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# What Must There be to Account for Being?

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Senior Honors Research Project

25 April, 2016

What Must There be to Account for Being?<sup>1</sup>

### **Section 1: Introduction.**

The term ‘being’ will be employed in this paper to refer to the ontological feature of a thing corresponding to the non-content related feature of a concept which signifies that a given entity actually is.<sup>2</sup> This essay will not provide even a brief overview of the many different positions on being that are presented by philosophers throughout history. For example, it will not be examining the interesting question of whether a thinker about being is necessarily presupposed when speaking of being. I do not mean to disregard these many important philosophical issues. Rather, I merely wish to bracket them in order to focus on a single presupposition, and examine one of its implications: On the assumption that there are some things, what might account for their being? I do not intend to settle any questions about the existence or nonexistence of anything, but merely to point out that if we are ever going to operate from the assumption that something does exist, it seems reasonable to ask about what accounts for its being.

In section one, I will attempt to establish that the discussion of any aspect of a thing depends upon considering that thing as an entity, namely that it has being. Sections two through five will focus on my chief question; what might account for the being of

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<sup>1</sup> I wish to thank Dr. Li Vecchi, Dr. Huss, and Dr. Ducharme for their insightful comments and help in the revision process of this essay. As well Sylvia Juscak for all of her help in completing the process.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's on Interpretation*, book I lesson 5 number 18, English trans. *Aristotle on Interpretation: Commentary by St. Thomas and Cajetan*, J.T. Oesterle, Milwaukee 1962.

things. In particular, in section two, I will examine whether or not being could be accounted for as a feature of a thing. In section three, I will examine whether or not being could be accounted for as part of a thing's essence or definition. In section four, I will consider the question of whether the being of a thing could be accounted for as any part of a thing or whether it must be accounted for by a source outside of that thing. In section five, I will propose a possible answer to the question of section four. Finally, in section six, I will provide a brief overview of some of the qualities that an outside source for a things being might possess.

### **1.1. Does inquiry begin with being?**

Are all lines of inquiry and fields of study founded upon a metaphysical assumption? Whenever we study any specific aspect of an object must we necessarily start from the assumed fact that it is, before we can continue to inquire how it is. One might claim that no metaphysical assumption is required in order to move forward. For example, if I were interested in studying the mathematical properties of a triangle I would not have to make any metaphysical commitment about the existence or nonexistence of the triangle. I could simply put those questions to the side and focus on what its mathematical properties would be.

While this claim may describe an actual procedure, there is another question which it does not address. It is one thing to ask whether one must make a metaphysical commitment before studying an object. It is quite another to ask whether one must have a working metaphysical assumption in order to study the object. A similar distinction in philosophy of science contrasts metaphysical with methodological naturalism.

Methodological naturalism is the doctrine that in order to conduct scientific study

of objects in the natural world, one does not need to explicitly oppose the existence of supernatural entities by embracing metaphysical naturalism. Rather, methodological naturalism demands only that one should conduct one's studies as though there were no supernatural entities, confining their theories to natural objects, and natural influences and effects.

Similarly, it seems that while a commitment to the existence of a given object is not necessary in order to study a particular aspect of that object, one must conduct one's study as though that object were existent. For instance, if we return to the triangle example, when we inquire as to its mathematical properties, we are actually saying, "Let us consider that there is in fact a triangle, and let us study its mathematical properties." We do not, by contrast, begin by saying, "Let us consider that there is not in fact a triangle, and let us study its mathematical properties." If the assumption of the triangles nonbeing were truly our starting point, we could not possibly inquire as to the mathematical properties of such a triangle, for it would have no mathematical properties, or properties of any kind whatsoever.

Why belabor the point that any inquiry must begin with at least a methodological assumption about being? There are two reasons. First, since the starting place is this presupposition, it is reasonable to investigate the possible foundation of such an assumption. Second, while metaphysical commitment is not required, in matter of practice, such a commitment is often tacitly embraced. What I mean to say is that the claim that there are some things is not the sort of claim one can be practically skeptical about.

The applied sciences, such as engineering or applied physics, for example, are

often presented as having little interest in metaphysical questions. The word ‘applied’ here, is meant to signify that these are the sorts of sciences that can be used for real world applications. Of course the idea that there are real world applications signifies a commitment to there actually being a real world. For example, when engineers are designing a bridge, they tacitly assume their work will be used for the construction of a real bridge. Otherwise their work would be futile. My point here is that if we ever truly believe that studying other aspects of given objects can have real world implications, this illustrates a commitment to actual being, which further underlines the importance of inquiring as to what might account for being. This does not provide any proof of course that anything actually is, but it demonstrates a practical commitment to the position that somethings exist.

## **1.2. Is the knowledge of being certain?**

For the purposes of this paper I am not interested in a thorough investigation into the certainty of the claim that anything actually has being. I am interested in a different question: Assuming that I am correct that much scientific practice presupposes the being of its objects, my question is this: What could account for the possibility of being? Nonetheless, a few words on the question of the certainty of being will provide some perspective on the question of what might account for the possibility of being.

Descartes' methodological doubt provides a convenient starting point for examining the question of whether or not anything exists. In *Meditations on First Philosophy* as Descartes attempts to call into doubt everything which can be doubted, he famously reaches the conclusion, “I think, therefore I am.”<sup>3</sup> Even if he may be mistaken

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<sup>3</sup> Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 1641, Trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane, *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, Cambridge University Press, 1911, Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 1996, page 9.

about everything which he perceives about reality, in order for him to be mistaken he must at least exist as a conscious mind capable of producing thought.

I do not intend to merely echo Descartes here. In fact, I wish to criticize him. I believe Descartes fails to take his methodological doubt far enough. When examining all possibilities for doubt, or reasons he might be mistaken, Descartes considers the possibilities of errors of the senses, dreams, and a deceptive god. It seems that even those things which seem most self-evident, such as mathematical laws, come into question under the possibility of a deceptive god. An all-powerful god could influence Descartes' very thought process so that every time he goes to add two and two, he gets four, even though this is not the sum of two and two in reality. However, even in such a case it seems that in order for this god to be deceiving him, Descartes must exist, at least as a thinking thing<sup>4</sup>.

I can imagine a thought experiment, which could show how I might be mistaken about even the fact that I am a conscious substance. Let us imagine that all there was in reality was a spinning vortex of energy. Now, periodically this vortex spits out random bursts of energy, and these bursts of energy form thoughts. Some of these thoughts have attached to them the false idea that they are in fact substances with a mental history currently considering a given subject. In reality these thoughts are merely products of random bursts of energy, which have no history, and exist only for an instant before dissipating back into the vortex. Through such a thought experiment, I can call into question even that the thinking inheres in a substance, while still being able to offer an explanation for the appearance of a consciousness. This is not meant to be a refutation of Descartes' claim that the existence of thought is undeniable, but merely a refutation of

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<sup>4</sup> Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, pages 6-9.

the claim that the thinking must adhere in a substance.

What cannot be denied even by taking the doubt this far, is that there is still something, namely the current occasion of thought. If, in an attempt to doubt everything which might be doubted, I were to start by imagining that there is absolutely nothing, then no explanation whatsoever could be given for the fact that it appears as though there is something. While it may be possible to call into question even the existence of a conscious substance, with a history and continuing consciousness, what cannot be doubted is the existence of consciousness itself. To deny the existence of consciousness, seems to require the existence of consciousness.<sup>5</sup> One may wonder what an argument for the existence of consciousness has to do with the question of what accounts for being. As I have stated, the question I intend to examine about the source of being follows from the assumption that there are some things. Consciousness is one example of such a thing.

## **Section 2: Being as merely a feature?**

One possible response to the question of what accounts for being is to claim that being is merely a feature of whatever entities are found to exist. By feature I mean merely any quality which can be attributed to an entity. Let us examine a specific example of such an account. That is, one particular version of the materialist view of the universe. Specifically, the version of materialism which accounts for the existence of the universe by claiming that matter has always existed and that it merely changes in shape, size, and arrangement. This sort of an account stretches all the way back to Democritus<sup>6</sup> and his atomic theory. It would explain the being of matter by claiming that to be is a feature of

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<sup>5</sup> This observation about the being of consciousness was pointed out to me in lecture by Prof. Joseph Li Vecchi fall 2014, The University of Akron. Cf his “Quine and Aquinas: on what there is”, *The Modern Schoolman*, 2010, 207-223, pages 216-217.

<sup>6</sup> C.C.W. Taylor, *The Atomists: Leucippus and Democritus. Fragments, A Text and Translation with Commentary*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999.

brute matter. The reason that matter is, is simply that to be is something which is always found in brute matter.

Such an account requires us to ask what we mean by saying that being is a “feature” of brute matter. We cannot mean it the way we would when referring to other features, such as the greenness of grass because features such as that, can be observed empirically. Empirical features of an object are those which are observed via the senses. For instance, if one wanted to focus on the roughness or smoothness of an object, they could demonstrate precisely what feature of the object they were discussing, by feeling the object, and describing the particular feeling of roughness or smoothness.

However it is not possible to do the same thing with the being of an object. If we took an object, and began to list all of its different features, we could then turn back to the object and use our senses to match the list of features up with the physical features of the object. However if we listed being as one of these features, we would have nothing in the physical object to turn to and say 'this is the being of the object'. Being is not something which can itself be observed through the senses. Therefore, being is not an empirical feature. The ontological difference between a thing and its being is discussed in the next section in relation to Aquinas' distinction between being and essence.

However, the point I wish to make here is that if we want to claim that there is an object possessing physical features which we can empirically observe, then we simply cannot deny the being of that object. Now, it is evident that one may discuss the features of some object which one does not hold to exist, such as a mythological creature. I do not mean to deny this. I merely wish to point out that in the cases where we claim that some object actually has some set of physical features in reality, one cannot deny the



being of that object while asserting that it has existent physical features. This presents a problem for the particular materialist account we were examining, the one which states that there is only matter and matter has simply always been. Presumably, one who holds to such a materialist account would hold that the material universe is really existent. If only matter exists, then it seems that all features of the universe (and of matter itself) should be empirical features. However, if we want to claim that either material objects or matter in general exist, we find that their existence is not a feature which can be accounted for empirically.

### **Section 3: Being in the Essence? Aquinas on the real distinction**

Since being is not an empirical feature, as was shown in the previous section, perhaps it is simply in the nature of everything which is, to be. Perhaps whatever is by its very definition has being. This is exactly the question which Aquinas takes up in his work *On Being and Essence*, when he discusses the nature of the distinction between being and essence which he calls “real” as opposed to purely conceptual. In order to explicate and clarify the relevant arguments from Aquinas a brief definition is needed for some of his terminology. Also, some background information is needed on some of the theories he is using for the basis of his arguments. These will allow for a better understanding of Aquinas’ relevant arguments about being.

For the purposes of this paper the term ‘essence’ can be thought of as what corresponds to a thing’s definition. In chapter one of *On Being and Essence* Aquinas gives four senses of the word ‘essence’, one of which is the ‘quiddity’ meaning definition.<sup>7</sup> When Aquinas mentions something being within or outside of the essence of

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, 1252-56, Trans. Robert T. Miller, New York: Fordham U, 1997, *Internet History Sourcebooks*, Fordham University, page 229. Quiddity, from the Latin “quid est” meaning

a given entity, this can be understood as saying that the given characteristic either is or is not a part of the definition of the given entity. For example, it could be stated that it is the essence of a plant to be a living thing which possesses a nutritive capacity, by which I mean it takes in nutrients for survival. Anything which does not take in nutrients of some kind cannot be rightly called a plant.

### **3.1. Form and Matter.**

In this text, Aquinas makes an argument that being is really distinct from essence. The claim is that to exist is not in the essence or definition of most substances. In order to defend this claim, Aquinas distinguishes between what he calls compound substances, which are substances composed of both form and matter, and simple substances, which if they exist, would be composed of form alone. One might ask what reason Aquinas has to assume a hylomorphic ontology, meaning an ontological view which considers entities to have a composition of form and matter. The reason is epistemological.

Form is the second sense of the term ‘essence’, of which Aquinas speaks. He says that form is related to the certitude of everything.<sup>8</sup> For Aquinas, knowledge logically requires something unchanging, and form is the unchanging essence of any entity. However, it is clear that those entities which exist in our natural world are constantly growing and changing in many ways. This is where matter comes in. Prime matter is simply pure potentiality, it is what accounts for the possibility of unchanging forms existing in a changing world.

### **3.2. Substances.**

In *On Being and Essence* Aquinas tells us that a substance is simple if it does not

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“what is it?”.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, page 229.

have a composition of form and matter, but is form alone. A simple substance does not need matter because it does not exist in our natural changing world. For this reason, Aquinas also refers to simple substances as “separate.” What he has in mind here are what he calls “intelligences” or “angels.” Aquinas does not claim to prove the existence of such entities. He simply speaks of what they would be like if they did exist. These substances do not need the potentiality of matter because they do not change like things in the material world. They do not grow, or decay, or move at all through time and space, for they exist outside of time and space.

Here I would like to stress that believing in the existence of such substances is not necessary in order to understand the argument that Aquinas illustrates through these substances in regards to being and essence. Aquinas points out that while simple substances do not have the composition of form and matter, there is composition within their forms; the composition of being and essence. What does Aquinas mean by saying that there is a composition of being and essence? Quite simply that even within separate substances, being is not a part of their essence. In other words, if such substances truly did exist, the fact that they existed would not be a part of their definition.<sup>9</sup>

What defense does Aquinas give for this claim? In chapter 4 of *On Being and Essence* he states, "But every essence or quiddity can be understood without understanding anything about its being."<sup>10</sup> Given our concept of what an angel would be, if they existed, there is no contradiction of that concept in the claim that angels do not exist. The same can be said of our concept of things in the material world.

If it could be shown that an entity contained being within its essence, not only

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, page 239.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, page 240.

would it be impossible to understand that entity without understanding it as actually being, it would also be a self-contradiction to claim that such an entity did not exist. In other words, any entity which has being in its essence would be a necessarily existent being. Here I am not claiming to have proven the existence of such an entity, but merely to show that from this it seems clear that the being of the many different entities which we have discussed cannot be found within their essence, for they are not necessary beings, but merely contingent.

### **3.3. Can a purely material universe contain the principle of its own being?**

Physics tells us that the apparent destruction of material objects is really just the dispersion of matter. This raises the question of whether matter, and the material universe have simply always existed. However, even if the material universe has always existed, it still does not contain within itself the principle of its own being. By this, I mean that the material universe contains nothing within itself which can account for its own being. This can be demonstrated by the fact that existence is not in the definition of matter. The claim that matter does not exist may seem bizarre, or even like a scientific impossibility, but it is not a self-contradiction of the definition of matter.

### **Section 4: If entities cannot account for their own being, what does?**

Two questions arise. Firstly, is there an entity that has being in its essence? We will return to this is a question in section five. Secondly, for all those beings which are not logically necessary, if their being is neither an essential nor an empirical feature, then how can their being be accounted for?

#### **4.1. Can the being of an entity be accounted for by a source outside itself?**

In chapter five of *On being and Essence*, Aquinas states that “whatever is not

included in the understanding of an essence...is coming to it from outside."<sup>11</sup> The being of those things which do not have being in their essence must come from a source other than themselves. Whatever source one might posit to give account for the being of such an entity must also have its being accounted for. As Aquinas says later in this chapter, "there has to be something that is the cause of existence for everything, since it is existence only. For otherwise the series of causes would go to infinity, since everything that is not existence only has a cause for its existence."<sup>12</sup> Many might respond that there is no reason why an infinite chain of causes is not possible. However, this quote from Aquinas can be interpreted so that the claim he is making does not depend on the impossibility of infinite regress.

#### **4.2. Paley as a parallel case.**

William Paley offers an argument regarding contrivance and a contriver that bares on the question of infinite regress. In *Natural Theology*, Paley famously examines the "state of the argument from design" by looking at the example of a watch.<sup>13</sup> He begins by listing the many features of the watch that seem to indicate contrivance, by which he means purposeful arrangement to arrive at a specific end. Paley claims that the features indicating contrivance lead us in search of a contriver to account for them. A contriver is an entity with a plan, such as one who purposefully designed the watch to have certain features that work towards a given end. He then relates many discoverable facts about the watch, which do not diminish the need to give account of contrivance. Among these he considers the possibility that the watch could have a series of mechanisms that allows it to produce another watch like itself. Given the discovery of this feature, one might

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, page 240.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, page 240.

<sup>13</sup> William Paley, *Natural Theology*, New York: American Tract Society, 1801, Archive.Org, MSN.

reasonably assume that the watch could have been produced by another similar watch. However, this discovery does not eliminate the need for a contriver with a plan. Even if we assume the watch were materially produced by another watch like it, that previous watch would still lack within itself anything which accounts for the apparent contrivance of its mechanisms. Moreover it does not account for the contrivance of the mechanisms of the watch it materially produced, and as Paley then notes, "Nor is anything gained by running the difficulty back... indefinitely. Our going back ever so far brings us no nearer to the least degree of satisfaction upon the subject. Contrivance is still unaccounted for."<sup>14</sup>

Putting aside the merits of Paley's argument, there is still a lesson to be learned. That is, when we are trying to give account of any particular aspect of an entity, if we posit a source which has nothing within itself that can account for this particular aspect, then we have failed to answer the question which we intended to answer by positing this source. This is true even if we posit sources back to infinity. If not a single member of an infinite series has within itself anything that can account for some particular aspect, then the infinite series taken as a whole still cannot account for that aspect.

For example, suppose we inquired as to why a given raven had black feathers. Suppose upon investigation we found nothing within that particular raven itself that gave a clue as to why its feathers were black as opposed to some other color. Suppose we then attempt to answer this question by positing a source outside of that particular raven, namely its parent, we say this raven has black feathers because it inherited this feature from its parent. This however does not satisfactorily answer our original question, for we

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<sup>14</sup> William Paley, *Natural Theology*, page 16.

can still ask why the raven's parent passed the trait of black feathers on, why the raven's parent had black feathers itself. If we attempted to answer this further question by positing another source, the raven's grandparent, and claiming the raven's parent inherited black feathers from the grandparent, our question would still be unanswered. If we continued to posit ancestors of the original raven back infinitely, all of them passing the trait of black feathers down to their decedents, our question would still remain unanswered. To answer the question, some other explanatory factor is needed to explain why any of the ravens in the series have the trait of black feathers; something like an evolutionary account of how ravens who happened to have black feathers were better adapted to their environments, and so they survived and passed that trait on. In the next section, I will apply this principle to the question of the source of being.

#### **4.3. Being is unaccounted for in an infinite series of contingent entities.**

What can we learn from Paley and Aquinas in regards to the question of what accounts for the possibility of being? We have seen that the fact that a given entity has being cannot be accounted for within itself. This leads us to posit a source outside of that entity. Moreover, if we posit it is also a contingent entity which does not have in itself the account of being, then this source can neither account for its own being, nor that of the entity of which it is the source. Similarly, even a series of such contingent entities could give no account of being. Moreover, an infinite series of contingent sources taken as whole, if it could be so taken, would not be able to account for its own being, much less the being of any of its members.

#### **Section 5: A source of being.**

Up to this point, I have examined some proposed accounts of the being of things,

given the presupposition that some things actually exist. I will now synthesize the criticisms that I have laid out in the previous sections against each of these proposed accounts.

The first proposal examined was the claim that being is merely a feature of physical entities that exist. The criticism of this account runs as follows:

1. Premise: if something is a features of physical entities then it is empirically observable
2. Premise: Being is not empirically observable
3. Conclusion: Being is not a feature of physical entities

The second proposal examined was that all things that exist do so because it is in their very essence or definition to be. The criticism of this account runs as follows:

1. Premise: An entity which has being in its essence is a logically necessary being. (When the essence of such an entity is understood, it could not be imagined that such an entity did not exist without creating a logical contradiction.)
2. Premise: Things in the physical world are contingent. (When their essences are understood, we could imagine that they did not exist without creating a logical contradiction).
3. Conclusion: Being is not a part of the essence of things in the physical world.

A third proposal was the claim that an infinite chain of contingent entities would be sufficient to account for the being of those entities. The criticism of this claim runs as follows:

1. Premise: If a posited source of some particular aspect cannot account for this aspect within itself, then it to give an account of that aspect.
2. Premise: In an infinite chain of contingent entities, none of these entities would be able



to account for being within itself

3. Conclusion: Therefore, an infinite chain of contingent entities fails to give an account of being.

Once we find that no number of contingent entities will ever bring us any closer to giving account for being, we see that we must posit a source which can account for being within itself. We must posit some entity which does contain being in its essence. Which brings us back to the question, ‘is there any existing entity which does contain being in its essence?’”

### **5.1. Why posit a source?**

Some who have followed this line of inquiry to this point might find themselves asking a different question. “Why must we posit any source at all? Why is not sufficient to simply say that being just is?” In a sense this is precisely Aquinas’ position with one important caveat. Let us return once again to the passage from *On Being and Essence* where Aquinas states “there has to be something that is the cause of existing in everything, since it is existence only”<sup>15</sup> The source which Aquinas has in mind to give account for the being of any entity, is being itself which subsists. What I am suggesting is that to say that “there just is being” means to say that being itself actually is. It means affirming that there is an existent entity which is being itself; pure, subsistent being.

### **5.2. Being is the source.**

To say contingent things exist cannot mean they exist in virtue of some internal principle, be that principle physical or definitional. The claim things exist can be better understood as saying “things participate in existence.” It follows that if one were to maintain that things exist they could not deny the existence of existence itself, which is

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, page 240.

subsistent being. This claim could be understood as saying “things participate in existence, but there is no such thing as existence,” and this is a self-contradiction.

### **Section 6: Another name?**

Aquinas gives another name for the source which accounts for being in any given entity. As we have already seen he starts out by saying that the source of existence is “existence only” but further on in the passage he claims that existence comes from, “the first being that is existence only; and this is the first cause, which is God.”<sup>16</sup>

#### **6.1. Not mere bias.**

It may seem that this conclusion for Aquinas is simply a testament to his predetermined conclusions, led by a religious bias.<sup>17</sup> However, Aquinas was not arbitrarily invoking the name 'God' in this conclusion. He did not decide to tack God on, because according to his religious beliefs God has to be the answer to the question “what accounts for the existence of anything?” Rather, through his metaphysical investigation, Aquinas came to understand God as having being as his very essence. This is exactly what Aquinas says in the passage, that God is “existence only.” So when Aquinas refers to 'God' as the answer to what accounts for the possibility of being, he has nothing in mind other than the entity that is subsistent being. This might raise the question: Why would anyone use the title 'God' when referring to subsistent being?

#### **6.2. Subsistent being is necessary.**

To better understand why Aquinas chooses this particular title, we should closely examine the entity of subsistent being in attempt to get some grasp of what little we can know about such an entity. We originally posited such an entity in order to answer the

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<sup>16</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, page 240.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy*, Ch. 34, “St. Thomas Aquinas”, Allen & Unwin, London; Simon & Schuster, New York 1946, 484-5.

question of what it is that accounts for the possibility of being. In our examination of this question we found that no contingent entity could give account for its own being, because it could not contain being within itself. This led us to posit an outside source, however if the outside source we posited was yet another contingent entity, we would still have nothing which could give account for being. This led us to realize that we must posit a source which contains being within its essence making it logically necessary. So, the very first trait we can accredit to subsistent being is that it is a logically necessary being.

### **6.3. Subsistent being is self-caused.**

Why did we need to posit a source which was logically necessary? The reason is because in order to give account for any being, we needed a source which could account for being within itself. An entity which can account for being within itself can rightly be said to be the cause of itself. Now the term ‘cause of itself’ cannot mean cause as we normally think of it; something which precedes an effect in time and somehow brings it about. As Aquinas puts it, in *On Being and Essence*, "the thing would... bring itself into existence which is impossible. Therefore, all such things, namely, those that have their existence as something distinct from their nature, have to have their existence from something else."<sup>18</sup> Such an entity is not the cause of itself in that it brings itself into existence; rather it can give account for its own being. Such an entity has always been, because it is in its very nature to be. There are two more traits which we can accredit to the entity of subsistent being. Firstly, we can say that it is, in this sense, “self-caused”. Secondly, since it has always been because it is in its nature to be, we can say it is “eternal”.

### **6.4. Subsistent being sustains all being.**

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<sup>18</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, page 240.

We must remember here again what led us to posit such an entity. We were not originally trying to find an entity which could give account for its own being, rather we were seeking an entity which could account for the being of those entities which we found could not account for their own being. So another trait which we can accredit to subsistent being, is that it is the entity through which all other entities receive and sustain their existence. I say “receive” because nothing can come into being if there is not first being itself. I say “sustain” because nothing which already is could continue to be if there is not being itself.

### **6.5. Review.**

Through examination we see that the traits which can be attributed to subsistent being include: logical necessity, self-causation, eternal existence, and being that through which all other entities receive and sustain their existence. Throughout human history, the word ‘God’ has come to represent precisely these traits which can be attributed to the entity that is subsistent being. This is why Aquinas chooses to use the word ‘God’ when he is referring to subsistent being.

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