowledge of separate substances? Not if 'scientific knowledge' means *scientia propter quid*. For *scientia propter quid* requires cognition of the real essence of the subject, and Aquinas is clear that — at least in this life — we cannot know the essences of the angels. See, for example, *Quaestiones disputatae de anima*, q. 16, *corpus*. We can, however, attain to *scientia quia* of the angels in this life, and we can do so precisely because they fall under *ens commune*.

the-pen argument' and the second I will call the 'Aristotelian accommodation argument'. They go like this<sup>16</sup>:

**Slip-of-the-Pen Argument:** I know that Aquinas says «separate substances are the universal and premier causes of being» but that's not what he *means*. What he *means* is that God is the universal and premier cause of being. His use of the plural was a slip of the pen.

**Aristotelian Accommodation Argument:** Yes, Aquinas says that «separate substances are the universal and premier causes of being». And yes, his use of the plural is intentional. But remember the context of the quote: it is from the introduction to an *Aristotelian* commentary. Aquinas is simply accommodating Aristotle's preferred way of speaking, which uses the plural when talking about the divine. We don't have to assume that the grammar of the sentence reflects Aquinas's preferred account of the principles of being.

While I find neither of these arguments compelling, it is easier to dismiss the slip-of-the-pen argument than it is to dismiss the Aristotelian accommodation argument. As we shall see in the next section of this article, the quotation from the *prooemium* that is currently under discussion is not an isolated, idiosyncratic instance of pluralization. In fact, throughout the *prooemium* Aquinas repeatedly employs the plural, and he does so with different plurals: in addition to «separate substances» he also speaks of «God and the intelligences» and of «those things which abstract not only from designated matter, but from sensible matter entirely — and not only according to *ratio*, but also according to being». There are just too many cases like this in the *prooemium* for it to be a mistake. The slip-of-the-pen argument would have us impute to Aquinas an egregious inattentiveness to grammar in a context where he is exceedingly attentive to everything else.

But what about the Aristotelian accommodation argument? Compared to the slip-of-the-pen argument, it seems much more plausible. There has been a great deal of debate in the secondary literature about the extent to which Aquinas's Aristotelian commentaries can serve (if at all) as a guide to his own thought. The question is whether or not in these texts Aquinas is merely playing the role of expositor — reporting what he takes to be Aristotle's opinion and the meaning of Aristotle's words — or whether he also uses these texts to express his own opinions on the problems that come up in the course of

<sup>16</sup> I am grateful to Fr. Raphael-Mary Salzillo, O.P., for pushing me to consider these possibilities.

commenting on the Stagirite's work.<sup>17</sup> The proponent of the Aristotelian accommodation argument can thus point to the complicated nature of the commentary genera and the interpretive nuance that it requires as giving us good reason not to take every quote from such a work at face-value.

One can hardly disagree with this call for care and caution. But a general interpretive warning need not always imply a particular interpretive threat. The crux of the question is whether or not this *particular* text from the *prooemium* can be trusted to express Aquinas's thought. And it is this particular question that the advocate of the Aristotelian accommodation argument answers in the negative.

One way we might try to make our case would be to point out that the text in question does not, strictly speaking, come from Aquinas's commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Rather, it comes from the *introduction* to that commentary and, as such, is more reliable. Still, the proponent of the argument will likely come back with the following rejoinder: the fact that Aquinas is introducing an *Aristotelian* commentary is enough to make it plausible that he would adopt an *Aristotelian* way of speaking — even in his introduction. If we want to claim that Aquinas really thinks that the angels are principles of being as being, then we will have to prove that this is required by the text.

Before committing ourselves to that daunting task, it might be worth exploring an alternate way to undercut the Aristotelian accommodation argument. Rather than arguing directly from the *prooemium* text, what if we found a parallel text in which Aquinas makes substantively the same claim, but outside the context of an Aristotelian commentary? The following passage strikes me as the most plausible candidate:

«[T]he 'divine science' handed down by the philosophers considers the angels (which they call 'the intelligences') according to the same *ratio* under which [it considers] the premiere cause (which is God), inasmuch as they are also the secondary principles of things — at least by means of the motion of the spheres — [principles] to which no physical motion can occur»<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, E. GILSON, *The Philosopher and Theology*, translated by C. GILSON, Random House, New York 1962, pp. 210-211; J. OWENS, *Aquinas as Aristotelian Commentator*, in J. R. CATAN ed., *St. Thomas Aquinas on the Existence of God: The Collected Papers of Joseph Owens*, State University of New York Press, Albany 1980, pp. 1-20; M. D. JORDAN, *Thomas Aquinas' Disclaimers in the Aristotelian Commentaries*, in R. J. LONG ed., *God and the Philosophy of Abraham: Essays in Memory of James A. Weisheipl, O.P.*, Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, Toronto 1991, pp. 99-112; J. WIPPEL, *Thomas Aquinas's Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, in *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas II*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C. 2007, pp. 49-62; L. ELDERS, *The Aristotelian Commentaries of St. Thomas Aquinas*, «The Review of Metaphysics», 63, 2009, pp. 29-53.

<sup>18</sup> «Sed in scientia divina quam philosophi tradunt consideratur de angelis quos intelligentias vocant, eadem ratione qua et de prima causa, quae Deus <est>, in quantum ipsi etiam

On my preferred reading of this text, what it says is that metaphysics (i.e., the «divine science handed down by the philosophers») considers separate substances (i.e., 'God' and 'the intelligences') as principles of its subject-matter (i.e., being as being). In other words, it says exactly what the *prooemium* says. And since Aquinas is not commenting here on Aristotle, we thus have no reason to think that he is accommodating Aristotelian language.

Unfortunately, my preferred reading of this text is not the only available reading. The proponent of the Aristotelian accommodation argument will likely point out that Aquinas here only calls the intelligences principles of *things*, not principles of *being*. Moreover, the qualification «at least by means of the motion of the spheres» might be interpreted to mean that while both God and the angels are considered as principles, the former is considered as the principle of *being* while the latter are considered as principles of *motion*. If this were the case, then the text would actually tell *against* premise (2) of our argument for Aquinas's aporia. The passage is not, then, the smoking gun we were hoping for.

Where does all this leave us? We know that Aquinas thinks that the angels fall under *ens commune*, or being as being. We also know that Aquinas *appears* to think that the angels are universal and premier causes of *ens commune*. If this is not mere appearance, then we will have a genuine aporia: Aquinas will think that the angels are causes of that under which they fall. But there is at least one plausible reason to think that this is mere appearance, namely, that Aquinas might be accommodating without endorsing Aristotle's language.

The purpose of the next section of this article is to show that this is not the case. As we shall see, Aquinas intends his *prooemium* to resolve an earlier aporia in Aristotle regarding the subject-matter of metaphysics. But his *prooemium* can only succeed as a resolution to that aporia on the condition that the angels are principles of being in fact and not just in name. This will prove that the Aristotelian accommodation argument fails, and that Aquinas's aporia is genuinely puzzling.

## II. ARISTOTLE'S APORIA AND AQUINAS'S SOLUTION: A READING OF THE *PROOEMIUM* TO THE COMMENTARY ON THE *METAPHYSICS*

To better understand the project of Aquinas's *prooemium*, it will be helpful to begin with a few words about Aristotle. It is not unusual for scholars of Aris-

sunt rerum principia secunda, saltem per motum orbium. Quibus quidem nullus motus physicus accidere potest». In *De Trinitate*, q. 5, art. 4, ad 3. I translate *prima causa* as 'premier cause' rather than as 'first cause' because it makes clear that the distinction at issue is not merely one of order, but also of nobility. One need only think of the early propositions of the *Liber de causis* to see the point.



totle's *Metaphysics* to point out the problematic — even aporetic — character of the discipline there under discussion<sup>19</sup>. In particular, vast amounts of ink have been spilt in the attempt to determine what metaphysics is about (i.e., its subject-matter). The problem is often portrayed as a dichotomy: is Aristotelian metaphysics an *ontology* or a *theology*? But the problem is much worse than this dichotomy makes it appear. In fact, we can find in the text at least four different candidates for the science that Aristotle seeks. If we privilege the books alpha, then metaphysics will look like a science of causes, or an *etiology*<sup>20</sup>. If we privilege books gamma and delta, then it will look like a science of being, or an *ontology*<sup>21</sup>. If we privilege books zeta and eta (and maybe even theta), then it will look like a science of substance, or an *ousiology*<sup>22</sup>. And if we

<sup>19</sup> Aristotle himself provocatively refers to it as «the science we are seeking». See *Met.*, B, 1, 995a24.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, *Met.*, A, 1, 981b25-28 and *Met.*, α, 1, 993b25-30. For modern interpretations along similar lines, see A. D. CODE, *Aristotle's Metaphysics as a Science of Principles*, «Revue Internationale de Philosophie», 3, 1997, pp. 357-378; S. MENN, *La Sagesse Comme Science Des Quatre Causes ?*, in M. BONELLI ed., *Physique et Métaphysique Chez Aristote*, transl. by L.-A. DORION, Vrin, Paris 2012, pp. 39-68. Other representatives of this view include S. BENARDETE, *On Wisdom and Philosophy: The First Two Chapters of Aristotle's 'Metaphysics' A*, «The Review of Metaphysics», 32, 1978, pp. 205-215; D. SCHAEFFER, *Wisdom and Wonder in 'Metaphysics' A: 1-2*, «The Review of Metaphysics», 52, 1999, pp. 641-656; J. A. GARCÍA-LORENTE, *La Ciencia de Los Principios y de Las Causas Primeras En El Libro Primero de La Metafísica*, «Anales Del Seminario de Historia de La Filosofía», 33, 2016, pp. 11-31.

<sup>21</sup> See *Met.*, Γ, 1, 1003a20-24. For examples of historical figures who adopted this ontological view of metaphysics, see AVICENNA, *The Metaphysics of "The Healing": A Parallel English-Arabic Text*, translated by M. E. MARMURA, Brigham Young University Press, Provo, UT, 2005, cap. 1-2; ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Metaphysica IV*, tract. 1, cap. 2-3, ed. Colon. 16/1, 162b-165a; BL. IOANNIS DUNS SCOTI, *Quaestiones Super Libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis*, ed. G. ETZKORN ET AL., *Opera Philosophica*, The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure, New York 1997, lib. I, quest. 1. For modern proponents of the same view, see W. D. LUDWIG, *Aristotle's Conception of the Science of Being*, «The New Scholasticism», 63, 1989, pp. 379-404; I. BELL, *Metaphysics as an Aristotelian Science*, Academia Verlag, Sankt Augustin 2004; S. DUARTE, *Aristotle's Theology and Its Relation to the Science of Being qua Being*, «Apeiron», 40, 2007, pp. 267-318; C. SHIELDS, *Being Qua Being*, in Id. ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Aristotle*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2012, pp. 343-371.

<sup>22</sup> See *Met.*, Γ, 2, 1003b14-17; *Met.*, Δ, 7, 1017a8-1017b7; *Met.*, Z, 1, 1028a10-19 and 1028b1-6. This position was commonly attributed to John Buridan by later scholastic authors such as Suárez and Flandrensis. Modern defenders can be found in J. OWENS, *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics*, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto 1978; G. REALE, *The Concept of First Philosophy and the Unity of the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, ed. and trans. J. R. CATAN, State University of New York Press, Albany, NY 1980; R. BOLTON, *Aristotle's Conception of Metaphysics as a Science*, in T. SCALTSAS, D. CHARLES, M. L. GILL eds., *Unity, Identity, and Explanation in Aristotle's Metaphysics*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1994, pp. 321-354; R. BOLTON, *Science and the Science of Substance in Aristotle's Metaphysics Z*, «Pacific Philosophical Quarterly», 76, 1995, pp. 419-469; K. FRASER, *Demonstrative Science and the Science of Being qua Being*, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», 22, 2002, pp. 43-82; Id., *Seriality and Demonstration in Aristotle's Ontology*, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», 25, 2003, pp. 131-158.

privilege books epsilon, kappa, and lambda, then it will look like a science of divine substances, or a *theology*<sup>23</sup>. Moreover, these four candidate sciences look mutually exclusive<sup>24</sup>. Thus, it looks like Aristotelian metaphysics has four mutually incompatible subjects. We can refer to this as 'Aristotle's aporia'<sup>25</sup>.

The central task of this section of the article is to prove (1) that the *prooemium* to Aquinas's commentary on the *Metaphysics* is intended to resolve Aristotle's aporia; and (2) that it can do so only on the condition that the angels really are principles of being as being. My reading of the *prooemium* is not revisionary, but it does go beyond the standard accounts in one respect — namely, in the way that it applies Aquinas's understanding of moving from nominal definitions to real definitions to the *prooemium*'s presentation of wisdom<sup>26</sup>. Since this novel aspect of my interpretation is not required for achieving the two goals listed above, readers who take issue with it can simply bracket that part of the interpretation in what follows.

When we turn to the first lines of Aquinas's *prooemium*, we find him — perhaps unexpectedly — referring to the *Politics* rather than to the *Metaphysics*. He says,

«As Aristotle teaches in his *Politics*, when many things are ordered to one thing, one among them must be managing or ruling and the others managed or ruled. This is clear in the case of the union of soul and body, for the soul naturally commands and the body naturally obeys. The case is similar among

<sup>23</sup> See *Met.*, K, 7, 1064a28-1064b1; *Met.*, E, 1, 1026a23-33. Among the medieval Latin commentators this is the position regularly attributed to Averröes, but Bertolacci thinks the matter requires more nuance. See A. BERTOLACCI, *Avicenna and Averroes on the Proof of God's Existence and the Subject-Matter of Metaphysics*, «Medioevo», 32, 2007, pp. 61-97. One possible way forward would be to distinguish Ibn Rushd from the Averröes *Latinus* and instead argue that the latter, though perhaps not the former, was an adherent of the theological view of metaphysics. For a famous modern exponent of the same view, see P. MERLAN, *On the Terms 'Metaphysics' and 'Being-qua-Being'*, «Monist», 54, 1968, pp. 174-194.

<sup>24</sup> I pass over *Metaphysics* B for reasons of space. It seems to me that if one were to privilege this book as a guide to the subject-matter of metaphysics it would in fact yield a new candidate, namely, metaphysics as the science of aporias, or *aporiology*. This interpretation does seem to have at least one adherent: Pierre Aubenque — see P. AUBENQUE, *Le Problème de l'être Chez Aristote: Essai Sur La Problématique Aristotélicienne*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1962.

<sup>25</sup> I do so without prejudice to (and with full knowledge of) the fact that there are far more than one aporia in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Just see the previous note.

<sup>26</sup> My interpretation of the *prooemium* has been heavily influenced by J. F. WIPPEL, *The Title 'First Philosophy' According to Thomas Aquinas and His Different Justifications for the Same*, «The Review of Metaphysics», 27, 1974, pp. 585-600; R. MCINERNEY, *The Science We are Seeking*, «The Review of Metaphysics», 47, 1993, pp. 3-18; and O. BOULNOIS, *La métaphysique selon saint Thomas d'Aquin: Lecture du «Prologue» de son commentaire d'Aristote*, in T.-D. HUMBRECHT ed., *Saint Thomas d'Aquin*, Cerf, Paris 2010, pp. 37-88.

the powers of the soul, for in the natural order the irascible powers and the concupiscible powers are ruled by reason. But all sciences and arts are ordered to one thing — namely, to the perfection of man, which is his bliss. Thus, it is necessary that one of them, which rightly claims the title of ‘wisdom’, should be the manager of all the others. For it belongs to the wise to set others in order »<sup>27</sup>.

This strikes me as a clever way to begin. On the one hand, Aquinas mentions both ‘wisdom’ and a hierarchy of cognition, which should immediately put his readers in mind of the first chapter of *Metaphysics* A. On the other hand, he makes no commitment regarding what this ‘wisdom’ might be *about*. Instead, he identifies it by what it *does*, namely, manage the arts and sciences with a view to human perfection<sup>28</sup>. This should put us in mind of what Aquinas says at the beginning of his commentary on Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics*. There, in the context of explaining Aristotle’s account of the sort of knowledge that one must already possess before arriving at *scientia*, Aquinas makes a striking clarification: before we can prove why a subject has the properties that it does, we must know both *that* the subject is and *what* the subject is. But in order to know *that* it is, we first have to have some notion of what the term used to designate that subject means<sup>29</sup>. Thus, nominal definitions will often precede real definitions.

I think this is precisely what is going on at the beginning of the *prooemium*. Aquinas starts by introducing a merely *nominal* definition of wisdom, constructed from a remote genus (‘an art or science’) and a proper attribute (‘managing all the others with a view to human perfection’). This nominal definition will then provide us with a way to begin our inquiry into the true nature of wisdom (i.e., its *real* definition). And it can do this precisely because it leaves open the question of what the subject-matter of wisdom is.

But this subject-matter-neutral starting point itself raises two further questions: (a) which of the arts or sciences satisfies this nominal definition?

<sup>27</sup> « Sicut docet philosophus in politicis suis, quando aliqua plura ordinantur ad unum, oportet unum eorum esse regulans, sive regens, et alia regulata, sive recta. Quod quidem patet in unione animae et corporis; nam anima naturaliter imperat, et corpus obedit. Similiter etiam inter animae vires: irascibilis enim et concupiscibilis naturali ordine per rationem reguntur. Omnes autem scientiae et artes ordinantur in unum, scilicet ad hominis perfectionem, quae est eius beatitudo. Unde necesse est, quod una earum sit aliarum omnium rectrix, quae nomen sapientiae recte vindicat. Nam sapientis est alios ordinare ». *In Met., prooemium*, 1a.

<sup>28</sup> In other words, Aquinas begins with a *proprium* of wisdom rather than with an essential definition. This choice makes sense, since the latter cannot be given except in terms of its subject-matter, which is precisely what is at issue.

<sup>29</sup> See *In Post. An.* I, lect. 2. Cf. *In Post. An.* II, lect. 1.

And (b) how can we know? Aquinas thinks that answering (b) will provide us with the key to answering (a). He says,

« We can tell which science this is and what sort of things it deals with if we diligently attend to how someone is qualified to rule. For just as people of vigorous intellect are naturally the rulers and masters of others (as Aristotle says in the same book), while people who are robust in body but lacking in intellect are naturally servants, so too the science that is most intellectual naturally ought to be the manager of the others. And that will be the one that deals with the most intelligible things »<sup>30</sup>.

Notice what he says in the first line. « We can tell which science this is *and what sort of things it deals with* ». Thomas is clearly interested in the question of the subject-matter of wisdom. Moreover, he is explicit about what that subject-matter must be like — it must be ‘the most intellectual’, and thus about the most intelligible things. The argument seems to be as follows:

1. Wisdom is the art or science that manages all others with a view to human perfection.
2. The art or science that manages all others with a view to human perfection is the art or science that is most intellectual.
3. The art or science that is most intellectual is the art or science that is about the most intelligible things.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ is the art or science that is about the most intelligible things.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ is wisdom.

Thus, if we want to answer question (a) above, all we have to do is fill in the blank. Unfortunately, this is easier said than done, for it is exactly at this point in the text that Aristotle’s *aporia* rears its ugly head. As Aquinas is well aware, there are multiple candidates that might fit this description. He identifies the first such candidate as follows:

« ‘The most intelligible things’ can be grasped in three ways: The first is from the understanding’s [internal] order. For the things from which the intellect receives certitude seem to be the more intelligible. Since, then, scientific cer-

<sup>30</sup> « Quae autem sit haec scientia, et circa qualia, considerari potest, si diligenter respiciatur quomodo est aliquis idoneus ad regendum. Sicut enim, ut in libro praedicto philosophus dicit, homines intellectu vigentes, naturaliter aliorum rectores et domini sunt: homines vero qui sunt robusti corpore, intellectu vero deficientes, sunt naturaliter servi: ita scientia debet esse naturaliter aliarum regulatrix, quae maxime intellectualis est. Haec autem est, quae circa maxime intelligibilia versatur ». *In Met., prooemium*, 1a-b.

titude is acquired by the intellect from causes, the knowledge of causes seems to be the most intellectual. Thus, that science which considers the premier causes seems most of all to be the manager of the others »<sup>31</sup>.

Our first candidate for what wisdom might be, then, is *etiology*. It claims to be the most intellectual of all the sciences because it is the most *certain* of all the sciences. And why is it the most certain? Because *scientia propter quid* is the most certain form of knowledge, and *scientia propter quid* demonstrates through proper causes<sup>32</sup>. In such demonstrations, the conclusion derives its certainty from the premises, which are themselves propositions capturing the necessary causal connections between things. Thus, the science that deals with the ultimate causes will be the most certain — and so the most intellectual — of the sciences.

Aquinas identifies the second candidate as follows:

« The second [way that ‘the most intelligible things’ can be understood] is by comparison of the intellect to sensation. For, since sensation is a knowledge of particulars, the intellect seems to differ from sensation on account of the fact that it comprehends universals. Thus, that science is the most intellectual which deals with the most universal principles. These are being and the things that follow upon being, like one/many, and potency/act. But such things should not remain altogether undetermined, since it is not possible to possess complete knowledge of the things that are proper to any genus or species without them. Nor, again, should they be treated in any one of the particular sciences, because — since every sort of being requires these things for it to be known — there would be equal reason for them to be treated by each particular science. Hence, it remains that such things be treated by a single common science that — since it is most intellectual — should be the manager of the others »<sup>33</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> « Maxime autem intelligibilia tripliciter accipere possumus. Primo quidem ex ordine intelligendi. Nam ex quibus intellectus certitudinem accipit, videntur esse intelligibilia magis. Unde, cum certitudo scientiae per intellectum acquiratur ex causis, causarum cognitio maxime intellectualis esse videtur. Unde et illa scientia, quae primas causas considerat, videtur esse maxime aliarum regulatrix ». *In Met., prooemium*, 1b.

<sup>32</sup> See *Apo* I.2, 71b8-72a8. Cf. *In Post. An.* I, lect. 4.

<sup>33</sup> « Secundo ex comparatione intellectus ad sensum. Nam, cum sensus sit cognitio particularium, intellectus per hoc ab ipso differre videtur, quod universalialia comprehendit. Unde et illa scientia maxime est intellectualis, quae circa principia maxime universalialia versatur. Quae quidem sunt ens, et ea quae consequuntur ens, ut unum et multa, potentia et actus. Huiusmodi autem non debent omnino indeterminata remanere, cum sine his completa cognitio de his, quae sunt propria alicui generi vel speciei, haberi non possit. Nec iterum in una aliqua particulari scientia tractari debent: quia cum his unumquodque genus entium ad sui cognitionem indigeat, pari ratione in qualibet particulari scientia tractarentur. Unde restat quod in una

While much more could be said about this passage, for present purposes it is enough to note the importance that Aquinas gives to commonality or universality as the mark of intellectuality. What he has in mind is not universality in the *causal* order (which would align more with the *etiological* science just considered) but rather universality in the order of *predication* and *cognition*<sup>34</sup>. Terms like 'being', 'one', 'many', 'act', and 'potency' are among the most universally predicable of all terms, and their corresponding concepts are among the first concepts known by the human mind. As such, they are the first principles of our knowledge and have a claim to being called 'most intelligible'<sup>35</sup>. On this view, then, wisdom will be the science that deals with being and its attendant features (*ea quae consequuntur ens*)<sup>36</sup>. In other words, wisdom will be *ontology*.

While Aquinas does not explicitly consider the *ousiological* account of metaphysics as a fourth possibility in his *prooemium*, it is nevertheless clear that he grafts it into his account of the ontological view. His commentary on the early chapters of *Metaphysics* E makes it clear that, once *ens per accidens* and *ens ut verum* have been set aside as non-starters for the subject-matter of metaphysics, we will arrive at a proper notion of *ens* as dividing into substance and the nine categories of accident<sup>37</sup>. But within this categorial division we find a marked priority of substance over accident. For this reason, Aquinas says that a substance counts as 'a being' more than an accident, and he is even willing to call metaphysics 'the science of substance'<sup>38</sup>. Thus,

communi scientia huiusmodi tractentur; quae cum maxime intellectualis sit, est aliarum regularitrix ». In *Met.*, *prooemium*, 1b-2a.

<sup>34</sup> For the distinction between *resolutio secundum rem* and *resolutio secundum rationem*, see In *de Trinitate* q. 6, art. 1; see also the excellent J. AERTSEN, *Method and Metaphysics: The via resolutionis in Thomas Aquinas*, « The New Scholasticism », 63, 1989, pp. 405-418.

<sup>35</sup> See SCG II, ch. 83. Cf. ST I-II.94.2; In VI *Met.*, lect. 6, n. 605.

<sup>36</sup> More often than not, this locution simply gets translated as 'its properties' or 'its attributes'. I think this is wrong, though I cannot mount a sustained argument here. It will be enough to point out that Avicenna distinguished the discussion of a subject-matter's *species* from that of a subject-matter's *properties*, both of which in some way 'follow upon' that subject-matter. When Dominicus Gundissalinus translated Avicenna into Latin, he used the phrase *consequentia entis* (and related expressions) for both. See, e.g., GUNDISSALINUS, *De divisione*, 100: « Species vero huius artis sunt consequentia entis, in quae scilicet dividitur ens. Ens enim aliud est substantia, aliud accidens, aliud universale, aliud particulare, aliud causa, aliud causatum, aliud in potentia, aliud in actu et cetera, de quibus sufficienter tractatur in eadem scientia ». See also A. FIDORA, *Dominicus Gundissalinus and the Introduction of Metaphysics into the Latin West*, « The Review of Metaphysics », 66, 2013, pp. 691-712.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Aquinas's treatment of the ten categories in *De Veritate* q. 1, art. 1, where they appear as 'special' modes of being in contrast with transcendental notions, which he calls 'general' modes of being.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, In III *Met.*, lect. 5 and 6; In IV *Met.*, lect. 1 and 2; In V *Met.*, lect. 7; and In I *De caelo*, lect. 20.

Aquinas's ontological account of metaphysics incorporates within itself the key claims of the ousiological account.

The last candidate that Aquinas considers for the position of wisdom is the view according to which it is *theology*:

« The third [way that 'the most intelligible things' can be understood] is from the intellect's own knowledge. For, since each thing has intellectual intensity from the fact that it is free from matter, it is necessary that those things which are most separate from matter should be the most intelligible. For the intelligible and the intellect must be proportioned and belong to one genus, since the intellect and the intelligible are one-in-act. However, those things are most separate from matter which abstract not only from designated matter (like natural forms taken universally, with which natural science deals), but from sensible matter entirely — and not only according to *ratio* (like mathematical things) but also according to being (like God and the intelligences). Thus, the science that considers those things seems to be the most intellectual, and the Lord or Lady of the others »<sup>39</sup>.

The idea seems to be that matter is not merely the principle of potentiality, but also the principle of unintelligibility. Since a thing is intelligible insofar as it is actual, it follows that the less actual a thing is, the less intelligible it will be<sup>40</sup>. Thus, the most intelligible things will be those that entirely transcend the potencies of matter<sup>41</sup>.

It is striking that despite the fact that Aquinas regularly lists the human soul along with the angels and God in the order of intellectual substances, and despite the fact that he affirms the soul's status as a *hoc aliquid* and as

<sup>39</sup> « Tertio ex ipsa cognitione intellectus. Nam cum unaquaeque res ex hoc ipso vim intellectivam habeat, quod est a materia immunis, oportet illa esse maxime intelligibilia, quae sunt maxime a materia separata. Intelligibile enim et intellectum oportet proportionata esse, et unius generis, cum intellectus et intelligibile in actu sint unum. Ea vero sunt maxime a materia separata, quae non tantum a signata materia abstrahunt, sicut formae naturales in universali acceptae, de quibus tractat scientia naturalis, sed omnino a materia sensibili. Et non solum secundum rationem, sicut mathematica, sed etiam secundum esse, sicut Deus et intelligentiae. Unde scientia, quae de istis rebus considerat, maxime videtur esse intellectualis, et aliarum princeps sive domina ». *In Met., prooemium*, 2a.

<sup>40</sup> « Cum enim unaquaeque res sit intelligibilis secundum quod est in actu, ut dicitur in IX Metaphisice, oportet quod ipsa natura siue quiditas rei intelligatur uel secundum quod est in actu quidam, sicut accidit de ipsis formis et substantiis simplicibus, uel secundum id quod est actus eius, sicut substantie composite per suas formas, uel secundum id quod est ei loco actus, sicut materia prima per habitudinem ad formam et uacuum per priuationem locatæ; et hoc est illud ex quo unaquaeque natura suam rationem sortitur ». *In De Trinitate* q. 5, art. 3, corpus [Leon. 147, lin. 121-132].

<sup>41</sup> See *ST* I.14.1, corpus. Cf. *ST* I.7.1, corpus.

subsistent, he nevertheless here passes over the human soul without comment<sup>42</sup>. Whatever else it may be, it is not a *separate* substance (at least in this life), and so cannot be numbered among the most intelligible things. The upshot is clear: Aquinas really does have in mind a natural theology — a science of immaterial, separate substances that are above us and beyond us.

To recap what we have seen so far: we began with a nominal definition of ‘wisdom’ as the art or science that manages all others with a view to human perfection. We then identified it with the most intellectual science, and in turn identified *that* with the science of the most intelligible things. But now we seem to have hit an impasse. We have three equally good candidates for what might count as ‘the most intelligible things’ — namely, the highest causes, the most universal features, and the most immaterial beings. And we have three different sciences corresponding to those candidates — namely, *etiology*, *ontology*, and *theology*. The question that now stands before us is, how do we adjudicate between these three contenders?

Thomas’s answer is that we do *not* adjudicate between the them, because they are not really *three* at all. He explains,

«Now this triple consideration should not be attributed to diverse sciences, but to one. For the aforementioned separate substances are the universal and premier causes of being. But it belongs to the same science to consider the proper causes of some genus and the genus itself (just as natural [science] considers the principles of natural bodies). Thus, it must pertain to the same science to consider separate substances and *ens commune*, which is the genus whose common and universal causes are the aforementioned substances»<sup>43</sup>.

This passage is of crucial concern, for it is here that we find the contested quote. According to the advocate of the Aristotelian accommodation argument, when Aquinas says that ‘the aforementioned separate substances are the universal and premier causes of being’, his use of the plural is not expressive of his personal position, but rather is an act of accommodation toward Aristotle’s way of speaking. Is this a plausible reading of the text? The only way to answer that question is to pay careful attention to the moves Aquinas is making in this passage and how it relates to the larger argument.

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, *ST* I.75.2, ad 1; *QDDA* art. 1.

<sup>43</sup> «Haec autem triplex consideratio, non diversis, sed uni scientiae attribui debet. Nam praedictae substantiae separatae sunt universales et primae causae essendi. Eiusdem autem scientiae est considerare causas proprias alicuius generis et genus ipsum: sicut naturalis considerat principia corporis naturalis. Unde oportet quod ad eandem scientiam pertineat considerare substantias separatas, et ens commune, quod est genus, cuius sunt praedictae substantiae communes et universales causae». *In Met., prooemium*, 2a-b.



Recall that *scientia* in its most rigorous sense requires that we appeal to the causes of something in order to understand why that thing is the way it is. *Propter quid* knowledge of *x* involves knowledge of the causes of *x*. For this reason, Aquinas thinks that we do not need to posit two distinct sciences — an etiology and an ontology — if the highest causes studied by the former are the causes of the very genus (being *qua* being) studied by the latter. Thus, in order to be what it is — namely, a *science* of being *qua* being — ontology must also be etiology.

But what about theology? What does Aquinas do with ‘the aforementioned separate substances’? Recall the distinction we discussed earlier between what is universal in the order of predication and what is universal in the order of causality. The former is the terminus of what Aquinas calls *resolutio secundum rationem*, while the latter is the terminus of *resolutio secundum rem*<sup>44</sup>. When we follow the path of *resolutio secundum rationem*, it leads to the most universal predicates — i.e., it leads to ontology. When we follow the path of *resolutio secundum rem*, it leads to ‘the universal and premier causes of being’ — i.e., it leads to etiology. But that is not all that it leads to — it also leads to theology. This is because ‘the universal and premier causes of being’ just *are* ‘the aforementioned separate substances’. Theology and etiology study the same thing, and so turn out to be the same science.

This brings Aquinas a long way toward resolving Aristotle’s aporia. Ontology must be etiology (because it has to study the causes of being) and etiology must be theology (because the highest causes according to *resolutio secundum rem* are the separate substances). It follows by transitivity that ontology must also be theology. Our three sciences, then, are only conceptually distinct from one another. In reality, they form but a single wisdom.

Already we can see problems for the Aristotelian accommodation argument. If Aquinas does not really think that the angels count as principles of *ens commune*, then he cannot really think that the science of the highest causes is identical to the science of separate substances — i.e., he cannot really think that etiology is theology. And the problems for the Aristotelian accommodation argument only get worse as the *prooemium* continues:

«From all this, it is apparent that even though this science does consider the three [topics] previously mentioned, nevertheless it does not consider each of them as [its] subject, but only *ens commune* itself. For in a science the subject is the thing whose causes and properties we seek, not the causes of the sought-after genus. For knowledge of the causes of a genus is the goal towards which

<sup>44</sup> See AERTSEN, *Method and Metaphysics* cit., pp. 412–416.

the consideration of a science reaches. But even though the subject of this science is *ens commune*, the whole [science] is said to be about those things which are separate from matter according to being and *ratio*. This is because those things are said to be separate 'according to being and *ratio*' which not only *never can be* in matter (like God and the intellectual substances), but also *can be without* matter (like *ens commune*). But that would not happen if they depended upon matter according to being »<sup>45</sup>.

Here, Aquinas draws a distinction between (a) the *subject* of a science, (b) the *goal* of a science, and (c) the whole of what a science is *about*. In metaphysics (a) is *ens commune*, (b) is the highest causes/separate substances, and (c) is everything that can be characterized as 'separate according to being and *ratio*', which would include both (a) and (b)<sup>46</sup>. To use terminology helpfully introduced by John Wippel, (a) and (c) are 'separate' in the sense of being *negatively* or *neutrally* immaterial, while (b) is separate in the sense of being *positively* immaterial<sup>47</sup>. The former *need not* exist in matter, while the latter *cannot* exist in matter.

Aquinas's use of the term 'goal' makes it tempting to think that he awards pride of place to the theological and etioloical accounts of wisdom. But that would be a mistake. The real definition of wisdom is 'the science of being *qua* being', and we can now understand why. It is (a), not (b) or (c), that exercises the unifying force. The *reason why* the metaphysician investigates the highest causes and the separate substances is because he *must* do so in order to fully understand his proper subject of inquiry (*ens commune*). He does not study

<sup>45</sup> « Ex quo apparet, quod quamvis ista scientia praedicta tria consideret, non tamen considerat quodlibet eorum ut subiectum, sed ipsum solum ens commune. Hoc enim est subiectum in scientia, cuius causas et passiones quaerimus, non autem ipsae causae alicuius generis quaesiti. Nam cognitio causarum alicuius generis, est finis ad quem consideratio scientiae pertingit. Quamvis autem subiectum huius scientiae sit ens commune, dicitur tamen tota de his quae sunt separata a materia secundum esse et rationem. Quia secundum esse et rationem separari dicuntur, non solum illa quae nunquam in materia esse possunt, sicut Deus et intellectuales substantiae, sed etiam illa quae possunt sine materia esse, sicut ens commune. Hoc tamen non contingeret, si a materia secundum esse dependerent ». *In Met., prooemium*, 2b.

<sup>46</sup> It is unclear where Aquinas would place the properties of being in this scheme, in part because it is unclear what Aquinas thinks the properties of being actually *are*. Most Thomists identify them with the five transcendental terms (*res, unum, aliquid, verum, and bonum*) listed in *De Veritate* q. 1, art. 1, but in that passage Aquinas never refers to them as *passiones entis* or *per se accidentia entis* or *propria entis*. Rather, he places them under the heading of '*modus generalis entis*' which he contrasts with the '*modus specialis entis*' identified with the categorial division of being. I am inclined to think that the metaphysical pairs listed earlier — one and many, act and potency — are the *propria entis*, and that they fall under (c) in the division above, but that is a speculative conjecture.

<sup>47</sup> See WIPPEL, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas* cit., p. 47.

them ‘on their own terms’. In fact, Aquinas thinks that it is *not possible* for the metaphysician to study separate substances ‘on their own terms’. The limitations of the human mind preclude us from grasping the essences of such substances, and for that reason *scientia propter quid* of such substances is impossible. The best we can do is study them indirectly, i.e., insofar as they are the causes of what we *can* understand<sup>48</sup>.

It should now be clear that if the Aristotelian accommodation argument were true, then the whole point of Aquinas’s *prooemium* would be vitiated. If the angels are not principles of *ens commune*, then the science of separate substances will not be identical to the science of the highest causes. From this it follows that theology will not be the goal of ontology (since the goal of a science is knowledge of the causes of its subject-genus) and we will be left with an onto-etiology, on the one hand, and a free-floating theology, on the other hand. Since each of these sciences will have a legitimate claim to being about ‘the most intellectual things’, each of these sciences will have a legitimate claim to the title ‘wisdom’. Thus, it will be impossible for us to proceed from a nominal definition of ‘wisdom’ to a real definition, since ‘wisdom’ would not correspond to the real nature of a single science.

This is simply too high a price to pay. Aquinas must really mean what he says: separate substances — in the plural — are the universal and premier causes of being. Thus, the Aristotelian accommodation argument fails and the aporia raised in §1 offers a genuine puzzle for Aquinas’s account of metaphysics. If that is true, then we have good reason to go looking for an answer.

### III. FLANDRENSIS’S SOLUTION

Before considering Dominic of Flanders’s answer to Aquinas’s aporia, it might be good to remind ourselves what that aporia is. At the beginning of §1 we presented it as follows:

#### **Aquinas’s Aporia**

1. The angels fall under *ens commune*.
2. The angels are the universal and premier causes of *ens commune*.
3. The angels are the universal and premier causes of that under which they fall.

In §1 we both defended premise (1) and presented two possible ways of objecting to premise (2), namely, the slip-of-the-pen argument and the Aris-

<sup>48</sup> On this point Aquinas is explicit: « Unde et huiusmodi res divinae non tractantur a philosophis nisi prout sunt rerum omnium principia ». In *De Trinitate*, q. 5, art. 4.

totelian accommodation argument. While we did not find the former especially compelling, the latter was harder to dismiss. Doing so was the main goal of §2. As we saw, the only way for Aquinas's *prooemium* to work as an answer to Aristotle's aporia is if Aquinas really means what he says and endorses premise (2). Since premise (1) and premise (2) are both true, it follows that the aporia articulated in (3) is a genuine puzzle: how can the angels be the universal causes of that under which they fall? Would this not require them to be in some way causes of themselves?

These are the questions that most modern interpreters of Aquinas have overlooked, and so in this final section I would like to turn to the work of a 15<sup>th</sup> century commentator, Dominic of Flanders, for answers<sup>49</sup>. Despite being almost entirely forgotten today, Dominic (also known as 'Flandrensis') was a key figure in the world of Renaissance scholasticism in general, and of Thomistic metaphysics in particular<sup>50</sup>. His descent into obscurity is regret-

<sup>49</sup> I do so because, as best as I can tell, only one interpreter of Aquinas in the last hundred years has noticed the puzzle that we have drawn attention to in the previous sections — and his solution is almost identical to the one proposed by Flandrensis 500 years earlier. See DOOLAN, *Aquinas on Separate Substances and the Subject Matter of Metaphysics* cit., pp. 347-382

<sup>50</sup> The standard sources of information on Dominic's life are as follows: G. MEERSSEMAN, O.P., *Een Vlaamsch Wijsgeer: Dominicus van Vlaanderen*, « Thomistisch Tijdschrift Voor Katholiek Kultuurleven », 1, 1930, pp. 385-400; U. SCHIKOWSKI, *Dominicus de Flandria O. P. (†1479) Seine Schriften, Seine Bedeutung*, « Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum », 10, 1940, pp. 169-221; L. MAHIEU, *Dominique de Flandre (XVe Siècle): Sa Métaphysique*, Vrin, Paris 1942, pp. 19-55; T. KAEPEL, *Dominicus de Flandria*, in *Scriptores Ordinis Praedicatorum Medii Aevi*, vol. I, Santa Sabina, Rome 1970, pp. 315-318; A. F. VERDE, O.P., *Domenico di Fiandra: Intransigente tomista non gradito nello studio Fiorentino*, « Memorie Domenicane », 93, 1976, pp. 304-321; L. CINELLI, *Domenico Di Fiandra: la carriera di un frate Predicatore del Quattrocento fra Bologna e Firenze*, « Memorie Domenicane », 45, 2014, pp. 147-169. R.-A. Gauthier has called into question many of the dates associated with Dominic's life prior to entering the Order of Preachers. See R.-A. GAUTHIER, *Préface*, in THOMAS AQUINAS, *Sentencia libri de anima*, ed. Leonina, vol. 45/1, 1984, pp. 33\*-34\*.

With respect to Dominic's importance among followers of Aquinas, the point is visually illustrated in a striking woodcut, part of which appears as the cover page of JOHN CAPREOLUS, *On the Virtues*, trans. K. WHITE and R. CESSARIO, Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C. 2001, and the whole of which is reproduced in its entirety on the cover of D. D'ETTORE, *Analogy after Aquinas: Logical Problems, Thomistic Answers*, Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C. 2018. The image, which originally appeared in the 1621 edition of Dominic's question-commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, depicts the most important figures in the school of St. Thomas. The Angelic Doctor stands in the center, teaching, while the Thomistic theologians form a line on his right and the Thomistic philosophers form a line on his left. Separated out from each group — and seated closest to St. Thomas — are two men, each of whom is labeled 'princeps'. John Capreolus is depicted as the prince of Thomistic theologians. Dominic of Flanders is the prince of Thomistic philosophers.

A further indication of Dominic's sustained influence can be found in Francisco Suarez's *Metaphysical Disputations*. Dominic's name appears frequently in the early part of the disputa-

table, and I consider it one of the values of the present study that it makes some contribution toward raising his profile<sup>51</sup>.

What, then, is Dominic's solution to Aquinas's aporia? How did he think that created, immaterial substances could be numbered among the causes or principles of being as being, despite the fact that they also fall under the being that they are supposed to cause? When we turn to his *Summa divinae philosophiae* — a super-commentary on Aquinas's *Metaphysics* commentary — it might initially look like Flandrensis would deny this claim<sup>52</sup>.

There are two textual arguments for thinking that this is so. The first comes from a passage in *SDP* I.1.8, where Dominic defends Aquinas's position on the subject-matter of metaphysics — namely, that being *qua* being should be identified with being insofar as it is divided into the ten categories. The core of the second objection against Dominic's position runs as follows:

«The subject of any given science ought to be definable, since the middle term for demonstrating properties of the subject is either the definition of the subject (according to Aquinas) or the definition of the property, which includes the definition of the subject (according to Albert). But being cannot be de-

tions, where Suarez treats being and the transcendentals in general. In the first disputation, for example, Suarez appeals to Dominic of Flanders as the chief representative of the notion that the subject of metaphysics is being insofar as it divides immediately into the ten categories. See FRANCISCO SUÁREZ, *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, disp. I, sect. 1, n. 18, in *Opera Omnia*, vol. 25, ed. C. BERTON, Paris 1866. Jan Aertsen has recently drawn attention to the likelihood that it is Dominic, and not Suarez, who more adequately reflects Aquinas's true position on this point. See J. A. AERTSEN, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought: From Philip the Chancellor (ca. 1225) to Francisco Suárez*, Brill, Boston 2012, p. 593.

<sup>51</sup> The only book-length monograph devoted to Dominic's thought is Mahieu's, and that work is limited solely to the investigation of Dominic's *Metaphysics* commentary. More recent research into Dominic's thought has been almost entirely limited to his place within the Thomistic tradition vis-à-vis developing reflections on the analogy of being. See, for example, TAVUZZI, *Some Renaissance Thomist Divisions of Analogy*, «*Angelicum*», 70, 1993, pp. 93-121: 95-98; RIVA, *L'analogia dell'ente in Domenico di Fiandra*, «*Rivista di Filosofia Neoscolastica*», 86, 1994, pp. 287-322; E. J. ASHWORTH, *Suárez on the Analogy of Being: Some Historical Background*, «*Vivarium*», 33, 1995, pp. 68-70; D. D'ETTORE, *Dominic of Flanders' Critique of John Duns Scotus' Primary Argument for the Univocity of Being*, «*Vivarium*», 56, 2018, pp. 176-199.

<sup>52</sup> DOMINICUS DE FLANDRIA, O.P., *In Duodecim Libros Metaphysicae Aristotelis, Secundum Expositionem Eiusdem Angelici Doctoris, Lucidissimae Atque Utilis*, ed. C. MORRELLES, Coloniae Agrippinae 1621. The title under which this question-commentary on the *Metaphysics* most frequently circulated — and the title by which Dominic himself refers to it in his other works — is the *Summa divinae philosophiae*. This is the practice that I follow in the present article, and I cite the work according to the abbreviation *SDP*. This abbreviation is then followed by a Roman numeral, Arabic numeral, and Arabic numeral in order to designate the book, question, and article, respectively. For the sake of further precision, I also provide in parentheses the page number, column number (1 or 2), and column letter (i.e., the quote's vertical location within a given column, either a, b, c, or d) according to the Morrelles edition given above.

fined, since there is nothing prior to it — and every definition is given in terms of something prior»<sup>53</sup>.

What is at stake in this objection is nothing less than the scientific character of metaphysics: if it is to be a science, it must produce demonstrations. But if it is to produce demonstrations, it must have a definable subject — and *ens commune* appears to be indefinable.

Dominic responds to this objection by granting that being cannot be defined by means of a definition given in terms of proximate genus and specific difference. But he nevertheless insists that being *can* be defined either through (a) intrinsic and essential modes or through (b) extrinsic causes. Regarding the latter he says,

«[Being] can be defined by a causal definition given through the efficient and the final cause—such as when we say “a real, created being is that which is naturally apt to proceed from the first cause and is orderable to it as to its final end»<sup>54</sup>.

It is clear from the context that the ‘first cause’ and ‘final end’ that Flan-drensis has in mind is God. Moreover, it is hard to imagine what sort of efficient or final causal definition might be given for being *qua* being in angelic terms. At the very least, we can say that the angels do not seem to fit nicely into this picture of how Dominic thinks we appeal to extrinsic causes in order to defend metaphysics as a demonstrative science.

A second problematic text comes from the same article and looks to be even more damning. This is because it appears to touch directly upon Aquinas’s aporia. The objection to which Dominic is responding goes like this:

«According to St. Thomas, the separate substances are principles of the being that is the subject of this science; but it is obvious that separate substances — namely, the angels — are not principles of the being that divides into the ten

<sup>53</sup> «Subiectum cuiuslibet scientiae debet esse diffinibile, quia diffinitio subiecti est medium ad demonstrandum passionem de subiecto secundum Doctorem S<anctam> <in> 2 posteriorum, lect. 2, vel diffinitio passionis, quae includit diffinitionem subiecti, secundum Albertum; sed ens non potest diffiniri, cum non habeat aliqua priora; omnis enim diffinitio per priora datur, ut patet 2 posteriorum, lect. 15 ». *SDP* I.1.8, obj. 2 (pg. 11, col. 1d).

<sup>54</sup> «[Ens] potest tamen diffiniri diffinitione causali, quae datur per causam efficientem et finalem, ut dicendo, Ens reale creatum, est quod aptum natum est procedere a prima causa, et ad ipsam ordinabile, tanquam ad ultimum finem ». *SDP* I.1.8, ad 2 (p. 12, col. 2c-d).

categories, but rather are principles contained under the category of substance, which is the primary subjective part of being »<sup>55</sup>.

The goal of this argument is to narrow the scope of metaphysics to a more restricted domain than that of categorial being. But the way that the objector tries to achieve this goal is by denying that created separate substances are principles of categorial being — and this is precisely what is at issue in our aporia. Dominic's reply, then, should be of direct relevance. Here is what he says:

« Separate substances are said to be 'principles of being' not [such] that every separate substance whatsoever is a principle of such being, but rather because among the separate substances there is a primary one, which is the one universal cause of all things — namely, God »<sup>56</sup>.

How is this not a version of the 'slip-of-the-pen' argument (or the 'Aristotelian accommodation' argument) that we have gone to such great lengths to refute in the previous sections of this article? At first glance it certainly looks like this is exactly the move that Dominic makes in his reply. He seems to be both (a) denying that created separate substances have a causal role to play vis-à-vis *ens commune*, and (b) affirming that what Aquinas really has in mind is the causality of God.

But such a conclusion would be premature. At this point in the text Dominic is not primarily concerned with the *principles* of metaphysics, but rather with its *subject-matter*. As such, it is not unreasonable to expect that his reply here might be condensed or abbreviated vis-à-vis his explicit treatment of the principles of being as being, which comes later in the *SDP*. It is in light of those later and fuller texts that the above-quoted reply should be interpreted.

What, then, does Dominic say when he treats the topic directly? In *SDP* VI.1.1, Flandrensis asks whether or not metaphysics should inquire into the principles and causes of being as being. His third objector argues that it should not, and provides the following argument:

<sup>55</sup> « Praeterea, Secundum Doctorem Sanctum in praesenti lectione, substantiae separatae, sunt principia entis, quod est subiectum in hac scientia; sed manifestum est quod substantiae separatae, videlicet angeli, non sunt principia entis quod dividitur in decem praedicamenta; sed sunt principia contenta sub substantia, quae est principalior pars subiectiva entis. Igitur, etc. ». *SDP* I.1.8, obj. 6 (pg. 11, col. 2b).

<sup>56</sup> « Substantiae separatae dicuntur esse principia entis, non quod quaelibet substantia separata sit principium talis entis, sed quia inter substantias separatas est una prima, quae est una universalis causa omnium rerum, videlicet Deus ». *SDP* I.1.8 ad 6 (p. 12, col. 1d).

«If there *were* some principle investigated by this science, then, more than anything else, it would be the separate substances. But that cannot be, since separate substances (e.g., angels) are not the causes of created being inasmuch as it is being — otherwise, they would be causes of themselves, and that is absurd»<sup>57</sup>.

Even more than the objection and reply just under consideration, this objection from *SDP* VI.1.1 perfectly captures the issue at the heart of Aquinas's aporia. If created separate substances were causes of being as being, then they would be causes of themselves. Why? Because created separate substances themselves fall under being as being.

Dominic's lengthy and nuanced reply to this objection deserves quoting in full. He says,

«To the third [objection] it must be said that the separate substances are called principles of being not with respect to *all* the parts of being, but rather because they are the principles of heavenly motion, which is the cause of all generable and corruptible things and, consequently, of all accidents. Thus, they are called 'principles of accidents' and 'principles of substances' — though not of every [substance] whatsoever, but rather of every *corporeal* substance whatsoever — either with respect to being or with respect to changing. But God is the principle and cause of every created being whatsoever. Hence, when by [the words] 'separate substances' we understand both God and the angels, then if we take them together they will be the causes of being universally. But if we are speaking distributively, then not every separated substance whatsoever will be the cause of every being whatsoever, but rather [they will be causes of being] in the way explained above. For we seek the causes of being of accidents — namely, substance itself — and we seek further the causes of material substances, and we even seek the causes of immaterial substances (as is clear in *Metaphysics* XII, lect. 12, where Aristotle concludes that there is one [such] principle). And because every created being is either material or immaterial, it follows that the causes of every created being whatsoever are sought out in this science»<sup>58</sup>.

<sup>57</sup> «Preterea, si in hac scientia, quaererentur aliqua principia, maxime hoc esset substantiae separate; sed hoc non potest esse. Quod sic patet: quia substantia separate, ut puta angeli, non sunt causae entis create, inquantum est ens; alias, essent causae sui ipsius. Quod est inconueniens. Ergo &c.». *SDP* VI.1.1 obj. 3 (p. 414, col. 2b).

<sup>58</sup> «Ad tertium, dicendum quod substantiae separatae dicuntur esse principia entis, non quantum ad omnes partes entis, sed quia sunt principia motus caeli, qui est causa omnium generabilium et corruptibilium, et per consequens omnium accidentium; ideo dicuntur principia accidentium et principia substantiae, non cuiuslibet, sed substantiae corporalis cuiuslibet, vel quantum ad esse, vel quantum ad moveri. Deus, autem est principium, et causa



To better understand what is going on in this passage, it may be helpful to recall (1) that Dominic thinks that the subject-matter of metaphysics is *ens commune*, or being *qua* being, which he identifies with *categorical* being, and (2) that Dominic thinks of the categories as subjective parts of being, of which substance is the foremost part<sup>59</sup>. In this passage, we find him bringing these two points together. This allows him to assert that something can be a cause of *ens commune* with respect to one (or more) of its parts, and yet not be a cause of *ens commune* with respect to its full scope. Moreover, Dominic identifies at least two parts of *ens commune* of which separate substances genuinely *are* the causes of being: (a) accidents, and (b) corruptible substances.

Also striking is the way in which Dominic has the angels play their causal role — they do so precisely in and through their movement of the heavenly spheres. This should call to mind the passage from Aquinas's *De Trinitate* commentary that we quoted earlier in §1. There, we saw Aquinas say that

«the 'divine science' handed down by the philosophers considers the angels (which they call 'the intelligences') according to the same *ratio* under which [it considers] the premiere cause (which is God), inasmuch as they are also the secondary principles of things — at least by means of the motion of the spheres — [principles] to which no physical motion can occur»<sup>60</sup>.

While Aquinas merely tells us *that* the metaphysician considers the angels as principles on account of their role as celestial movers, Dominic explains

cuiuslibet entis creati. Unde per substantias separatas, intelligendo Deum, et angelos simul, sic sunt causae entis, in universali, si collective sumantur. Si vero distributive loquamur, sic, non quaelibet substantiae separatae, sunt causa cuiuslibet entis, sed secundum modum expositum: quaerimus enim causas essendi accidentium, scilicet ipsam substantiam, ut patet in principio septimi huius, lect. 1, quaerimus ulterius, causas substantiarum materialium, ut patet in 12 huius, lect. 3. Et quaerimus etiam causas substantiarum immaterialium, ut patet in eodem 12, lect. ult., ubi concludit, unum esse principem. Et quia omne ens creatum, vel est materialis, vel immaterialis, ideo in hac scientia, quaeruntur causae, cuiuslibet entis creati». SDP VI.1.1, ad 3 (pg. 416, col. 2b-c).

<sup>59</sup> For Dominic's account of the difference between the 'foremost part' of a science, the 'subject of attribution' of a science, and the 'common' subject of a science, see DOMINICUS DE FLANDRIA, O.P., *In D. Thomae Aquinatis Commentaria Super Libris Posteriorum Analyticorum Aristotelis: Quaestiones Perutiles*, Venetiis, 1587, I, q. 1, a. 3, *corpus* (pp. 7-8, col. 2-1). [Hereafter, PA]. For his account of substance as the foremost part of metaphysical science, see SDP I.1.6. It is useful to read this text in conjunction with what Flandrensis says about the relationship between the *ratio entis* and the *ratio substantiae* in SDP IV.2.6 *corpus*.

<sup>60</sup> «Sed in scientia divina quam philosophi tradunt consideratur de angelis quos intelligentias vocant, eadem ratione qua et de prima causa, quae Deus <est>, in quantum ipsi etiam sunt rerum principia secunda, saltem per motum orbium. Quibus quidem nullus motus physicus accidere potest». *In De Trinitate*, q. 5, art. 4, ad 3.

why this is so. By acting upon the heavenly bodies, the angels cause the whole order of generability and corruptibility upon which categorial accidents and corruptible substances depend.

The clarification that this dependency is «either with respect to being or with respect to changing» is also noteworthy. It follows upon Dominic's insistence that the angels are not the causes of *all* substances, but only of corporeal substances, and it seems to imply a cascading, modulating causal influence. With respect to incorruptible corporeal substances, the angels are only the cause of motion. But *qua* causes of such motion, they in turn cause both the being and the motion of corruptible corporeal substances. Finally, in and through their causal influence on the whole range of corporeal substance, the angels are also the cause of both the being and the motion of accidents.

Thus, it is clear that the reply to the sixth objection in SDP I.1.8 is a heavily abbreviated text. It is true that, on their own (i.e. «speaking distributively») the angels are not causes of being for *ens commune* in its totality — for that, we need God. Nevertheless, their causal influence over *ens commune* is vast, for the only beings of which they are not the cause of *being* are (1) themselves, and (2) incorruptible corporeal substances. With respect to the being of (3) corruptible corporeal substances, and (4) accidents, the angels really are causes of being as being — for they cause the very *grade* of being under which such beings fall, namely, the grade of generability/corruptibility<sup>61</sup>. For this reason, they can rightly be called causes and principles of being *qua* being. Nevertheless, they are not the principles and causes of being *qua* being precisely insofar as they fall under it — for God alone is the

<sup>61</sup> Though Dominic does not explicitly use the language of 'grades' of being in this text, such language would have been familiar to Dominic from Aquinas. See, for example, *In Div. Nom.*, chapter 5, lect. 2, where Aquinas says, «Circa primum, tria facit: primo, distinguit gradus entium, dicens eos esse a Deo; secundo, subiungit gradus supremorum entium; ibi: et quidem et cetera; tertio, distinguit gradus inferiorum entium; ibi: et animae et cetera. Dicit ergo primo quod ex universali causa omnium quae Deus est, sunt substantiae Angelorum, Deo similium quae sunt intelligibiles, inquantum sunt immateriales et sunt intellectuales, inquantum habent virtutem intelligendi se et alia, et iste est primus gradus substantiarum, quae nec corpora sunt, nec corporibus unita. Secundus gradus est substantiarum quae non sunt corpora, sed corporibus unita sunt; et quantum ad hoc dicit: et animarum. Tertius gradus est substantiarum corporalium; et quantum ad hoc dicit: et omnis mundi naturae. In quarto gradu entium, sunt accidentia quae sunt in novem generibus. Quintus gradus est eorum quae non sunt in rerum natura, sed in sola cogitatione, quae dicuntur entia rationis, ut genus, species, opinio et huiusmodi; et quantum ad hos duos gradus dicit quod a Deo sunt quocumque modo aliqua dicantur inesse aliis, sicut accidentia aut esse secundum cogitationem, sicut entia rationis». The first four grades of being mentioned by Aquinas seem to align perfectly with the fourfold distinction made by Dominic in the text just cited.

cause of being for incorporeal substances and incorruptible corporeal substances. Thus, Dominic offers a way to simultaneously affirm both (a) that angels are counted among the principles of *ens commune*, and (b) that angels fall under *ens commune*.

Just how plausible is Dominic's answer to Aquinas's aporia, considered on its own terms? What further questions might we raise by way of challenge to this answer? Three questions come to mind<sup>62</sup>:

**Question 1:** Does Dominic's answer entail that the heavenly bodies are also causes of being *qua* being?

**Question 2:** Does Dominic's answer require the angels to be the causes of *all nine* categories of accident?

**Question 3:** Does Dominic's answer amount to anything more than a sophisticated version of the slip-of-the-pen or Aristotelian-accommodation argument?

With respect to the first question, the answer is 'no'. To see why, it will help to consider what (presumably) the argument for an affirmative answer would look like. The following seems plausible:

**Affirmative Argument**

- (a) Whatever is a cause of the grade of generable/corruptible being is a cause of *ens commune*.
- (b) The heavenly bodies are causes of the grade of generable/corruptible being.
- (c) The heavenly bodies are causes of *ens commune*.

Though Dominic does not address an argument such as this directly, his qualification regarding how the angels can be called 'principles of substance' in *SDP* VI.1.1 ad 3 is pertinent. There, we saw him say that the angels are principles « not of every [substance] whatsoever, but rather of every corporeal substance whatsoever — *either with respect to being or with respect to changing* ». I take this to mean that Dominic thinks the angels are principles of *changing* for incorruptible corporeal substances (the heavenly bodies) and principles of *being* (as well as of changing) for corruptible corporeal substances (sublunary substances). But it does not follow from this that the heavenly bodies must *also* be principles of being for sublunary substances. Why not? Because

<sup>62</sup> I am grateful to Thérèse Cory for bringing these objections to my attention.

they might simply be principles of *changing* for such substances. Remember that the heavenly bodies are not the causes of their own motion — the separate substances are — and it is the *motion* of the heavenly bodies that causes the grade of generable/corruptible being. Thus, while any instance of generation or corruption will reduce back to the *motion* of the heavenly bodies as its cause, the next step in that (efficient causal) reduction will move from heavenly motions to *separate* substances, not from heavenly motions to incorruptible *corporeal* substances. If this is right, then the minor premise of the affirmative argument is false and Dominic's answer to Aquinas's aporia does not entail that heavenly bodies also be numbered among the principles of being *qua* being.

The second question raised above was whether Dominic's answer would require the angels to be the causes of *all nine* categories of accident. An affirmative answer to this question would seem to present a problem for his solution, since the angels' status as principles of being is supposed to obtain in virtue of their causing heavenly motion, and yet some categories of accidents do not seem to depend upon such motion for their existence<sup>63</sup>. Thus, if Dominic's answer requires commitment to the idea that angels are causes of being for all nine categories of accident, then even on his own principles it would seem to commit him to something false.

The easiest way to respond to this line of argument would simply be to accept it, and insist that for Dominic the angels are the cause of being for *many* categories of accident, but not for *all* the categories of accident. Unfortunately, this response is not easy to square with the text. As we have seen, Dominic says that the motion of the heavenly bodies is «the cause of *all* generable and corruptible things and, consequently, of *all* accidents»<sup>64</sup>. That the causality here in question is a causality of being and not merely of changing is clear from the fact that the separate substances are supposed to be principles of being precisely on account of the fact that they are the causes of heavenly motion. The natural reading of the text, then, is that it

<sup>63</sup> Suppose (for Dominic, counterfactually) that the angels were *not* the causes of motion for the heavenly bodies. In such a scenario, accidental categories like quality and relation would presumably still exist, since the qualities and relations of the angels themselves would not depend upon such motion. Moreover, it is plausible that even *quantity* would exist in such a scenario, since the (*ex hypothesi* unmoved, though moveable) heavenly bodies would still be corporeal, and so quantified.

<sup>64</sup> «Ad tertium, dicendum quod substantiae separatae dicuntur esse principia entis, non quantum ad omnes partes entis, sed quia sunt principia motus caeli, qui est causa omnium generabilium et corruptibilium, et per consequens omnium accidentium». *SDP* VI.1.1, ad 3 (pg. 416, col. 2b). Emphasis mine.

says the heavenly motions are the cause of being for *some* substances and *all* accidents. Nevertheless, it is possible that Dominic intended the 'generable and corruptible' qualification to carry over from the word 'things' to the word 'accidents'. If this were so, then he would be making the more modest (and more defensible) claim that the angels are the cause of being for all generable/corruptible substances and all generable/corruptible accidents<sup>65</sup>. Such an interpretation would absolve Dominic of the accusation that he has contradicted his own principles, but it also requires the interpreter to place more emphasis on the notion of *grades* of being (e.g., corruptible/incorruptible substances/accident) than is obvious from the text.

What about Question 3? Does Dominic's answer to Aquinas's aporia really amount to anything more than a sophisticated version of the slip-of-the-pen argument? One might be excused for thinking that it does not. Recall the distinction that Dominic makes between understanding 'separate substances' as (a) meaning 'God and the angels' taken together, and (b) meaning 'God and the angels' taken distributively. When taken together, the proposition 'separate substances are the principles of being' will be true without qualification, since nothing falling under *ens commune* is without *some* separate substance as its principle of being. But when speaking distributively, the proposition 'separate substances are the principles of being' will be true only in a qualified way, since not every separate substance will be the principle of being for *everything* that falls under *ens commune* — no angel is a principle of being for itself, or for another created separate substance, or for an incorruptible corporeal substance. But why would this distinction not amount to an admission of the fact that created separate substances are not *really* principles of being, but rather principles of some *parts* (or 'grades') of being? And if that is what this distinction amounts to, then Dominic's answer will start to look suspiciously similar to the slip-of-the-pen argument.

<sup>65</sup> It is worth pointing out that the angels will also be the cause of being for their own *incorruptible* accidents (e.g., their incorporeal qualities, relations, etc.), since all accidents depend for their being upon the substances in which they inhere. The angels will not, however, be the cause of being for such accidents in the same way in which they are the cause of being for the generable/corruptible accidents of sublunary substances — for the latter causality is mediated through the motion of the heavenly spheres, while the former is not.

It is also worth pointing out that the observation just made is insufficient to diffuse the pressure exerted by Question 2. Even if we admit that the angels are the cause of being both for their own incorruptible accidents and for all generable/corruptible accidents, there would still remain some accidents for which they do *not* seem to be the cause — namely, incorruptible corporeal accidents (e.g., the quantity of the heavenly bodies) and non-angelic incorporeal accidents (e.g., the intellectual powers, habits, and operations of human beings).

This is a powerful objection, but I do not think it leaves Dominic entirely without response. Remember that the Latin language's lack of an article renders the phrase *ens inquantum ens* ambiguous. Does it mean 'being as being' or does it mean 'a being insofar as it is a being'? If the former, then to ask about the principle or principles of *ens inquantum ens* is to ask about the principle or principles of *ens commune* in such a way as to encompass everything of which '*ens*' is predicable. If the latter, then to ask about the principle or principles of *ens inquantum ens* is to ask about the principle or principles of some being precisely insofar as it falls under *ens commune*. And, though related, those are two subtly different questions. The former is an extensional question, while the latter is an intensional question, since the former focuses on the principles of *all* beings, while the latter focuses on the principles of *all the being of some* being.

Dominic's distinction between taking 'separate substances' together vs. taking 'separate substances' distributively speaks to this point. What he is saying is that each angel is a principle of *ens inquantum ens* or *ens commune* in the sense that it is the principle of *some* being precisely insofar as that being falls under *ens commune*. Consider, for example, my suffering a papercut. The angels are not specific principles of that passion *qua papercut*. Nor are they generic principles of that passion *qua cut*. But they are principles of that passion *qua passion*, for there would be no accidental category of passion were it not for the angelic motion of the heavenly bodies causing the generable/corruptible order. Moreover, since Dominic insists that the sense of '*ens*' at issue here divides immediately and analogically into the ten categories, it follows that what it is for a passion to be *a being* is nothing other than for that passion to be a passion<sup>66</sup>. Thus, by being the principles of my papercut *qua passion* the angels are also the principles of my papercut *qua being*. And the same will be true both with respect to (some) other accidental categories and with respect to corruptible substances<sup>67</sup>. But this does *not* entail that each angel will be a principle of *ens inquantum ens* in the sense of being a principle of *ens commune* taken as a whole. Only God can be a principle of *ens inquantum ens* in that sense, for such a principle cannot fall under that of which it is the principle — and God alone does not fall under *ens commune*.

<sup>66</sup> See, for example, Dominic's account of the analogicity of *ens* vis-à-vis substance and accident at *SDP* IV.2, especially articles 1-7.

<sup>67</sup> This becomes even clearer when we remember that substance, when taken as a metaphysical genus, is analogical. Thus, what it is for a corruptible substance to be a substance is analogically diverse from what it is for an incorruptible substance to be a substance. The principles of a corruptible substance *qua corruptible substance* will, then, also be its principles *qua substance*. And insofar as they are its principles *qua substance*, they will also be its principles *qua being*.

Thus, Dominic seems to have plausible responses available for all three critical questions raised above. In providing those responses, I have tried to keep as close to Dominic's text as possible. But now I want to bring this article to a close with something far more speculative — a suggestion that bears directly upon the last two questions under discussion. I think that Dominic may well have been in a position to make a substantively stronger claim than the one that he actually did make. Namely, Dominic could have affirmed that the angels are secondary causes of being *qua* being, full stop (i.e., even 'taken distributively'). As we have already seen, Dominic thinks that the subject-matter of metaphysics — *ens commune* or *ens inquantum ens* — is being as divided immediately into the ten categories. So understood, being is not univocal, but rather analogical and participative according to the special modes of being designated by those categories. If this is correct, then *ens commune* would not be what it is were it not for the ten categories. And if *ens commune* is what it is on account of the ten categories, then, if there were not *ten* categories, it would follow that *ens commune* would be otherwise than it is.

But why are there ten categories? There are ten categories only on the condition that there are nine accidents. But there are nine accidents only on the condition that there are generable and corruptible corporeal substances<sup>68</sup>. And given Flandrensis's reply, there are generable and corruptible corporeal substances only on the condition that created separate substances function as the unmoved movers of the celestial spheres<sup>69</sup>. It would seem to follow, then, that *ens commune* taken as a whole would not be what it is were it not for angelic causal influence. Thus, it seems that Dominic could have maintained — even though he did not — that the angels are principles of *ens commune* in its full scope.

<sup>68</sup> It is clear from the text quoted above that Dominic thinks this is the case. Why he thinks this is the case is less clear. One could easily imagine an argument that goes like this: incorruptible substances (whether corporeal or incorporeal) do not undergo action and passion. Thus, were there no corruptible substances, there would be no categories of action and passion, and so there would not be *ten* categories. But Dominic seems to be committed to a stronger claim: he seems to think that *all nine* categories of accident depend upon corruptible substance.

<sup>69</sup> This is not to say that the only way for God to make a world in which there are ten categories would be for God to make a world in which there are created separate substances that move the celestial spheres. Presumably God could move the spheres immediately without creating separate substances. Rather, the claim is that, given God's choice to create separate substances that move the heavenly spheres, the being of the accidental categories depends upon the causal activity of such substances.

## IV. SUMMARY

This article began by drawing attention to an overlooked puzzle pertaining to Thomas Aquinas's account of the principles of being. That puzzle ran as follows:

**Aquinas's Aporia**

1. The angels fall under *ens commune*.
2. The angels are the universal and premier causes of *ens commune*.
3. The angels are the universal and premier causes of that under which they fall.

Since (3) is problematic and denying (1) would require attributing flagrantly contradictory metaphysical commitments to Aquinas, we considered two possible avenues for denying premise (2), namely, the slip-of-the-pen argument and the Aristotelian-accommodation argument. The former was seen to be highly implausible, given the repeated and systematic character of the supposed 'slip'. The latter, however, merited more serious consideration. Nevertheless, a close reading of the *prooemium* to Aquinas's commentary on the *Metaphysics* revealed that the success of his argument — intended to resolve an earlier Aristotelian aporia regarding the subject-matter of metaphysics — depends upon the truth of premise (2). Thus, we concluded that Aquinas's aporia is genuine.

For a resolution to this aporia, we turned to the work of Dominic of Flanders, a largely-forgotten 15th century scholastic metaphysician. According to Dominic, created separate substances can indeed be universal and premier causes of *ens commune*, under which they fall, but without being universal and premier causes of *ens commune* precisely insofar as they fall under it. This is because their universal causality over *ens commune* is intensional rather than extensional. They are not the principles and causes of *all* beings, but they are the principles and causes of *all the being* of some beings. In other words, they are the principles and causes of some beings precisely insofar as those beings fall under *ens commune*. They exercise this sort of causality because, insofar as they are the unmoved movers of the heavenly bodies, they are also universal causes of the entire order of generable and corruptible being — for there could be no such substances (or accidents) were it not for the motion of the heavenly spheres. Thus, Dominic saw the angels as not merely the causes of *motion* for such substances (and accidents), but also as the causes of their *being*. This solution allowed him to accept both the premises and the conclusion of Aquinas's aporia in such a way as to diffuse its



problematic character — the angels are the universal and premier causes of that under which they fall (i.e., *ens commune*) for some *other* beings, though not for themselves.

Dominic should receive high marks, not only for his recognition of an oft-overlooked puzzle in the metaphysics of Aquinas, but also for his ingenious solution to that puzzle. Weaving together Aquinas's cosmological and ontological commitments, Dominic offered an account of how created separate substances could both — along with God — serve as the principles of *ens commune*, and — along with all other creatures — fall under *ens commune*. His example is further proof (if further proof were needed) of the fruitfulness of *aporiae* and puzzles in the history of metaphysics.

It goes without saying that, given the prominent role in Dominic's solution to Aquinas's *aporia* played by (a) the existence of celestial spheres and (b) angelic movement thereof, contemporary proponents of Aquinas's metaphysics could never adopt Dominic's solution as their own. But neither can they ignore the problem it was meant to solve. As we have shown, 'Aquinas's *aporia*' picks out a genuine tension within Aquinas's metaphysical thought — one that bears upon such fundamental issues as the subject-matter of metaphysics and the ultimate principles to which the metaphysician appeals in order to explain that subject. Thus, if today's Thomists want to present Aquinas's metaphysics in a plausible and systematic way, they must at least imitate Dominic in his effort to resolve Aquinas's *aporia*, even if they do not imitate him in the answer given. But they need not view such a project as a threat. In fact, they might plausibly view such a project as progress. For, as Aristotle himself pointed out in the *Metaphysics*,

« It is because of wondering at things that humans, both now and at first, began to do philosophy. At the start, they wondered at those of the puzzles that were close to hand, then, advancing little by little, they puzzled over greater issues »<sup>70</sup>.

<sup>70</sup> *Metaphysics*, A, 2, 982b11-14.

## ABSTRACT

*Separate Substances and the Principles of Being as Being: Aquinas's (†1274) Aporia and Flandrensis's (†1479) Answer*

This article draws attention to an oft-overlooked puzzle arising from Thomas Aquinas's account of the principles of metaphysics, and an even more oft-overlooked answer found in the work of the 15<sup>th</sup> century metaphysician, Dominic of Flanders. §1 provides an account of Aquinas's aporia, which arises from the fact that he holds, on the one hand, that created separate substances are among the principles of being *qua* being, and, on the other hand, that created separate substances fall under being *qua* being. §2 defends the genuineness of this aporia with a detailed analysis of the *prooemium* to Aquinas's *Metaphysics* commentary. Finally, §3 shows how Dominic of Flanders resolves this aporia with an account of the role of separate substances as celestial movers that renders them not only cosmological principles of change, but also ontological principles of being.

PHILIP-NERI REESE, O.P., University of Notre Dame  
philip.neri.reese@nd.edu

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