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THOMAS AQUINAS ON THE APPREHENSION OF BEING:
THE ROLE OF JUDGMENT IN LIGHT OF
THIRTEENTH-CENTURY
SEMANTICS

by

Rosa E. Vargas Della Casa, M.A.

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School,
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the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT
THOMAS AQUINAS ON THE APPREHENSION OF BEING:
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Rosa E. Vargas Della Casa, M.A.

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Aquinas' famous comments in his early *Scriptum on the Sentences* (*In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3) regarding the intellect's apprehension of essence and *esse* have traditionally been interpreted as grounding Aquinas' doctrine on the judgment of *esse*. For Aquinas, it appears, what the intellect apprehends in a simple *concept* is essence. Since *esse*, for him, is not an essence, it cannot, on the received view, be the object of conceptualization. Therefore, *esse* is grasped by the intellect only in judgment. The claim that no genuine concept of *esse* is possible, however, is inconsistent with Aquinas' theory of signification. A term's signification is constituted, at least in part, in its "signing relation" with some "concept" in the mind. If, as on the traditional reading, there is no concept of *esse*, the term '*esse*' is left without signification. To respond that the term '*esse*' signs, not a concept, but the judgment in which *esse* is apprehended is in direct conflict with Aquinas' claim elsewhere that no term, including '*ens*' and '*esse*', signifies a judgment. I propose an alternative interpretation to *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, one that allows for the possibility of a conceptual apprehension of *esse*. The alternative reading explains Aquinas' remarks there in light of the theoretical context of the discussion, in particular the theory of propositions and their objects. I show how and why Aquinas develops a distinctive theory of the object of the proposition, that it is concerned with "the *esse* of a thing" as a complex. Although this complex includes the simple act of being, as for the traditional position (contrary to its major critics), it cannot be reduced to anything simple. Despite the *Sentences*' affirmation of a real distinction between a thing's *esse* and essence, to which correspond two different operations of the intellect, it does not follow that the human intellect cannot conceive *esse*, just as it conceives essences, in a simple conception.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	i
INTRODUCTION.....	vi
CHAPTER I	
A PROBLEM REGARDING THE HUMAN INTELLECT'S APPREHENSION OF <i>ESSE</i>	1
1.1 The Problem: A Concept of <i>Esse</i>	1
1.2 A Concept of <i>Esse</i> : Aristotelian or Thomistic Logic?.....	12
1.3 The Problem of a Concept of <i>Esse</i> : Begging the Question.....	15
1.4 An Alternative Approach to the Problem.....	17
CHAPTER II	
AQUINAS AND THE TRADITION OF TERMINIST LOGIC.....	20
2.1 Thirteen Century Logic: The Tradition of Terminist Semantics.....	21
2.1.1 Historical Background.....	22
2.1.2 Thirteenth-Century Theory of Supposition.....	30
2.1.3 Thirteenth-Century Theory of Signification.....	32
A. The Signification of Terms.....	33
B. Consignifications and Modes of Signification.....	38
a. Consignification.....	38
b. Modes of Signification.....	40
C. Analogy: Signification <i>per prius et posterius</i>	43
a. Background of the Discussion of Equivocation and Analogy in the Thirteenth Century.....	44
b. The Semantic Structure of Analogous Terms.....	47
2.2 Aquinas' Theory of Signification.....	51

2.2.1 Aquinas' Account of the Nature of the <i>Conceptio</i> and <i>Res</i> Signified by Terms.....	52
A. The <i>Res</i> Signified in Aquinas.....	53
B. Aquinas and the <i>Conceptio</i> Signified.....	62
a. Simple vs. Complex Conceptions.....	63
b. Signification and Knowledge.....	67
2.2.2 Aquinas on Modes of Signification.....	71
A. Preliminary Remarks.....	71
B. Concrete and Abstract Modes of Signification in Aquinas.....	74
C. Concluding Remarks on Aquinas' Account of Modes of Signification.....	81
2.2.3 Aquinas on the Signification of Analogous Terms.....	84
CHAPTER III	
AQUINAS ON THE SIGNIFICATION OF <i>ESSE</i>	91
3.1 Preliminary Remarks on the Signification of the Terms ' <i>Ens</i> ' and ' <i>Esse</i> ' in Aquinas.....	93
3.1.1 The Modes of Signification of the Terms ' <i>Ens</i> ' and ' <i>Esse</i> '.....	94
3.1.2 Analogy of ' <i>Ens</i> ' and ' <i>Esse</i> '.....	95
3.1.3 The ' <i>Conceptio</i> ' and ' <i>Res</i> ' Signified by ' <i>Ens</i> ' and ' <i>Esse</i> '.....	96
3.2 Aquinas on the Signification of the Concrete Term ' <i>Ens</i> ' and its Abstract Counterpart <i>Esse</i> '.....	100
3.2.1 The Signification of the Concrete ' <i>Ens</i> '.....	100
A. The Term ' <i>Ens</i> ' Consignifies Composition.....	102
B. The term ' <i>Ens</i> ' Does not Signify Composition.....	109

3.2.2 The Signification of the Abstract ‘ <i>Esse</i> ’	122
3.3 Aquinas on the Signification of the Verb ‘ <i>Est</i> ’	130
Conclusion.....	137
 CHAPTER IV	
REREADING <i>IN I SENT.</i> , d. 38, q. 1, a. 3: EXPLAINING DIVINE KNOWLEDGE WITH A DISTINCTIVE PROPOSITION THEORY	142
4.1 Eliminating Two Solutions.....	144
4.1.1 Restating the Problem: Two Conflicting Sets of Texts on the Intellect’s Apprehension of <i>Esse</i>	144
4.1.2 Solution I: Judgment Regards <i>Esse</i> , not as <i>Act of Existing</i> , but as <i>Mode of Existing</i>	147
4.1.3 Solution II: Only in the Later Writings Does Aquinas Recognize a Simple Conception of <i>Esse</i>	152
4.1.4 The Simple Conception of <i>Esse</i> in the Early Writings.....	154
A. Aquinas’ Early Account of the Semantic Structure of ‘ <i>Ens</i> ’ and ‘ <i>Esse</i> ’	154
B. The Simple Conception of ‘ <i>Ens</i> ’ in the Commentary on the <i>Sentences</i> and in the <i>De veritate</i>	158
Text 1: The Commentary on the <i>Sentences</i>	158
Text 2: The <i>De veritate</i>	160
4.1.5 Response to an Objection to a Simple Conception of ‘ <i>Ens</i> ’ in the Early Writings.....	161
4.1.6 Two Corollaries.....	163
4.2 <i>In I Sent.</i> , d. 38, q. 1, a. 3: <i>Utrum scientia Dei sit enuntiabilem</i>	164
4.2.1 Theoretical Context: <i>Enuntiabile</i> Theory.....	165
A. The Ontological Status of <i>Enuntiabilia</i>	168
B. <i>Enuntiabilia</i> as Bearers of Truth Value.....	170

C. <i>Enuntiabilia</i> as Objects of Knowledge and Belief.....	173
4.2.2 God’s Knowledge of <i>Enuntiabilia</i> : An Exegesis of <i>In I Sent.</i> , d. 38, q. 1, a. 3.....	175
4.2.3 Human Knowledge of <i>Enuntiabilia</i>	181
4.2.4 The Inherence Theory of Predication in Aquinas.....	185
A. Copulative Propositions.....	185
B. Existential Propositions.....	193
4.2.5 The <i>Esse</i> of Things as Signified by <i>Enuntiabilia</i>	196
4.2.6 Returning to <i>In I Sent.</i> , d. 38, q. 1, a. 3: <i>Esse Rei</i> as the Correlate of Human Judgment.....	200
Concluding Remarks on on the Intellect’s Apprehension of <i>Esse Rei</i> at <i>In I Sent.</i> , d. 38, q. 1, a. 3.....	214
CONCLUSION.....	216
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	223

INTRODUCTION

The most famous and distinctive doctrine in Aquinas' metaphysics is his account of *esse* as the act of a thing by which it exists, an act ontologically distinct from a thing's essence. As a result, there is great interest in how Aquinas establishes the doctrine, and how *esse* in this sense is known. In three well-known passages in the commentaries on the *Sentences* and on Boethius' *De trinitate*, both early works, Aquinas maintains that the second operation of the intellect regards the *esse* of a thing, whereas the first operation regards a thing's essence. Ever since the work of Étienne Gilson and Joseph Owens such remarks have been interpreted as outlining Aquinas' doctrine on the judgment of *esse*. According to this doctrine, *esse* is grasped originally and solely in 'judgment'. There is no authentic 'concept' of *esse*, for only essence is grasped in 'simple apprehension'. Since *esse* is not an essence, it cannot be the object of conceptualization.

Among the earliest criticisms of this interpretation of Aquinas' words is that of Louis-Marie Régis who, in a review of Gilson's *Being and Some Philosophers* in 1951, challenges the assertion that for Aquinas no concept of *esse* is possible from the point of view of Aquinas' logic. Régis points to various passages from Aquinas' commentary on Aristotle's *Peri hermeneias* where Aquinas speaks of a concept of *esse* signified by the verb '*est*'. Régis' critique was echoed by Jean Isaac who, in a similar review and referring also to the commentary on the *Peri hermeneias*, argues that for Aquinas the noun '*ens*' and the verb '*est*' signify a concept of *esse* in different ways. Some years later, in 1959, Ralph McInerny argues against the claim that the verb '*est*' is not a predicate (for, predicates are concepts, and '*est*' is not a concept since no concept of *esse* is possible) on the basis of an study of Aquinas' account of the signification of the verb

‘*est*’, which shows that, for Aquinas, ‘*est*’ is not only a concept but a predicate as well. Régis’ line of criticism for the denial of a concept of *esse* in Aquinas has otherwise generated very little attention among mainstream Aquinas scholars. A contributing factor may be the fact that prior to 1970 not much was known about the nature of thirteenth-century logic and its place in Latin scholasticism. Only since the work of L. M. De Rijk in his *Logica Modernorum*, a two-volume study terminist logic completed in 1967, has it been widely recognized how central a role was played within subsequent thirteenth-century education and thought by a novel interpretation of Aristotle’s logic, which originates in the twelfth century. As regards to Aquinas, in the last twenty years, serious research on Aquinas’ logic has begun to show the extent to which Aquinas’ doctrine of *esse* is embedded in his theory of signification.

The present study defends Régis’ approach to the issue of the possibility of a concept or simple conception of *esse* in Aquinas. Régis’ position has failed to be compelling because (i) it offers no convincing alternative account of the early texts on judgment of *esse*; (ii) whatever account of these texts is offered seems to focus on a proposition as predicating form of a subject, which either ignores non-quidditative *esse* as act or reduces it to *esse* in the sense of the truth of a proposition, or ‘propositional *esse*’. By contrast, I establish three different claims. First, as part of his semantic theory, Aquinas recognizes a simple conception of *esse*. Second, the traditional reading of Aquinas’ remarks in the commentaries on the *Sentences* and on *De trinitate* on the intellect’s apprehension of the *esse* of a thing as ruling out the possibility of a simple conception of *esse* cannot be made consistent with the text. And, third, Aquinas’

association of the intellect's second operation with a thing's *esse* is a consequence of his rather novel view on the object of propositions.

The discussion is divided into four chapters. In chapter I, I discuss in detail Gilson's and Owens' claim of the impossibility of a 'concept' of *esse* in Aquinas. I also review Régis' and Isaac's critique of this claim from the point of view of Aquinas' logic. Last, I consider Gilson's answer to the difficulties introduced by Régis and Isaac. Following on McInerny, I argue that Gilson's response begs the question in ruling out of court Aquinas' remarks in the commentary on the *Peri hermeneias* concerning a concept of *esse* as signified by the noun '*ens*' and the verb '*est*'. I submit that the question of whether or not Aquinas' remarks in the *Peri hermeneias* are representative of the sort of logic to which Aquinas' subscribes must be answered on the basis of an independent study of Aquinas' logic, and in particular of his theory of signification.

In chapters II and III, then, I review Aquinas' account of the signification of terms, including the terms '*ens*' and '*est*', in order to ascertain the nature of the logical theory to which Aquinas subscribes. In the process, I present evidence that as part of his semantic theory Aquinas recognizes a simple or non-composed conception of *esse* (i.e. a 'concept' of *esse*). I begin chapter II by presenting the main elements of the standard semantic theory of terminist logic, according to which the signification of terms, nouns and verbs alike, is constituted primarily by their "signing relation" with a simple or non-composed conception of some *res*. Aquinas subscribes to a version of this theory that is distinctive of mid-thirteenth century Latin Europe, a version sometimes called 'pre-modism', in which is highlighted a correspondence within the semantic triangle between the *modi significandi* of terms, the *modi intelligendi* of our intellect, and the *modi essendi*

of extra-mental reality. We shall see significant overlap between the major witnesses of this logic, Peter of Spain, William of Sherwood, and Lambert of Auxerre, and the semantics of Aquinas. At different places throughout his works Aquinas characterizes the conception signified by terms as simple (*incomplexa*), and in more than one occasion he specifically links the kind of conception that nouns and verbs signify to the first operation of the intellect. Under the ‘pre-modist’ semantic framework, the noun ‘*ens*’ and the verb ‘*est*’, which have *esse* as their *res significata*, must signify a simple conception of *esse*. Indeed, in chapter three, I show that in his commentary on Aristotle’s *Peri hermeneias*, Aquinas argues that, despite appearances to the contrary, the conception the terms ‘*ens*’ and ‘*est*’ signify is not the sort of conception produced by the second operation of the intellect, a complex conception, but rather the sort of conception that belongs to the first operation, a simple conception. Aquinas’ remarks in the commentary on the *Peri hermeneias* on the signification of the terms ‘*ens*’ and ‘*est*’ are thus very much consistent with the semantic theory to which Aquinas subscribes, *pace* Gilson. If, as on the traditional reading of the *Sentences* and *De Trinitate*, there is no concept of *esse*, we are faced with two conflicting sets of texts on the subject of the human intellect apprehension of *esse*. Should Aquinas’ early texts on the judgment of *esse*, then, be dismissed as inconsistent with his finished semantics?

In the last chapter (chapter IV), I dissolve the apparent inconsistency between the texts by presenting an alternative reading of Aquinas’ association of the second operation of the intellect with a thing’s *esse*. My reading leaves open the possibility of a simple conception of *esse*. I begin by addressing a question of development, which suggests that Aquinas’ doctrine of the impossibility of a simple conception of *esse* belongs exclusively

to his early writings. In response, I show that even while (presumably) still maintaining the view that *esse* is apprehended only in judgment, Aquinas recognizes a simple conception *esse*. Next, I give an exegesis of the key text, *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, where Aquinas refers twice to the intellect's apprehension of a thing's *esse* in its second operation. Aquinas' affirmations cannot be understood independently of the medieval problem of divine knowledge of *enuntiabilia*: can God with his simple understanding know propositions and their objects, which are complex, and if so, how? After presenting the theoretical background of Aquinas' discussion, I show that, contrary to the traditional reading of the passage, Aquinas's remarks on the second operation of the intellect and 'the *esse* of a thing' or '*esse rei*' are not directed at the intellect's apprehension of *esse* as a simple. What Aquinas has in mind is rather the intellect's apprehension of the composed unit that is 'the *esse* of a subject'. Further, evidence for this interpretation emerges when one examines Aquinas' 'inherence theory' of the proposition. Standard characterizations of Aquinas' theory fail to see how the very notion of the proposition as predicating form of matter or a subject allows it also to be seen as predicating the being of a form of the subject. Existential propositions such as 'Socrates exists' can be taken as predicating a form. But Aquinas moves in the opposite direction: all propositions can be related to existential propositions as the primary instance, so that all propositions can be seen as predicating the act of being of a thing or *esse rei*. It appears that it is precisely in the context of explaining divine simple knowledge of complexes that Aquinas develops this propositional theory. Aquinas' aim at *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3 is to contrast a propositional and hence complex apprehension of *esse* as the act of a subject (*esse rei*) in humans with knowledge in God that is not really distinct from his simple apprehension of

his *esse*, which is his essence. Apparently for Thomas the account of how God knows essences is by itself inadequate to explaining how God knows propositional complexes. The same association of the second operation of the intellect with the apprehension of a complex *esse rei* can be found in Aquinas' other early texts, and he refers to the same solution to the problem of God's knowledge of *enuntiabilia* in the mature *Summa theologiae*.

CHAPTER I

A PROBLEM REGARDING THE HUMAN INTELLECT'S APPREHENSION OF *ESSE*

1.1 The Problem: A Concept of *Esse*

In his early *Scriptum on the Sentences* (c. 1251-52)¹ Aquinas makes the following remarks regarding the intellect's apprehension of a thing's essence and *esse*:

Cum in re duo sint, quidditas rei, et esse ejus, his duobus respondet duplex operatio intellectus. Una quae dicitur a philosophis formatio, qua apprehendit quidditates rerum, quae etiam dicitur indivisibilium intelligentia. Alia autem apprehendit esse rei, componendo affirmationem, quia etiam esse rei ex materia et forma compositae, a qua cognitionem accipit, consistit in quadam compositione formae ad materiam, vel accidentis ad subjectum.²

Since there are two [components] in a thing, the quiddity of the thing and its *esse*, a twofold operation of the intellect corresponds to these two. One is called “formation” by philosophers, by which the intellect apprehends the quiddities of things, which is also called the “understanding of indivisibles.” But the other comprehends the *esse* of a thing by composing an affirmation, because also the *esse* of a thing composed of matter and form, from which the intellect receives cognition, consists in a certain composition of form with matter or of accident with subject.

Later in the same article, contrasting God's and the human intellect's apprehension of a thing's *esse* and *non esse*, Aquinas adds, in the response to the second objection:

Sed intellectus noster, cujus cognitio a rebus oritur, quae esse compositum habent, non apprehendit illud esse nisi componendo et dividendo.³

But our intellect, whose cognition arises from things that have composite *esse*, apprehends this *esse* only by composing and dividing.

Since the work of Étienne Gilson and Joseph Owens, these remarks have been interpreted as ruling out the possibility of a “conceptual” apprehension of *esse* and thus as grounding

¹ For the dating of Aquinas' works see Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Initiation à saint Thomas d'Aquin: Sa personne et son œuvre*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Cerf, 2002).

² *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 903.

³ *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, ad 2, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 904.

Aquinas' distinctive doctrine on the judgment of *esse*. According to the mainstream reading of this doctrine, *esse* is originally and solely apprehended by the human intellect in judgment. For Aquinas, it appears, what the intellect apprehends in simple abstract conceptualization is essence. Since *esse*, for him, is not an essence, it cannot be the object of conceptualization. Therefore, no concept of *esse* is possible.

The absence, indeed, the apparent impossibility, of a concept of *esse*, however, makes it difficult to explain the evident fact that *esse* is often the subject of thought and discourse. In response, Aquinas scholars generally concede that what is originally apprehended in judgment is in some way later also conceptualized. I say "in some way" because the resulting concept of *esse* is not regarded as a concept in the strict sense. In the second edition of *Being and Some Philosophers*, for example, Étienne Gilson recognizes a "logical concept" of *esse*. This logical concept, he says, mistakenly turns *esse* into an essence and needs to be distinguished from the proper "metaphysical conception" of *esse* in judgment. Gilson reminds his readers of a distinction he made earlier in his book between "conception," which covers both judgment and conceptualization, and "concept" which is the simple apprehension of an essence.⁴ Similarly, in *An Interpretation of Existence*, Joseph Owens observes that when we think and write about *esse*, the term '*esse*' refers to a concept whose borrowed content can do no more than to "draw attention to and focus attention upon what is originally known through a judgment."⁵ If *esse* cannot be apprehended through conceptualization, there is in fact no concept of *esse*. Owens writes:

⁴ Étienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952), 221-27.

⁵ Joseph Owens, *An Interpretation of Existence* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1968), 65.

We have no authentic concept of existence. What we do is use concepts of other objects to indicate actual existence and to keep attention concentrated upon it. But no concept taken just in itself expresses what is characteristic of the fact that something exists.⁶

In a later article Gilson takes a similar position. He accepts a conceptual “representation” of *esse*; we use quidditative concepts to represent what is “implicitly conceived” in judgment.⁷ In the end, there really is no concept of *esse*. There cannot possibly be one if conceptualization, properly speaking, is limited to essences. The doctrine of the judgment of *esse* is seen by both Gilson and Owens as a distinctive feature of Aquinas’ metaphysics as compared to that of Aristotle. No doubt what is apprehended in judgment needs to be somehow conceptualized, but this can never be an authentic conceptualization. As Owens notes:

Aquinas of course does more than judge that things exist. He thinks about and writes about existence as a topic. He is thereby conceptualizing what was originally known in judgment . . . He speaks of the existence of God, the existence of man, the existence of a stone, regarding existence as a single notion undiversified in itself . . . Yet he shows no interest in calling it a concept.⁸

Though largely accepted among scholars, the claim that *esse* is originally and solely apprehended by the human intellect in judgment has seen some criticism as not properly representing the doctrine of Aquinas. Cornelio Fabro, for instance, rejects the stand entirely. Fabro interprets Aquinas’ remarks at *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3 as dealing with “the characteristic function of the two operations of the mind which divide the two-fold content of the notion of *ens*, essence and the *actus essendi*. Therefore, the *notio entis*

⁶ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁷ Étienne Gilson, “Propos sur l’être et sa notion,” in *San Tommaso e il pensiero moderno*, ed. Pontificia Accademia di S. Tommaso (Roma: Città Nuova Editrice, 1974), 16.

⁸ Joseph Owens, “Aquinas on Knowing Existence,” in *St. Thomas Aquinas on the Existence of God: Collected Papers of Joseph Owens*, ed. John R. Catan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1980), 29.

precedes them both.”⁹ The notion of *esse* or *actus essendi* is thus for Fabro consequent upon the notion of *ens*. Jacques Maritain, in contrast, concedes an original intellectual apprehension of *esse* in judgment, but he denies that *esse* is solely apprehended in judgment. He recognizes three concepts of *esse*. One is a reflexive concept, subsequent upon what is originally known in judgment; the other two concepts are attained through abstraction and precede the apprehension of *esse* in judgment.¹⁰

As intriguing as these alternative interpretations are they appear to be guided more by their respective proponent’s general understanding of Aquinas’ metaphysics than by a primarily logical inquiry guided by Aquinas’ texts. Another line of criticism, which stems from Louis-Marie Régis in his review of the first edition of *Being and Some Philosophers*, appears promising in this regard.¹¹ Régis challenges Gilson’s assertion that for Aquinas no concept of *esse* is possible from the point of view of Aquinas’ logic, specifically his theory of signification.

Before addressing Régis’ account of the problem, let us first briefly review some of the main components of Aquinas’ theory of signification. Aquinas’ semantic theory is not different from the standard semantic theory of the mid-thirteenth century Latin west, terminist logic, the culmination of a dominant century-old tradition.¹² The term

⁹ Cornelio Fabro, “The Transcendentality of *Ens-Esse* and the Grounds of Metaphysics,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 6 (1966): 426.

¹⁰ Jacques Maritain, “Réflexions sur la nature blessée et sur l’intuition de l’être,” *Revue thomiste* 68 (1968): 17-32.

¹¹ Louis-Marie Régis, review of *Being and Some Philosophers*, by Étienne Gilson, *Modern Schoolman* 28 (1951).

¹² The most comprehensive work on terminist logic is that of L. M. De Rijk, *Logica Modernorum: A Contribution to the History of Early Terminist Logic*, 2 vols. (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1962-7). Other relevant works include: Elizabeth Ashworth, “Signification and Modes of Signifying in Thirteenth-Century Logic: A Preface to Aquinas on Analogy,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 1 (1991); Paul Spade, “The Semantics of Terms,” in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny, and Jan Pinborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Umberto Eco, “Denotation,” in *On the*

‘terminist’ results from the theory’s focus on the properties of terms. Among those properties, logicians count that of signification or *significatio*. Generally speaking, a term (*terminus*) can be any word in a given language. Strictly speaking, however, a term is defined as any part of speech which may be “subjected to the predicate or predicated of the subject in an ordinary categorical proposition.”¹³ Thus, whole phrases may be terms, but only words of a certain type are terms in their own right. According to terminist logicians, only ‘categorematic’ words (nouns, adjectives, and verbs) may be placed in the subject or the predicate position. What is characteristic of categorematic words is that they have signification on their own, that is, they have signification outside a propositional content. In other words, categorematic words have signification before they enter into a proposition.

There are two things worth emphasizing in the terminist notion of signification. In the first place, signification is associated with “signing” rather than, as we might suppose, meaning.¹⁴ The question about the signification of terms is a question about what it is that terms sign. For any term, to signify is ‘to sign’. Signification is the property that a term has to sign something, that is, to represent or make something known beyond itself. Thus, another common formula for signification is “to establish an understanding” (*intellectum constituere*).¹⁵ Second, we must note that a term’s signification is twofold. A term immediately signifies a ‘conception’ in the mind (*conceptio, ratio, or verbum mentale*), but ultimately it signifies the ‘thing’ (*res*) that is the object of that conception. Thus, the

Medieval Theory of Signs, eds. Umberto Eco and Constantino Marmo (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1989).

¹³ Paul Spade, “The Semantics of Terms,” 188.

¹⁴ On signification as signing, see Ashworth, “Signification and Modes,” 43-45; Eco, “Denotation,” 47-55; Spade, “Semantics of Terms,” 188-90.

¹⁵ Ashworth, “Signification and Modes,” 44.

signification of the *res* is mediated by the *conceptio* signified by the term.¹⁶ At the same time, the *conceptio* signified by the term is the conception of the *res* signified by the term. In the words of Aquinas: “the *ratio* signified by a name is the intellect’s *conceptio* of the thing signified by the name.”¹⁷ Now, there are many other distinctions that terminists will add to the signification of a term: consignifications, *modi significandi*, and possible secondary significations. At this point, however, what we need to remember is that a term’s signification consists in the signing of a ‘conception’ in the mind and of a ‘thing’, generally outside the mind, which is the object of the conception signified.

Signification is generally defined as a property of terms, but propositions too were said to have signification. Propositions have signification inasmuch as they make something known to the mind. The semantic or logical distinction between terms and propositions rests on the nature of the conception they signify. Propositions signify the composition or division of the intellect, that is, they signify a “mental proposition” or complex conception. Terms, on the other hand, signify a simple or non-composite conception.¹⁸

¹⁶ For this doctrine in Aquinas see *ST I*, q. 13, a. 1, Leonine ed., vol. 4, p. 139: “Respondeo dicendum quod, secundum Philosophum, voces sunt signa intellectuum, et intellectus sunt rerum similitudines. Et sic patet quod voces referuntur ad res significandas, mediante conceptione intellectus;” *ST I*, q. 13, a. 4, ad 1, Leonine ed., vol. 4, p. 145: “[N]omen non significat rem, nisi mediante conceptione intellectus;” also *In I Perih.*, lect. 2, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 11, lines 109-12: “[I]deo necesse fuit Aristotili dicere quod uoces significant intellectus conceptiones immediate, et eis mediatibus res.” As we shall see, this mediated “signing” of the *res* is crucial to Aquinas’ account of modes of signification.

For a discussion of the role of Boethius’ translation of Aristotle as affecting the medieval signification theory, see John O’Callaghan, *Thomist Realism and the Linguistic Turn: Toward a More Perfect Form of Existence* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 41-77.

¹⁷ *ST I*, q. 13, a. 4, Leonine ed., vol. 4, p. 144: “Ratio enim quam significat nomen, est conceptio intellectus de re significata per nomen.”

¹⁸ On the signification of propositions see Gabriel Nuchelmans, “The Semantics of Propositions,” in Kretzmann, Kenny, and Pinborg, *Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*.

Let us now return to Régis's review. Régis begins by pointing out that the assertion that no concept of *esse* is possible is inconsistent with Aquinas' remarks in his commentary on Aristotle's *Peri hermeneias* (c. 1270-71) regarding the signification of verbs. Régis refers us to the following passages:

[S]ignificatio orationis differt a significatione nominis uel uerbi, quia nomen uel uerbum significat simplicem intellectum, oratio autem significat intellectum compositum.¹⁹

The signification of a proposition differs from the signification of a noun or verb, because a noun or a verb signifies a simple understanding, a proposition signifies a composite understanding.

Set dicendum est quod duplex est operatio intellectus, ut supra habitum est; ille qui dicit nomen uel uerbum secundum se, constituit intellectum quantum ad primam operationem, que est conceptio alicuius . . . non autem constituit intellectum quantum ad secundam operationem, que est intellectus componentis et diuidentis.²⁰

It should be said that the operation of the intellect is twofold, as was said above; and he who speaks a noun or a verb by itself brings about an understanding with respect to the first operation, which is the conception of something . . . but [the verb or the noun said by itself] does not bring about an understanding with respect to the second operation, which belongs to the intellect composing and dividing.

In the first text, verbs are said to signify a simple understanding as opposed to a composite understanding; that is, verbs signify a "concept" rather than a judgment. Furthermore, in the second text, the conception signified by verbs is linked to the first operation of the intellect, not the second. If the verb forms of *esse* signify a simple conception, then clearly a "concept" of *esse* is possible.

Next, Régis addresses Gilson's claim of the "impredicability" of the verb 'is' or 'est'. As we are about to see, Gilson's denial that 'is' is a predicate is closely linked to his denial that a "concept" of *esse* is possible. Before examining Régis' objections on the matter, let us look at Gilson's argument for the 'impredicability' of the verb 'is'.

¹⁹ *In I Periher.*, lect. 6, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 32, lines 20-23.

²⁰ *In I Periher.*, lect. 5, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 29, lines 277-86.

“Propositions,” Gilson writes, “are usually defined as enunciations which affirm or deny one concept of another.”²¹ A proposition consists in the union of two concepts (or of the disunion of two concepts, in the case of a negation). It follows from there that predicates are concepts. Gilson distinguishes two types of propositions: “one-term” and “two-term” propositions. An example of a two-term proposition is ‘Man is rational’, where ‘man’ and ‘rational’ are terms but ‘is’ is not. The reason ‘is’ is not a term, Gilson explains, is that “it designates, not a concept, but the determinate relation which obtains between two terms.”²² An example of a one-term proposition is ‘Peter is’, where there is only one term, ‘Peter’. Gilson asks, then: “if all propositions entail either a composition or division of concepts, how can there be a proposition in which there is only one concept?”²³ One could answer that in the proposition ‘Peter is’, ‘is’ is the predicate, just as in the proposition ‘Peter runs’, ‘runs’ is the predicate. Gilson observes, though, that while ‘John runs’ may be turned into the two-term proposition ‘John is running’, the transformation is not possible for a proposition such as ‘Peter is’. Gilson explicates the matter as follows:

Now, in such cases, as *I am* or *God is* the transformation is not even possible, because in *I am being* or *God is being*, the predicate is but a blind window which is put there for mere verbal symmetry. There is no predicate even in the thus-developed proposition, because, while *running* did not mean the same thing as *is, being* does. In other words, *is-running* does not mean *is*, and this is why, in the first case, the verb is a copula, which it is not in the second case. The metaphysical truth that existence is not a predicate is here finding its logical verification.²⁴

Gilson explains that ‘is’ cannot be a predicate because *esse* or existence falls outside the scope of conceptual or abstract representation. *Esse* or existence is rather

²¹ Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 190.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 191.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 193.

attained in judgment or, more precisely, in the judgment of existence. In Gilson's analysis, a judgment of existence has no predicate. A judgment of the form 'x is', or merely 'is', does not predicate existence of its subject; rather, it "posits" the existence of the subject.

If the proposition, "*Peter is*," means anything, it means that a certain man, Peter by name, actually is, or exists. *Is* does not predicate anything, not even existence; it posits it.²⁵

In the judgment of existence Gilson finds a distinct and superior type of cognition than abstract conceptualization because in judgment essence is restored to its act of existing.

Let us rather say that such a judgment intellectually reiterates an actual act of existing. If I say that *x is*, the essence of *x* exercises through my judgment the same act of existing which it exercises in *x*.²⁶

The act of judging thus reflects the structure of reality where essence is composed with *esse*. Gilson finds confirmation of this doctrine in Aquinas' Commentary on Boethius' *De trinitate*, q. 5, a. 3. The reference is significant because this is a parallel text to *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3 on the subject of the apprehension of *esse*.²⁷

Let us now review Régis' objections to the "impredicability" of the verb 'is'.

Régis points out that in the commentary on the *Peri hermeneias* Aquinas speaks of the verb 'is' as a predicate. He refers us to the following passage:

[H]oc uerbum 'est' quandoque in enunciatione predicatur secundum se, ut cum dicitur: «Sortes est», per quod nihil aliud intendimus significare quam quod Sortes sit in rerum natura; quandoque uero non predicatur per se, quasi principale predicatum, set quasi coniunctum principali

[T]his verb 'is' is sometimes predicated in a proposition in itself, as when one says 'Socrates is', by which we do not intend to signify anything other than that Socrates exists in reality. But sometimes the verb 'is' is not predicated in itself, as if [it were] the principal predicate, but, as it were,

²⁵ Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 201.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 203.

²⁷ See *De trin.*, q. 5, a. 3, Leonine ed., vol. 50, p. 147, lines 96-101: "Prima quidem operatio respicit ipsam natua rei Secunda uero operatio respicit ipsum esse rei." For the passage Gilson's has in mind, see *ibid.*, lines 105-18. The *Sentences* and *De trinitate* are the only texts where the correlation between the two operations of the intellect and the principles of reality, essence and *esse*, is mentioned. In later texts, the correlation has disappeared.

predicatio ad connectendum ipsum subiecto, sicut cum dicitur : «Sortes est albus» : non enim est intentio loquentis ut asserat Sortem esse in rerum natura, set ut attribuat ei albedinem mediante hoc uerbo ‘est’; et ideo in talibus ‘est’ predicatur ut adiacens principali predicato, et dicitur esse tertium non quia sit tertium predicatum, set quia est tertia dictio posita in enunciatione, que simul cum nomine predicato facit unum predicatum, ut sic enunciatio diuidatur in duas partes, non in tres.²⁸

conjoined to the principal predicate in order to connect it to the subject, as when one says ‘Socrates is white’. For, it is not the intention of the speaker to assert that Socrates exists in reality, but to attribute to him whiteness by means of the verb ‘is’; and for this reason ‘is’ in such cases is predicated as ‘adjacent to’ the principal predicate, and it is said to be ‘third’, not because it is a third predicate, but because it is a third term in the proposition, which together with the noun predicated make one predicate, and thus the proposition has two parts, not three.

In light of this passage, Régis observes that Gilson’s distinction between “one-term” and “two-term” propositions finds no support in Aquinas. For Aquinas, every proposition contains two terms: a subject and a predicate term. The difference between the propositions ‘Socrates is’ and ‘Socrates is white’ is that in the proposition ‘Socrates is white’, the predicate is composed of the verb ‘is’ and the term ‘white’; whereas in the proposition ‘Socrates is’, the verb ‘is’ alone constitutes the predicate.

Régis further observes that the metaphysical reason for the function of the verb ‘is’ as copula comes directly from its object, which, for Régis, is not existence in general but the actual and present ‘to be’ or ‘to exist’. He cites the following passage from Aquinas’ commentary on the *Peri hermeneias*:

[H]oc uerbum ‘est’ . . . significat enim id quod primo cadit in intellectu per modum actualitatis absolute; nam ‘est’ simpliciter dictum significat esse actu, et ideo significat per modum uerbi. Quia uero actualitas, quam principaliter significat hoc uerbum ‘est’, est communiter actualitas omnis forme uel actus, substancialis uel accidentalis, inde est quod, cum uolumus significare quamcumque formam uel actum

[T]his verb ‘is’ . . . signifies that which first falls into the intellect in the mode of actuality absolutely; for, ‘is’ simply said signifies being in act, and thus it signifies in the mode of a verb. But because the actuality that is principally signified by the verb ‘is’ is, in common, the actuality of every form or act, whether substancial or accidental, it follows that when we wish to signify that some form or act is actually in

²⁸ *In II Perisher.*, lect. 2, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 88, lines 36-52.

actualiter inesse alicui subiecto, significamus illud per hoc uerbum ‘est’, simpliciter quidem secundum presens tempus, secundum quid autem secundum alia tempora.²⁹

some subject, we signify this by means of the verb ‘is’, either simply or according to some qualification; simply, in the present tense; according to some qualification, in the other tenses.

For Aquinas, Régis concludes, *esse* is grasped through and in a concept. Régis thus rejects Gilson’s claim that concepts are only of essences: “there are concepts in Thomism which neither are nor can be quidditative, because the reality which they signify is not quiddity but being.”³⁰ Such is the case of the noun ‘*ens*’ and the verb ‘*esse*’ or ‘*est*’; the concept each of these terms signifies is by no means quidditative.

Régis’ critique of the assertion that for Aquinas no concept of *esse* is possible, a critique made in light of Aquinas’ logic, was echoed by Jean Isaac in his review of *Being and Some Philosophers*.³¹ Isaac’s contribution to the discussion consists in the introduction of the idea that the noun ‘*ens*’ and the verb ‘*esse*’ signify the same abstract concept in the mind, only grasped in different ways: in the first case (‘*ens*’), as a subject; in the second case (‘*esse*’ or ‘*est*’), as the act of a subject. The latter, Isaac adds, is only possible in judgment.³² To this extent Isaac considers Gilson to be right. Indeed, *esse* as the act of a subject is grasped by the intellect only in judgment, for the act of a subject cannot be understood without its subject. However, Isaac notes, there is an abstract concept of *esse* that precedes the grasping of *esse* in judgment.

²⁹ *In I Periher.*, lect. 5, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 31, lines 391-403. See also *ST I*, q. 3, a. 4, Leonine ed., vol. 4, p. 42: “Secundo, quia esse est actualitas omnis formae vel naturae: non enim bonitas vel humanitas significatur in actu, nisi prout significamus eam *esse*,” *De pot.*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 9, Pession ed., p. 192: “Qualibet autem forma signata non intelligitur in actu nisi per hoc quod esse ponitur . . . Unde patet quod hoc quod dico *esse* est actualitas omnium actuum, et propter hoc est perfectio omnium perfectionum.”

³⁰ Régis, review of *Being and Some Philosophers*, 125.

³¹ Jean Isaac, review of *Being and Some Philosophers*, by Étienne Gilson, *Bulletin Thomiste* 8, no. 1 (1951).

³² *Ibid.*, 56-57.

Gilson must have considered Régis' and Isaac's objections to the doctrine of the impossibility of a simple conception of *esse* sufficiently serious, for in the second edition of *Being and Some Philosophers*, he devotes an appendix to them. In the following section, we review Gilson's response to Régis and Isaac.

1.2 A Concept of *Esse*: Aristotelian or Thomistic Logic?

In reference to the apparent inconsistency referred to by Régis between the doctrine of the judgment of *esse* and Aquinas' commentary on the *Peri hermeneias*, Gilson asks:

In his commentaries on Aristotle does Saint Thomas always express his deepest personal thought on a given question? Unless we admit that logic is a strictly formal science wholly unrelated to metaphysics, it is hard to imagine that the true Thomistic interpretation of a logic applicable to *habens esse* can be identically the same as that of a logic applicable to a metaphysics of *ousia*.³³

Gilson insinuates that Aquinas' metaphysics requires a different sort of logic from that of Aristotle. For Aquinas, Gilson insists, there can be no "concept" of *esse* because "concepts" are only of essences and *esse* is not an essence. One may speak of a "concept" of *esse* only when *esse* is mistaken for essence. There is, however, a "conception" of *esse* in judgment. Gilson often goes back to his distinction between "concept" and "conception," insisting that he has not denied a "conception" of *esse*. How this distinction serves to dissolve the difficulty remains unclear. At some point, however, Gilson seems to recognize that the difficulties regarding the cognition of *esse* cannot be reduced to the level of names:

Whether or not our conceptions of verbs should be called 'concepts' is, outside of history, of secondary importance. What does matter is to know if nouns and verbs

³³ Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 224 (Gilson's appendix is not found in the corresponding French work).

express cognitions of the same nature and if they point out the same constitutive element in the metaphysical structure of being.³⁴

Gilson's assessment of what Régis' observations amount to is on target. If nouns and verbs signify "cognitions of the same nature," then concepts are not restricted to being about one metaphysical constituent alone, essence, and thus a concept of *esse* may be possible. Furthermore, if a simple conception of *esse*, expressed by a verb, is possible, then we have reason to question the traditional reading of *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3 as ruling out the possibility of a conceptual apprehension of *esse*.

Of course, Gilson's answer to the question of whether or not the cognitions signified by verbs and nouns are of the same nature is in the negative. Gilson remains firm in his interpretation of *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3 as ruling out the possibility of a conceptual apprehension of *esse*. Based on the idea that *esse* cannot be the object of conceptualization because *esse* is not an essence, Gilson concludes that nouns and verbs cannot express the same kind of cognition. Having limited conceptualization to essences, Gilson has no difficulty inferring that since verbs do not point out essences, verbs cannot possibly signify a concept and must therefore signify a judgment. For Gilson, Aquinas' distinction between essence and *esse* entails the distinction between conceptualization and judgment as well as the distinction between nouns and verbs:

[T]he same metaphysical distinction between *esse* and *essentia* . . . entails the logical distinction between simple apprehensions and judgments, as well as the grammatical distinction between nouns and verb.³⁵

According to the logic Gilson attributes to Aquinas, nouns signify essences and their concepts, whereas verbs signify *esse* and the judgment of *esse*.

³⁴ Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 230.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 231.

Regarding the relation between the linguistic expressions ‘*ens*’ and ‘*esse*’, Gilson observes that ‘*ens*’ is not properly a noun since it signifies not essence but *esse*; ‘*ens*’ is a “verbal” noun. Here Gilson presents us with the following texts where ‘*ens*’ is said to signify *esse* not essence: “*Ens autem non dicit quidditatem, sed solum actum essendi*” (*In I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 4, a. 2, ad 2); and “*nomen autem rei a quidditate imponitur, sicut nomen entis ab esse*” (*SCG I*, c. 25). From the observation that ‘*ens*’ and ‘*esse*’ signify *esse*, not essence, Gilson concludes, contrary to what Isaac suggests, that there is no “concept” of *esse* common to ‘*ens*’ and ‘*esse*’ that is grasped in different ways; for, only essence may be an object of conceptualization. Once again, there is no concept of *esse*. There is only *esse* or the act of existence which is signified *in abstracto* by ‘*ens*’ and *in concreto* by ‘*esse*’: “*Ens signifies in abstracto the act concretely signified by is.*”³⁶ In support of his analysis of ‘*ens*’ and ‘*esse*’, Gilson refers us to the following passage in Aquinas:

[V]ita non hoc modo se habet ad vivere, sicut essentia ad esse; sed sicut *cursus* ad *currere*; quorum unum significant actum in abstracto, aliud in concreto.³⁷

The relation between ‘*vita*’ and ‘*vivere*’ is not the same as that between ‘essence’ and ‘*esse*’; it is rather the same as ‘*cursus*’ and ‘*currere*’, one of which signifies the act in the abstract, the other in the concrete.

According to Gilson, the correct parallel to ‘*cursus*’ and ‘*currere*’, and to ‘*vita*’ and ‘*vivere*’, would be ‘*ens*’ and ‘*esse*’. The verb ‘*est*’ signifies the act of existing in the concrete, for ‘*est*’ signifies ‘something is’. The verbal noun ‘*ens*’ signifies the same act but in the abstract, for ‘*ens*’ signifies ‘*habens esse*’, that is, ‘an existing being’. Earlier in the text, Gilson has observed that the apprehension of ‘*ens*’ (i.e., of ‘*habens esse*’)

³⁶ Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 232.

³⁷ *ST I*, q. 54, a. 1, ad 2, Leonine ed., vol. 5, p. 39.

implies the apprehension of its *esse*, for it is because ‘it has *esse*’ that a thing is an *ens*.

Hence ‘*ens*’ expresses the same object as the verb ‘*est*’.³⁸

At the outset, there is a serious problem with Gilson’s response to the objections raised by Régis and Isaac: his argument begs the question.

1.3 The Problem of a Concept of *Esse*: Begging the Question

In his *Being and Predication*, Ralph McInerny has pointed out that, in answering Régis and Isaac, Gilson begs the question when he uses the equation between concept and essence as a reason to dismiss the texts referred to by Régis and echoed by Isaac where Aquinas speaks of a concept of *esse*. For, the equation between concept and essence is precisely what those texts bring into question.³⁹ McInerny, it seems to me, is correct. According to Gilson, a logic applicable to the metaphysical doctrine of the real distinction between essence and *esse* cannot admit a “concept” of *esse* because concepts are only of essences and, for Aquinas, *esse* is not an essence. In Gilson’s estimation, the texts where Aquinas speaks of a concept of *esse* must represent the logic, not of Aquinas, but of Aristotle, at least as viewed by Aquinas.⁴⁰ But, here is the problem: whether or not Aquinas’ remarks in the commentary on the *Peri hermeneias* regarding a concept of *esse* are representative of the logic to which Aquinas subscribes is an issue that can only be resolved on the basis of an independent examination of Aquinas’ logic.

³⁸ Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 228.

³⁹ Ralph McInerny, “Being and Predication,” in *Being and Predication: Thomistic Interpretations* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 179-180. Previously published as “Some Notes on Being and Predication,” *The Thomist* 22 (1959): 323-24.

⁴⁰ See the text from note 33.

Gilson provides us with a series of statements on the signification of nouns and verbs, as well as of ‘*ens*’ and ‘*est*’, that he claims represent the logic of Aquinas as contrasted with the logic of Aristotle:

- (i) Nouns and verbs signify objects and cognitions of a diverse nature.
Whereas nouns signify essences and their concepts, verbs signify *esse* and the judgment of *esse*.
- (ii) The verbal expressions ‘*ens*’ and ‘*est*’ signify, not a concept of *esse*, but the judgment of *esse*.
- (iii) *Esse* or the act of existence is signified *in abstracto* by ‘*ens*’ and *in concreto* by ‘*est*’.
- (iv) The verb ‘*est*’ is not a predicate. For, predicates are concepts, and ‘*est*’ is not a concept.
- (v) A judgment of existence (i.e., a judgment of the form ‘*x* is’) contains not two terms but one.

Although Gilson introduces the aforementioned statements as representing a ‘Thomistic Logic’ as contrasted with an ‘Aristotelian Logic’, he presents no direct evidence that Aquinas indeed subscribes to them. In fact, they downright contradict Aquinas’ affirmations on the matter in his commentary on the *Peri hermeneias*. Gilson is right in his assessment of the logic that would follow from the denial of a concept of *esse*. But whether or not Aquinas subscribes to such logic is yet to be seen.

There is, however, one observation made by Gilson on the problem of a concept of *esse* which is very much on target. Gilson observes that the answer to the question of whether there is a concept of *esse* requires first an answer to the question of whether

nouns and verbs “express cognitions of the same nature.”⁴¹ I agree, and I submit that the answer to the question is to be found by examining Aquinas’ account of the signification of nouns and verbs in general. If Aquinas’ theory of signification reveals that nouns and verbs signify cognitions of the same nature, then, there would be no reason to suppose that, when in the commentary on the *Peri hermeneias* Aquinas writes that the verb ‘is’ or ‘est’ signifies a simple conception produced by the first operation of the intellect, he is not expressing, as Gilson terms it, “his deepest personal thought.”⁴²

1.4 An Alternative Approach to the Problem

Before we consider my proposal for an alternative approach to the problem, let me offer a short recount of the problem itself. We have two conflicting sets of texts. In the first place we have *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3 where Aquinas establishes a correlation between the two operations of the intellect and the two metaphysical principles in a thing, essence and *esse*. The essence of a thing is apprehended by the first operation, the *esse* of a thing by the second operation. The traditional reading of this passage understands it as ruling out the possibility of a conceptual apprehension of *esse*, that is, as denying the possibility of a “concept” of *esse*. On the other hand, we have Aquinas’ *Commentary on Aristotle’s Peri hermeneias* where he specifically links the kind of conception that nouns and verbs signify to the first operation of the intellect alone. Nouns and verbs signify a simple conception rather than a composite conception, that is, they signify a “concept” rather than a judgment. Hence, a concept of *esse* is possible. Here is then the problem: The denial of the possibility of a genuine conceptual apprehension of *esse* is inconsistent

⁴¹ Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 230.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 224.

with the semantic theory of the *Commentary on Aristotle's Peri hermeneias*. According to the latter, the signification of nouns and verbs is constituted, at least in part, by their “signing relation” with some concept in the mind. If, as on the traditional reading of *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, there is no concept of *esse*, the term ‘*esse*’ is left without signification.

In order to address the problem and dissolve the inconsistency between texts, we have two possible paths to follow. In the first, we take as our starting point the claim that *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3 rules out the possibility of conceptual apprehension of *esse*. From here, our best explanation of the apparent inconsistency of texts is to agree with Gilson’s assessment of Aquinas’ commentaries on Aristotle. The inconsistency disappears since the conflicting semantic remarks do not represent Aquinas’ own theory of signification, but that of Aristotle, at least as viewed by Aquinas. We have seen the problems with such an approach. The other possible path is to take Aquinas’ semantic theory as our starting point. One first task would then be to show that Aquinas’ remarks in his commentary on the *Peri hermeneias* regarding the signification of nouns and verbs and of the terms ‘*ens*’ and ‘*est*’ are consistent with the general semantic theory Aquinas subscribes to. Recent research, unknown or little used by mainstream Aquinas scholars prior to 1970, greatly simplifies this project by having already established the nature of twelfth-thirteenth century “terminist” logic, and the fact that Aquinas was conversant in and an active contributor to this tradition. The real challenge we face, however, by taking Aquinas’ semantic theory as our starting point is to offer an alternative interpretation of *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, one that allows for the possibility of a conceptual apprehension of *esse*, thus solving the apparent inconsistency.

The second path is the one I pursue. There is much to be gained by approaching the issue of the human intellect's apprehension of *esse* from the point of view of Aquinas' semantic theory. Moreover, the same holds true regarding other issues pertaining to Aquinas' doctrine of *esse*. As any reader of Aquinas can tell, Aquinas' metaphysical claims regarding *esse* are very often accompanied by a series of semantic remarks regarding the terms '*ens*' and '*esse*' which are apparently intended to illuminate the corresponding metaphysical claims. Yet to the contemporary reader these semantic remarks are anything but illuminating. As a result, scholars tend for the most part either to ignore them or to take them as dispensable accessories to the comparatively substantive claims. However, Aquinas' semantic remarks function as more than outdated explanatory tools. In fact, as Gyula Klima has noted, the very form of discourse within which Aquinas' metaphysical claims are formulated presupposes a distinct semantic theory which sets the stage for the language game in which Aquinas and his contemporaries participate.⁴³ Therefore, if we are not only to make sense of but also to join in the discussion with some degree of competence, we need to be proficient in the rules governing the game and thus the semantic theory in which it is framed. In short, our understanding of Aquinas' metaphysical doctrine of *esse* is enriched if we take seriously his semantic remarks.

⁴³ See Gyula Klima, "The Semantic Principles Underlying Saint Thomas Aquinas's Metaphysics of Being," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 5 (1996): 87.

CHAPTER II

AQUINAS AND THE TRADITION OF TERMINIST LOGIC

This chapter serves two purposes at once. It provides the conceptual tools necessary for the next chapter's discussion of Aquinas on the terms that signify *esse*, namely, of the noun '*ens*' and the verb '*esse*'. In the process, the chapter also shows that Aquinas' theory of signification is no different from the standard semantic theory of the mid-thirteenth century, 'terminist logic', which has its origins in an original interpretation of the logical works of Aristotle that emerged in the twelfth century.

The chapter is divided into two parts, the first of which is devoted to terminist logic, focusing especially on the authors whose semantics parallels Aquinas' and who may have influenced Aquinas, directly or indirectly. After reviewing the historical background leading to the development of terminist logic in the Latin west, I examine the terminist theory of signification as found in logical treatises of the mid-thirteenth century.¹ Naturally, the focus will be on the notion of signification (*significatio*), but I will also consider three other related notions: consignification (*consignificatio*), modes of signification (*modi significandi*), and analogy (*analogia*) or signification *per prius et posterius*. In addition, I briefly review the notion of supposition (*suppositio*), given that Aquinas occasionally uses supposition theory to explain some features of a term's signification. In the second part of the chapter, I review Aquinas' theory of signification.

¹ The most comprehensive work on terminist logic is that of L. M. De Rijk, *Logica Modernorum: A Contribution to the History of Early Terminist Logic*, 2 vols. (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1962-7). Other relevant literature can be found in Elizabeth Ashworth, *The Tradition of Medieval Logic and Speculative Grammar from Anselm to the End of the Seventeenth Century. A Bibliography from 1836 Onwards* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1978); Fabienne Pironet, *The Tradition of Medieval Logic and Speculative Grammar from Anselm to the End of the Seventeenth Century. A Bibliography (1977-1994)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997).

Aquinas' understanding of the notion of *modi significandi* will be of particular interest to us in view of the next chapter's discussion on Aquinas' account of the signification of the terms 'ens' and 'esse', which discussion largely centers on the modes of signification Aquinas assigns to these terms. As we shall see, following on the logicians' use of the notion, Aquinas relates the notion of *modi significandi* with that of *modi intelligendi*. For Aquinas, the modes of signification of terms follow from the modes of understanding of the intellect; thus, an examination of the mode of signification of 'ens' and 'esse' will help us ascertain the sort of conception these terms signify.

2.1 Thirteen Century Logic: The Tradition of Terminist Semantics

Throughout the Middle Ages the area of study which today is identified as "semantics" was traditionally placed under the province of logic.² For the greater part of the thirteenth century (up until around 1275) terminist logic was the prevailing logical theory. Terminist logic, also known as 'modern logic' (*logica moderna*) as opposed to the 'ancient logic' (*logica antiqua*) of Aristotle, was the culmination of a century-old tradition which begins with the rediscovery of Aristotle's logical works in the twelfth century. The name 'terminist' results from the theory's focus on the properties of terms. Generally speaking, a term (*terminus*) can be any word in a given language. Strictly speaking, however, a term is defined as any part of speech which may be "subjected to the predicate or predicated of the subject in an ordinary categorical proposition."³

² On the scope of grammar and logic in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, see Michael Covington, *Syntactic Theory in the High Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 8-12.

³ Paul Spade, "The Semantics of Terms," in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny, and Jan Pinborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 188.

According to this definition, whole phrases may be terms, but only a certain kind of words may be terms in a proposition. Medieval logicians classified words into two kinds: categorematic words (*categoremata*) and syncategorematic words (*syncategoremata*). Only categorematic words are terms in their own right since they can function by themselves as subjects and predicates of propositions; thus, nouns, adjectives, and verbs are the only kind of words included within this category. Terminist logicians recognize two main properties of terms: signification (*significatio*), which is the property a term has of ‘signing’ a concept in the mind and an object in the real world; and supposition (*suppositio*), which is the property a term has of ‘standing for’ a particular object or individual.

In the following pages, I consider, first, the notion of *suppositio*, and next, the notion of *significatio*, together with the subordinate notions of *consignificatio*, *modi significandi*, and signification *per prius et posterius*, as found in treatises of logic of the mid-thirteenth century. Before analyzing the notions of supposition and signification, though, it is helpful to locate them against their background. I begin, then, with a review of the historical background leading to the standard semantic theory of the mid-thirteenth century.

2.1.1 Historical Background

At the turn of the twelfth century, the only logical works of Aristotle that were available in the Latin west were the *Categories* and *De interpretatione*. The rest of Boethius’s translations (the *Prior Analytics*, the *Topics*, and the *Sophistical Refutations*)

were lost and not rediscovered until the 1120s.⁴ During the first half of the twelfth century, Latin translations of other previously unknown works of Aristotle (including the *Posterior Analytics*) were made and disseminated throughout the Latin west. By 1150 the complete Aristotelian logical corpus was available to scholars in Latin translation.⁵ The influx into the Latin west of new translations of original texts as well as of commentaries on those texts by Arabic and other Greek authors continued over the second half of the twelfth century and into the thirteenth century. The wealth of new material circulating in Western Europe at this time inspired the development of original new work by medieval scholars. During this period the *logica moderna* took form and with it the theory of the properties of terms.

It was previously thought that the development of the *logica moderna*, or terminist logic as it was later known, was primarily the result of the assimilation of Byzantine and Arabic logic. It is true that some Arabic treatises on logic were available to scholars in Latin translation since the second half of the twelfth century,⁶ but they appear to have had little influence on the development of the *logica moderna*. In his *Logica Modernorum* De Rijk has effectively shown that the *logica moderna* developed authentically in Latin Europe. It was the result of the creative minds of medieval

⁴ Bernard G. Dod, "Aristoteles latinus," in Kretzmann, Kenny, and Pinborg (eds), *Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, 46.

⁵ James of Venice completed a Latin translation of the *Posterior Analytics* between 1125 and 1150. He also produced a new translation of the *Sophistical Refutations*. See Dod, "Aristoteles latinus," 74-79.

⁶ Early in the second half of the twelfth century Al-Ghazali's *Intentions of the Philosophers* was translated in full into Latin. Parts of Avicenna's *Book of Healing*, namely the part on Porphyry's *Isagoge* and some fragments of the part on Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*, were also available to twelfth century scholars. In addition, small fragments of Al-Farabi's logic works were also circulating. Henrik Lagerlund, "The Assimilation of Aristotelian and Arabic Logic up to the Later Thirteenth Century," in *Logic Handbook of the History of Logic*, vol. 2, *Medieval and Renaissance*, ed. Dov M. Gabbay and John Woods (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2008), 284-85.

logicians who, having appropriated the *logica nova* of the recently rediscovered Aristotelian texts on logic, expanded the range and application of logic to previously unconsidered problems. According to De Rijk, it was in part the rediscovery of the *Sophistical Refutations*, which deals primarily with fallacies, that set in motion the development of the theory of the properties of terms and, in particular, the notion of supposition.⁷ Although the theory of the properties of terms comprises both signification and supposition, it developed primarily as a theory of supposition. Early terminist logicians had a contextual approach to semantics; the discussion was centered on the properties of terms *in a proposition*. Supposition theory is “a theory describing how the structure of a sentence indicates what kind of items its terms ‘stand for’ (*stant pro*) or ‘suppose for’ (*supponunt pro*).”⁸ Terminist logicians were certainly not unaware of the new departures of the *logica moderna*, but at the same time they did not see themselves as truly going beyond Aristotle, whom they regarded as the pre-eminent logician whose theory is virtually complete.⁹ Supposition theory, however, is genuinely a European invention. Unlike the notion of signification, which has its roots in the Peripatetic tradition, the notion of supposition has no counterpart in Greek scholasticism.¹⁰

By the turn of the thirteenth century, logic had firmly reestablished itself as a major discipline of study, and terminist logic was widely acknowledged as a common

⁷ In addition to the discussion of fallacies in the early Latin commentaries on the *Sophistical Refutation*, the development of grammar in the twelfth century also played an important role in the formulation of the theory of supposition; De Rijk, *Logica Modernorum*, 2:95-125.

⁸ Sten Ebbesen, “The Dead Man is Alive,” *Synthese* 40, no. 1 (1979): 45.

⁹ Sten Ebbesen, “What Counted as Logic in the Thirteenth Century?” in *Methods and Methodologies. Aristotelian Logic East and West, 500-1500*, ed. Margaret Cameron and John Marenbon (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 99-101.

¹⁰ Sten Ebbesen, “Dead Man is Alive,” 45-46.

frame of reference for logical and semantic analysis.¹¹ At the newly established universities of Paris and Oxford, logical studies quickly became the main feature of the arts curriculum.¹² As noted by Ashworth, “Logic was at the heart of the arts curriculum, for it provided the techniques of analysis and much of the vocabulary found in philosophical, scientific, and theological writing. Moreover, it trained students for participation in the disputations that were the central feature of medieval instruction.”¹³ Aristotle’s *Organon*, Porphyry’s *Isagoge*, and Boethius’ logical treatises were the core of the logic curriculum of the *trivium*.¹⁴ The central place of logic in medieval instruction is further evidenced by the fact that Aristotle’s logical works remained largely unaffected by the prohibitions on Aristotle of the 1210-1230s. Logic was never very controversial. It was the *Metaphysics*, *Physics* and other Aristotelian works on natural philosophy that the authorities of the time found objectionable.¹⁵ During the first half of the thirteenth century, the most influential treatises of logic written within the tradition of terminist

¹¹ Alain De Libera, “The Oxford and Paris Traditions in Logic,” in Kretzmann, Kenny, and Pinborg (eds), *Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, 174.

¹² Richard Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), 182; Ashworth, “Terminist Logic,” in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Robert Pasnau (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1:146. The medieval universities were organized into four faculties: Arts, Theology, Law, and Medicine. The Arts Faculty, where one studied the *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric, and logic), provided a basis for the terminal degree at any of the other three faculties. On the structure and history of the universities of Paris and Oxford, see, e.g., Hastings Rashdall, *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages*, ed. A. B. Emden and F. M. Powicke, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1936); Gordon Leff, *Paris and Oxford Universities in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries: An Institutional and Intellectual History* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1968).

¹³ Ashworth, “Terminist Logic,” 146.

¹⁴ For an account of the standard textbooks used by students at the Arts Faculty in Paris in the thirteenth century, see C. H. Lohr, “The Medieval Interpretation of Aristotle,” in Kretzmann, Kenny, and Pinborg (eds), *Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, 84-86.

¹⁵ Lagerlund, “Aristotelian and Arabic Logic,” 283-84. By the end of the twelfth century scholars had in Latin translation all of *On Generation and Corruption*, *On the Senses*, *On the Heavens*, and the *Physics*, as well as books I-V of the *Meteorology*. Dod, “Aristoteles latinus,” 47.

logic were composed: Peter of Spain's *Tractatus*; William of Sherwood's *Introductiones in logicam*; and Lambert of Auxerre's *Logica*, also known as *Summa Lamberti*.

Of all the logical treatises produced in the thirteenth century, Peter's of Spain's *Tractatus* (written between 1230 and 1245) was by far the most influential. It was used throughout European universities as a standard logic textbook well into the seventeenth century.¹⁶ There is some uncertainty as to the true identity of Peter of Spain, but recent evidence suggests that, unlike what was previously thought, the author of the *Tractatus* is not Pope John XXI, but rather a Spanish Dominican.¹⁷ Although not as influential in subsequent centuries as Peter's *Tractatus*, Sherwood's *Introductiones in logicam* (written in the late 1230s or early 1240s) was highly regarded among his contemporaries. The Franciscan Roger Bacon acknowledges his influence in his *Opus tertium* (written in 1267).¹⁸ It is likely that Sherwood lectured at both Oxford and Paris; he is believed to have been a master in the Arts Faculty at Paris between 1240 and 1248.¹⁹ Regarding Lambert's *Logica*, it was likely written in the mid 1250s. The author of the *Logica* is generally identified with the Dominican Lambert of Auxerre, but recent studies have showed that the author could very well be his contemporary Lambert of Lagny.²⁰ There are strong similarities in composition, organization, and doctrine among the above-

¹⁶ On the diffusion of Peter's *Tractatus*, see L. M. De Rijk, introduction to *Tractatus*, by Peter of Spain (Assen: Van Gordum, 1972), xciv-cx. As De Rijk notes, Peter's *Tractatus* was repeatedly copied and commented upon; the earliest commentaries date to the second half of the thirteenth century. There exist today no less than 300 manuscripts and 200 printed editions of the *Tractatus*, the latter dating from 1474 to 1639.

¹⁷ On Peter of Spain as a member of the Dominican Order, see Angel d'Ors, "Petrus Hispanicus O.P., Auctor Summularum," *Vivarium* 35 (1997), 39 (2001), 41 (2003). For Peter of Spain as Pope John XXI, see Joseph Bochenski, introduction to *Summulae Logicales*, by Peter of Spain (Turin: Marietti, 1947), xii.

¹⁸ For a quote of the relevant passage, see Norman Kretzmann, introduction to *Introduction to Logic*, by William of Sherwood (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), 5.

¹⁹ Kretzmann, introduction, 8.

²⁰ On the identity of the author of the *Logica*, see Thomas Maloney, "Who is the Author of the *Summa Lamberti*?" *International Philosophical Quarterly* 49 (2009).

mentioned logical treatises. However, given the uncertainties of authorship and dating surrounding them, lines of influence among them cannot be properly traced.²¹ As noted by De Rijk, the similarities between the treatises are better explained by the authors' standing in a common tradition.²²

Although Arabic logic was not as influential in the development of Latin tradition of terminist logic as it was previously thought, it had not an insignificant influence either. In a recent study, Lagerlund has traced some lines of influence of Arabic logic on the work of mid-thirteenth century Latin commentators of the logical works of Aristotle, among them Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), Albert the Great (d. 1280), and Robert Kilwardby (d. 1279).²³ The most notable line of influence is the section on logic from Al-Ghazali's *Intentions of the Philosophers*, which was the basic text from which Latin scholars acquired their knowledge of Arabic philosophy. Latin scholars assumed that the *Intentions of the Philosophers* contained the views of Al-Ghazali himself, but it was in fact intended as a reworking of Avicenna's doctrines contained in his *Book of Science*.²⁴ Al-Ghazali's work was translated in full into Latin early in the second half of the twelfth

²¹ Some attempts have been made though. The strong similarities between Peter's *Tractatus* and Sherwood's *Introductiones* have lead scholars to consider their possible interdependence. Kretzmann, for instance, argues for Peter's indebtedness to Sherwood (introduction, 4). De Rijk strongly objects, claiming that it is unlikely that either author knew of each other (introduction, lxvii-lxxx).

²² De Rijk, introduction, lxxx.

²³ Lagerlund, "Aristotelian and Arabic Logic," 302-14. Since De Rijk's judgment on the issue, the assimilation of Arabic logic into the western logic tradition has hardly been studied at all; Lagerlund's preliminary study is a pioneer on the field. On the history of Arabic logic, see Tony Street, "Arabic Logic" in *Handbook of the History of Logic*, vol. 1, *Greek, Indian, and Arabic Logic*, eds. Dov M. Gabbay and John Woods (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2004); "Logic" in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, eds. P. Adamson and R. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

²⁴ For recent discussion, see Jules Janssens, "Al-Ghazzālī and His Use of Avicennian Texts," in *Problems in Arabic Philosophy*, ed. M. Maróth (Piliscsaba, Hungary: Avicenna Institute of Middle East Studies, 2003), 37-49.

century, but it was not widely read until the thirteenth century.²⁵ Al-Ghazali's presentation of Avicenna's division of the matter of syllogism is found in several logic texts of the mid-thirteenth century.²⁶ Avicenna's view of logic as a science of second intentions was also influential. Another line of influence explored by Lagerlund is Averroes' commentaries on the logical works of Aristotle. Latin translations of Averroes' middle commentaries on Aristotle's *Categories*, *De interpretatione*, *Prior Analytics*, and *Posterior Analytics*, as well as his commentary on Porphyry's *Isagoge*, became available to Latin scholars between the 1220s and 1230s. Averroes' views on *differentia* and modal propositions appear to have been influential, but Averroes' most notable influence is manifested in the tendency of mid-thirteenth century Latin scholars to read metaphysics and epistemology into the logic.²⁷

Other scholars have remarked that what characterizes the mid-thirteenth century approach to semantics is the close connection between logic as a theory of language and discussions on epistemology and ontology, a connection that was absent in the early tradition of terminist logic.²⁸ In this new approach to semantics, which dominated the discussion at Paris from around 1250 to 1275, the key notion is that of signification (*significatio*) as opposed to supposition (*suppositio*).²⁹ The new developments in logic during this period were determined by reflections on the discussions on equivocation,

²⁵ Henrik Lagerlund, "Al-Ghazali on the Form and Matter of Syllogisms," *Vivarium* 48 (2010): 194.

²⁶ Lagerlund, "Al-Ghazali," 212-14.

²⁷ Lagerlund, "Aristotelian and Arabic Logic," 285-86.

²⁸ See, e.g., Ria Van der Lecq, "Logic and the Theories of Meaning in the Late 13th and Early 14th Century including the Modistae," in *Handbook of the History of Logic*, vol. 2, *Mediaeval and Renaissance Logic*, eds. Dov M. Gabbay and John Woods (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2008), 348.

²⁹ Discussions on supposition theory continued to be prevalent at Oxford into the fourteenth century. Roger Bacon was the main figure at Oxford in the late thirteenth century; his *De signis* (1267) and *Compendium studii theologiae* (1292) both contain discussions on supposition. See, De Libera, "Oxford and Paris," 180-83 and 186; Ashworth, "Terminist Logic," 157-58.

univocation, and analogy as found in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and as developed by Arabic authors, as well as by discussions on the operations of the soul from Aristotle's *De anima*.³⁰ The period between 1250 and 1275 is often described as a pre-modistic period.³¹ During the last decades of the thirteenth century and the beginning of the fourteenth century, logic at Paris was dominated by speculative grammar or 'modistic' theory, so-called because of its focus on the notion of *modus significandi* or mode of signification; those who wrote within this theory were accordingly called 'modistae'.³² Some characteristics of modistic theory are prefigured in the semantic discussions of mid-thirteenth terminist authors, most notably the connection between a theory of language and epistemology and ontology. They saw parallels between *modi significandi*, *modi intelligendi*, and *modi essendi*, a parallelism that has been taken to define 'modism'.³³ In effect, they could be called 'pre-modist terminists'.³⁴ However, there are significant differences on how this parallelism is approached. The modistae were most interested in metalinguistic questions, such on the nature and structure of language, than in the semantic analysis of terms. The modistae offered an ontological interpretation of the structure of language. The *modi significandi*, the basic components of meaning, were

³⁰ See Van der Lecq, "Logic and Theories of Meaning," 348; De Libera, "Oxford and Paris," 182-84. On the influence of Aristotle's *De anima*, see also De Rijk, "A Study on the Medieval Intentionality Debate up to ca. 1350," in *Giraldus Odonis O.F.M. Opera Philosophica*, vol. 2, *De intentionibus*, ed. L. M. De Rijk (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 30-33.

³¹ See, e.g., Covington, *Syntactic Theory*, 22-23; De Libera, "Oxford and Paris," 182-86.

³² Jan Pinborg, "Speculative Grammar," in Kretzmann, Kenny, and Pinborg (eds), *Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, 255. The 'modistae' did original work in both grammar and logic; modistic grammar, however, was more influential than modistic logic. See Covington, *Syntactic Theory*, 22n1. For more information on the modistic theory, see Irène Rosier, *La grammaire spéculative des Modistae* (Lille: Press Universitaires de Lille, 1983).

³³ See, for example, Jan Pinborg, "Speculative Grammar," in Kretzmann, Kenny, and Pinborg (eds), *Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, 262.

³⁴ For efforts at terminology for divisions that are not clear-cut or perfectly understood, see Irène Rosier-Catach, "Modisme, pré-modisme et proto-modisme: vers une définition modulaire," in S. Ebbesen & R. Friedman (eds.), *Medieval Analyses in Language and Cognition* (Copenhagen: Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters, 1999), 45-81.

held to be reflections of the properties of real-world objects, that is, of the *modi essendi* of extra-mental reality.³⁵ Pre-modist terminist logicians of the mid-thirteenth century had a more epistemological approach to the study of language.³⁶ Discussions were centered on the semantics of terms. The focus was on the property of signification and on the connection between the *modi significandi* of terms and the *modi intelligendi* of our intellect.

Let us turn next to a review of terminist logic. We begin with a brief overview of the property of supposition; next, I focus the discussion on the property of signification (*significatio*), as did thirteenth century logicians. Our primary sources will be the logical treatises of Peter of Spain, William of Sherwood, and Lambert of Auxerre.

2.1.2 Thirteenth-Century Theory of Supposition

Aquinas was familiar with terminist theory of supposition and used it occasionally throughout his works. He did not develop a theory of supposition, but he uses supposition theory, not only in explaining theological statements such as concerning the Trinity, but also to explain other notions related to signification, such as imposition and modes of signification.

The theory of supposition was developed to address the relation between terms and the real-world objects they ‘refer to’ or ‘stand for’ when used in a proposition. As Spade notes, “Supposition is a property of categorematic words only when they serve as

³⁵ See Pinborg, “Speculative Grammar,” 255-56; Covington, *Syntactic Theory*, 28.

³⁶ The association of semantics and epistemology finds its major representative in the thirteenth century in Henry of Ghent (c. 1270). See De Rijk, “Medieval Intentionality,” 79-84, 150-58.

terms (in the strict sense), or extremes of sentences.”³⁷ Accordingly, Peter of Spain explains the difference between *significatio* and *suppositio* as follows:

Differunt autem suppositio et significatio, quia significatio est per impositionem vocis ad rem significandam, suppositio vero est acceptio ipsius termini iam significantis rem pro aliquo. Ut cum dicitur ‘*homo currit*’, iste terminus ‘*homo*’ supponit pro Sorte vel pro Platone, et sic de aliis.³⁸

Signification and supposition differ because signification is the result of the imposition of a vocal [expression] upon a thing to be signified, whereas supposition is the taking of a term that already signifies a thing for something; as when ‘a man runs’ is said, this term ‘man’ stands for Socrates, or for Plato, and similarly in other cases.

The term ‘man’ signifies human nature, but it can ‘stand for’ or ‘supposit for’ several things on different occasions of its use.

Terminist logicians distinguished various types of supposition according as to what a term might stand for when used in a proposition. Supposition is then generally divided into simple, material, and personal supposition. Simple supposition occurs when a term stands for the nature it signifies, as in ‘*homo est species*’. A term has material supposition when it stands for itself, as in ‘*homo est disyllabum*’. Finally, a term may stand for one or more members of the class it signifies, as in ‘*homo currit*’; in this case, a term is said to have personal supposition.³⁹

For the most part, the propositional context in which a term occurs dictates what the term supposits for in any particular occasion of its use. However, for both William of Sherwood and Peter of Spain the context required for supposition is not necessarily

³⁷ Spade, “Semantics of Terms,” 192.

³⁸ Peter of Spain, *Tractatus*, ed. L. M. De Rijk (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1972), p. 80, lines 9-13. See also William of Sherwood, *Introductiones in logicam*, eds. Charles H. Lohr, Peter Künse, and Bernhard Mussler, in “William of Sherwood, ‘Introductiones in logicam’ Critical Text,” *Traditio* 39 (1983), p. 265, line 9: “*Suppositio* autem est ordination alicuius intellectus sub alio;” and line 15: “[D]icitur *suppositio* significatio alicuius ut subsistentis.”

³⁹ Ashworth, “Terminist Logic,” 154-55.

propositional.⁴⁰ They distinguish between the supposition a term has in virtue of its signification alone and the supposition a term has in virtue of its actual occurrence. When a term acquires signification, it also acquires a natural capacity for supposition. William of Sherwood refers to a term's natural capacity for supposition as 'habitual' (*suppositio in habitu*), and he contrasts it with 'actual' supposition (*suppositio in actu*), which is the supposition of a term in an actual occurrence.⁴¹ For Peter of Spain, the distinction is between 'natural' and 'accidental' supposition.⁴² Peter's natural supposition is no different from William's habitual supposition inasmuch as no propositional context is required. For Peter of Spain, a term's natural capacity for supposition is the capacity of a term to stand for all actual and possible individuals that are of such nature as to partake in the form signified by the term. Thus, outside of any propositional context, the term 'man' supposits for all particular men, past, present and future. In contrast, for William of Sherwood, a term's natural capacity for supposition covers only actually existent individuals.⁴³

2.1.3 Thirteenth-Century Theory of Signification

In this section, I take up: the terminist notion of signification (*significatio*); the distinction between consignification (*consignificatio*) and modes of signification (*modi significandi*); and a type of signification of terms named 'analogy' (*analogia*).

⁴⁰ On this issue, see De Rijk, "The Origins of the Theory of the Properties of Terms," in Kretzmann, Kenny, and Pinborg (eds), *Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, 168-72.

⁴¹ William of Sherwood, *Introductiones*, p. 265, lines 11-15.

⁴² Peter of Spain, *Tractatus*, p. 81, lines 2-10.

⁴³ See De Rijk, "Theory of the Properties of Terms," 169-71.

A. The Signification of Terms

The first thing to note regarding the terminist notion of signification or *significatio* is that it is associated with “signing” rather than, as we might suppose, meaning.⁴⁴ Signification is not meaning. For medieval logicians, the question about the signification of terms is not a question about meaning but about what it is that terms sign. Signification is understood as the property that a term has to sign something, that is, to represent or make something known beyond itself. Thus, another common formula for signification is “to establish an understanding” (*intellectum constituere*).⁴⁵ This is not to say that medieval logicians did not have a general notion of meaning. They talked about sense (*sensus*) and about the thought or content (*sententia*) of a phrase. As Umberto Eco writes, “meaning (be it mental correlate, semantic content, intension, or any form of noematic, or ideal, or cultural entity), is represented in the Middle Ages, as well as in the whole Aristotelian tradition, not by ‘significatio’, but by ‘sententia’ or by ‘definitio’.”⁴⁶

The notion of *significatio* so understood has a long tradition; it has its roots in Aristotle’s observation at the beginning of *De interpretatione* (16a3-8) that spoken words are conventional “symbols” or “signs” of concepts, which in turn are likeness or icons of things:

Now spoken sounds are symbols of affections in the soul, and written marks symbols of spoken sounds. And just as written marks are not the same for all men, neither are spoken sounds. But what these are in the first place signs of—

⁴⁴ On the medieval notion of ‘signification’ as distinct from ‘meaning’, see Spade, “Semantics of Terms,” 188-92; Ashworth, “Signification and Modes of Signifying in Thirteenth-Century Logic: A Preface to Aquinas on Analogy,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 1 (1991), 43-45.

⁴⁵ This formula is based on Aristotle’s *De interpretatione* 16b19-21. For further references, see Ashworth, “Signification and Modes,” 44n22; Spade, “Semantics of Terms,” 188.

⁴⁶ Umberto Eco, “Denotation,” in *On the Medieval Theory of Signs*, eds. Umberto Eco and Constantino Marmo (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1989), 53. See also Ashworth, “Terminist Logic,” 151.

affections of the soul—are the same for all; and what these affections are likenesses of—actual things—are also the same.⁴⁷

From ancient to modern times, this passage has been the subject of multiple commentaries. According to Boethius, by “affections of the soul” Aristotle means a concept or understanding (*intellectus*).⁴⁸ Boethius characterizes the relation between word (*vox*) and concept (*intellectus*) with the term ‘signify’ (*significare* or *designare*). A word signifies a concept in the soul; the concept signified by a word is the conception or understanding of a thing.⁴⁹ It would appear that words signify only concepts.⁵⁰ However, we should notice that the relation of signification is transitive.⁵¹ Accordingly, Boethius remarks that words signify concepts primarily, but they also signify things in a secondary way.⁵² Later terminist authors explicitly remark on the transitive character of signification. Lambert writes:

Vox que est signum signi, scilicet intellectus, erit signum significati, scilicet rei, sed immediate est signum intellectus, mediate autem signum rei.⁵³

A word that is a sign of a sign, i.e. of a concept, will be a sign of what is signified, i.e. of a thing; but it is a sign of the concept directly, and a sign of the thing indirectly.

Following Boethius, then, terminist logicians interpreted Aristotle’s remarks at the beginning of *De interpretatione* along these lines: words primarily signify concepts and only secondarily, through the mediation of concepts, things in the external world.

Accordingly, the property of *significatio* was thought to involve a twofold signing

⁴⁷ Aristotle’s *Categories and De Interpretatione*, trans. J. L. Ackrill, eds. J. L. Ackrill and Lindsay Judson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 43.

⁴⁸ Boethius, *Commentarii in librum Aristotelis Peri Hermeneias, secunda editio*, ed. Karl Meiser (New York: Garland, 1987), p. 12, line 28.

⁴⁹ Boethius, *In librum Aristotelis Peri Hermeneias*, p. 20, lines 17-20.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 21, lines 3-4.

⁵¹ On the transitive character of signification, see Spade, “Semantics of Terms,” 188-89; Ashworth, “Terminist Logic,” 151. Note that meaning, unlike signification, is not transitive.

⁵² Boethius, *In librum Aristotelis Peri Hermeneias*, p. 24, lines 10-12.

⁵³ Lambert, *Logica*, ed. Franco Alessio (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1971), p. 206, lines 3-6.

relation. A term signifies or is a sign of both a concept in the mind and the *res* that is the object of that conception.

One of the most debated issues regarding the signification of terms in the Middle Ages concerns the status of the *res significata* of terms. What are the “things” terms are said to signify in a secondary way? This is the well known problem of universals. With the exception of syncategorematic terms such as ‘not’ and of terms referring to mental entities such as ‘concept’, the *res significata* of a term is typically considered to be a *res extra animam*.⁵⁴ Now, the general consensus was that, to use William of Sherwood’s definition, “signification is a presentation of the form of something to the mind.”⁵⁵ How this claim is interpreted depends on the status assigned to common natures. From the point of view of a realist position, common natures are the secondary significates of terms. For nominalists, common natures exist only inasmuch as they are conceived by the intellect. From this point of view, the duality of concept and ‘thing signified’ appears to be lost. Indeed, some logicians held the view that the *res significata* of a term is the intellect’s conception it signifies.⁵⁶ One cannot, however, hold the view that terms signify only concepts without committing oneself to the view that the only purpose of language is to make our thoughts known. Thus, nominalists often held the view that individual objects are the secondary significates of terms.⁵⁷ Among terminist logicians there was general agreement that terms do not signify individual objects; rather, terms “supposit for” or “stand for” individual objects and “signify” the common nature in which they

⁵⁴ Spade, “Semantics of Terms,” 191; Ashworth, “Signification and Modes,” 45.

⁵⁵ *Introductiones*, p. 265, lines 8-9: “Est igitur *significatio* praesentatio alicuius formae ad intellectum.”

⁵⁶ For references and texts, see Ashworth, “Signification and Modes,” 51-52.

⁵⁷ Spade, “Semantics of Terms,” 191.

participate.⁵⁸ Lambert makes it clear that the term ‘man’ signifies humanity, but stands for Plato or for Socrates.⁵⁹ When thirteenth century logicians asked whether terms primarily signify concepts or things, the issue was whether concepts or common natures should be taken as primary significates of terms.⁶⁰

A further characteristic of the notion of *significatio* is that it is regarded as a natural or essential property of terms.⁶¹ In order to understand this doctrine, we need to consider a related notion to signification, that of “imposition” (*impositio*).⁶² Peter of Spain, contrasting signification and supposition, writes:

<p>Differunt autem suppositio et significatio, quia significatio est per impositionem vocis ad rem significandam, suppositio vero est acceptio ipsius termini iam significantis rem pro aliquo.⁶³</p>	<p>Signification and supposition differ because signification is the result of the imposition of a word upon a thing to be signified, whereas supposition is the acceptance of a term, already signifying a thing, for someone.</p>
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Imposition is a conventional act by which some entity, in this case a vocal word, is appointed to sign something else. This is supposed to work as follows: a first “impositor” investigates things and their properties and then “imposes” (*imponit*) vocal words to signify things with such and such properties; when a word is “imposed” to signify a certain thing, it acquires signification and becomes a sign or more precisely a term.⁶⁴

From the point of view of the act of imposition, terms are said to have a conventional

⁵⁸ De Rijk, *Logica Modernorum*, 2:555-60.

⁵⁹ Lambert, *Logica*, p. 206, lines 15-17: “[S]ignificatio hominis solum extenditur ad hominem, non ad contempta sub homine: «homo» enim significant hominem, non Sortem nec Platonem.”

⁶⁰ Ashworth, “Terminist Logic,” 151.

⁶¹ On signification as a ‘natural’ property of terms, see De Rijk, “Theory of the Properties of Terms,” 162-64; Ebbesen, “Dead Man is Alive,” 47.

⁶² The notion of “imposition” as it relates to the signification of terms has its roots in Antiquity. Two important sources have been identified: Apollonius Dyscolus, a second century grammarian whose doctrine reached the Latin west in the sixth century through Priscian; and Porphyry, the third century Aristotelian commentator. Ebbesen, “Dead Man is Alive,” 46.

⁶³ Peter of Spain, *Tractatus*, p. 80, lines 9-11.

⁶⁴ Ebbesen, “Dead Man is Alive,” 46.

signification whereas concepts have natural signification.⁶⁵ Presumably we all share the same concepts of (elementary) things, but the terms we use to signify these concepts vary since they are appointed by convention.⁶⁶ Accordingly, Peter of Spain defines the signification of a term as “the conventional representation of a thing by a word.”⁶⁷ Once a term acquires signification, however, its signification is considered a natural property inasmuch as the relation of signing or signification between term and concept is essential to the term. A term is a significative vocal expression. Lambert writes:

[S]ignificatio enim est intellectus rei qui per vocem representatur, ante cuius unionem cum voce non est terminus, sed constituitur terminus in unione illius intellectus rei cum voce.⁶⁸

Signification is the concept of the thing represented by means of a word, and before the union of it with the word there is no term; rather, a term is constituted in the union of that concept of a thing with a word.

One of the consequences of the doctrine of imposition is that a term has signification prior to its use in a proposition.⁶⁹ Medieval logicians were certainly aware of the variations in the signification of terms in a propositional context. Their analysis of fallacies, for instance, made those variations evident. However, use and context are downplayed in favor of the view that the signification of a term on a particular occasion of its use can ultimately be deduced from its fundamental signification. As a way to explain the perceived variations in the signification of terms, medieval logicians

⁶⁵ See, e.g., Lambert, *Logica*, p. 205, lines 11-13.

⁶⁶ Note that although the signification of terms is conventional, it is not arbitrary. It is often argued that the properties of things that lead to imposition also provide the etymology of the term. On this issue, see Ashworth, “Signification and Modes,” 46.

⁶⁷ *Tractatus*, p. 79, lines 11-12: “Significatio termini, prout hic sumitur, est rei per vocem secundum placitum representatio.” See also Lambert, *Logica*, p. 205, lines 26-28: “[Q]uia a voluntate fit unio intellectus rei cum voce, et in hoc consistit vocis impositio, ideo vox dicitur significare ad voluntatem instituentis.”

⁶⁸ Lambert, *Logica*, p. 206, lines 7-10.

⁶⁹ See Peter of Spain, *Tractatus*, p. 113, lines 3-6; William of Sherwood, *Introductiones*, p. 277, lines 70-71.

introduced the idea that from the moment of imposition a term acquires, in addition to its fundamental signification, a set of consignifications (such as time and number); modes of signification (such as those explaining the distinction between abstract and concrete terms), and secondary significations (as in the case of analogous terms). Let's investigate the notions of consignification and mode of signification, before turning to the secondary signification of analogous terms.

B. Consignifications and Modes of Signification

In the context of logic and grammar, the consignification of terms was sometimes linked to a term's mode of signification, so that the two notions were used interchangeably.⁷⁰ Grammarians and logicians distinguished between two main groups of modes of signification: 'essential modes' and 'accidental modes'. When used as equivalent to the notion of consignification, the notion of mode of signification refers to 'accidental' modes of signification.⁷¹ Aquinas keeps the notions of consignification and mode of signification separate,⁷² which is why I have elected to treat them separately.

a. Consignification

The notion of consignification is used in two different contexts, each having to do with a type of word. First, syncategorematic words are said to have consignification

⁷⁰ Ashworth, "Signification and Modes," 54.

⁷¹ For this use, see Peter of Spain, *Tractatus*, p. 133, lines 5-7: "In nomine etiam est alius accidentalis modus significandi a parte accidentium, secundum quod nomen significat masculine vel feminine, et sic de aliis." See also p. 136, lines 28-31; and p. 139, lines 15-21.

⁷² Ashworth, "Signification and Modes," 57.

because they signify only when joined to categorematic words in a proposition.⁷³ Second, categorematic words are said to have consignification insofar as they have a secondary or additional signification. For instance, based on Aristotle's *De interpretatione* 16b6, as translated by Boethius, verbs (unlike nouns) were thought to consignify time because the notion of time is added to their proper signification.⁷⁴ Notice that a verb's consignification of time differs from the signification of time by nouns such as 'today' and by adverbs of time.⁷⁵ Just as verbs consignify time, nouns and adjectives consignify gender, number, and case.⁷⁶ In this context, the consignifications of a term were regarded as accidental properties in contrast to the natural or essential property of signification. Nonetheless, the consignification of a term is not dependent on use or context; rather, it is assigned to a term from the moment of imposition. Peter of Spain, for instance, points out that the one who imposes a term to signify such and such thing, also imposes it to signify such and such gender and number.⁷⁷ Peter does not include case among a term's consignification because, as he explains, a term's case is assigned to it only so that it can be ordered to other terms and thus it does not contribute to a term's signification.⁷⁸ Peter considers case as an example of what he calls an "*accidens respectivus*," which he

⁷³ See William of Sherwood, *Introductiones*, p. 224, lines 60-61: "[O]mnes partes indeclinabiles . . . non significant proprie, sed consignant, id est cum alio significant."

⁷⁴ *De interpretatione vel Periermenias*, trans., Boethius, ed. Laurentius Minio-Paluello (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1965), p. 7, line 1: "Verbum autem est quod consignificat tempus."

⁷⁵ Boethius, *In librum Aristotelis Peri Hermeneias*, p. 57, lines 6-10.

⁷⁶ See Lambert, *Logica*, p. 9, lines 37-39: "Dicitur autem [nomen] consignificare illud quod ei accidit ultra principale significatum ut «homo» consignificat nominativum casum et numerum singularem, et alia que sibi accidunt."

⁷⁷ Peter of Spain, *Tractatus*, p. 114, lines 20-22: "[Q]ui imponebat dictionem ad significandum talem rem, simul imponebat eam ad significandum in tali genere et in tali numero."

⁷⁸ Peter of Spain, *Tractatus*, p. 108, lines 21-23.

contrasts with the “*accidentia absoluta*” of terms, such as time in the case of verbs, and gender and number in the case of nouns.⁷⁹

b. Modes of Signification

Regarding modes of signification, we begin by noting that although there are remote foundations in Boethius and the Latin grammarian Priscian,⁸⁰ the notion of *modus significandi* is distinctively medieval. It developed primarily during the twelfth century and by the late thirteenth century became one of the central notions in speculative grammar.⁸¹ In the mid-thirteenth century, within the context of logic and grammar, the notion of *modus significandi* was used in two different senses, each resulting from its application to a variety of semantic and grammatical issues.⁸²

Grammatical Sense. The most common use of the notion was within the context of grammar, where the term ‘*modus significandi*’ identifies diverse parts of speech. Modes of signification include being a noun, an adjective, and a verb.⁸³ In this context, the mode of signification of a term was understood in connection with the *res significata*

⁷⁹ Peter of Spain, *Tractatus*, pp. 114-15.

⁸⁰ For the relevant passages, see Charles Thurot, *Extraits de divers manuscrits latins pour servir à l'histoire de doctrines grammaticales au moyen âge* (Frankfurt: Minerva, 1964), 150n2.

⁸¹ Irène Rosier, “*Res significata et modus significandi*: Les implications d’une distinction médiévale,” in *Sprachtheorien in Spätantike und Mittelalter*, ed. Sten Ebbesen (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1995), 137. On the historical background and development of the notion of *modus significandi*, see also Thurot, *Extraits de divers manuscrits latins*, 149-60; Gregory Rocca, “The Distinction Between ‘*res significata*’ and ‘*modus significandi*’ in Aquinas’s Theological Epistemology,” *The Thomist* 55 (1991), 175-80; Mark Jordan, “Modes of Discourse in Aquinas’ Metaphysics,” *New Scholasticism* 54 (1980), 403-10.

⁸² On the various uses and connotations of the notion of *modus significandi*, see Rosier, “*Res significata et modus significandi*,” 137-39. Ashworth’s discussion on *modi significandi*, in “Signification and Modes,” 53-57, is also useful, although it lacks a consideration of the second approach to the notion of *modus significandi*, to which we turn next.

⁸³ These modes are often called “essential” modes of signification. They are contrasted with a term’s “accidental” modes of signification, also referred to as consignifications. See, Rosier, “*Res significata et modus significandi*,” 137; Ashworth, “Signification and Modes,” 55-56.

of the term. Thus, in distinguishing parts of speech, grammarians speak of a noun as a term having the mode of signifying a substance, that is, an independent object, whereas an adjective is a term having the mode of signifying something dependent and inherent, such as a quality, a quantity, etc.⁸⁴

Logical Sense. Within the context of logic, the notion of *modus significandi* acquires a different connotation, wherein it conveys the general idea of signifying ‘according to’ or ‘in the manner of’ (*significare sic, significare ut*). In its logical sense, the notion of *modus significandi* is used to analyze the signification of terms that belong to the same family or that share the same root, such as ‘white’ (*albus*) and ‘whiteness’ (*albedo*). The focus here is not the grammatical opposition between a substantive name (‘whiteness’) and an adjectival name (‘white’), although such opposition is often in the background, but the different mode or manner in which these terms signify the same *res*.

In discussing modes of signification, logicians distinguish between signifying a substance and signifying substantively (*substantive*); the latter says nothing about the thing signified, it merely designates the mode or manner in which the thing is signified.⁸⁵ Following on this line of thought, Peter of Spain argues against the use of the descriptive terms ‘substantive’ and ‘adjectival’ in reference to the *modi significandi* of nouns and adjectives. He explains that “being adjectival” and “being substantive” are modes of things signified, not modes of signification. He recommends instead the use of the adverbs ‘substantially’ and ‘adjectively’:

Significationis alia est rei substantive et habet fieri per nomen substantivum, ut ‘homo’; alia est rei adiective et habet fieri per nomen adiectivum vel per verbum, ut

One sort of signification is that of a substantive thing and it is effected by a substantive noun like ‘man’. Another is that of an adjectival thing and it is effected

⁸⁴ Ashworth, “Signification and Modes,” 56.

⁸⁵ Rosier, “*Res significata et modus significandi*,” 138-39.

‘albus’ vel ‘currit’. Quare proprie non est significatio substantiva vel adiectiva, sed aliquid significatur substantive et aliquid adiective, quia adiectivatio vel substantivatio sunt modi rerum que significantur, et non significationis.⁸⁶

by an adjectival noun or by a verb like ‘*albus*’ or ‘*currit*’. As a result, signification is not properly substantive or adjectival; rather, something is signified substantively and something adjectivally, since being adjectival or being substantive are modes of the things that are signified, not modes of signification.

For Peter, then, the notion of *modus significandi* relates to the *res significata* of a term only to the extent that it designates the manner in which the *res significata* is signified by the term. As one will recall from our previous discussion of the terminist notion of signification, the *res significata* of a term is signified through the mediation of the intellect’s conception of it, which conception the term immediately signifies. Thus, the mode of signification of a term, as understood by Peter, is ultimately a reflection of the mode in which the *res significata* is conceived by the intellect. Peter’s understanding of the notion of *modus significandi* in connection with the intellect’s conception signified by terms explains why Peter uses the term ‘*modus intelligendi*’ as a synonymous with the term ‘*modus significandi*’.⁸⁷

As we indicated earlier, the notion of *modus significandi*, taken in its logical rather than grammatical sense, was used to analyze the signification of terms that belong to the same family or that share the same root (although distinctions among parts of speech are also often mentioned). Logicians analyze such terms as signifying the same *res* according to different modes (*alio modo, aliter et aliter*).⁸⁸ The source for this use of the notion is Boethius, who, distinguishing between the noun ‘*cursus*’ and the verb ‘*currit*’, remarks:

⁸⁶ Peter of Spain, *Tractatus*, pp. 79-80.

⁸⁷ See Peter of Spain, *Tractatus*, p. 137, lines 4-5; and p. 139, lines 20-21.

⁸⁸ See Rosier, “*Res significata et modus significandi*,” 138.

Omne enim verbum aliquod accidens designat. Cum enim dico *cursus*, ipsum quidem est accidens, sed non ita dicitur ut id alicui inesse vel non inesse dicatur. Si autem dixero *currit*, tunc ipsum accidens in alicuius actione proponens alicui inesse significo.⁸⁹

Every verb signifies an accident. When I say ‘*cursus*’, an accident is signified, but it is not said in such a way that it is said to be or not to be in someone. But if I say ‘*currit*’, by asserting the accident in the action of someone, I signify it as being in someone.

Notice that the implication here is that the terms ‘*cursus*’ and ‘*currit*’ signify the same *res*, in this case an accident, running, but in different modes. Notice also that although the noun ‘*cursus*’ signifies an accident, i.e., something dependent and inherent, it does not signify it in the mode of an accident, i.e., as inherent in someone (*ut id alicui inesse*). The verb ‘*currit*’, on the other hand, signifies an accident in the mode of accidents. Peter of Spain would say that the noun ‘*cursus*’ signifies its *res* “substantivally” whereas the verb ‘*currit*’ signifies its *res* “adjectivally.”

Next, we consider a case of terms having secondary significations, which came to be known in the thirteenth century as ‘*analogia*’, and which logicians analyzed in terms of signification: specifically, as they put it, signification *per prius et posterius*.

C. Analogy: Signification *per prius et posterius*

Logicians of the thirteenth century treated analogy or *analogia* as a species of equivocation, given that equivocation covered all cases in which one and the same term displays different significations on different occasions of its use.⁹⁰ For, the signification of analogous terms varies on different occasions of their use. The term ‘healthy’, for example, has different significations as it is predicated of animal and food. Before we consider the semantic structure of analogous terms, let us begin with an overview of the

⁸⁹ Boethius, *In librum Aristotelis Peri Hermeneias*, p. 67, lines 10-15.

⁹⁰ Ashworth, “Analogy and Equivocation in Thirteenth Century Logic: Aquinas in Context” *Mediaeval Studies* 54 (1992): 97.

three different sources that framed the semantic discussion of equivocation and analogy in the thirteenth century.⁹¹

a. Background of the Discussion of Equivocation and Analogy in the Thirteenth Century

Boethius and Aristotle's *Categories*. The first source is Boethius' translation and interpretation of Aristotle's distinction between equivocal and univocal terms at the beginning of the *Categories*. Equivocal terms are defined as having a name in common but a different *ratio*. Univocal terms, on the other hand, have both a name in common and the same *ratio*.⁹² Boethius divided equivocal terms into two groups: chance equivocals (*aequivoca a casu*) and deliberate equivocals (*aequivoca a consilio*).⁹³ Our interest lies with deliberate equivocals where there is a relation between the occurrences of the equivocal term. Boethius further subdivided deliberate equivocals into four groups according to the way the occurrences of the equivocal term are related: (i) resemblance, (ii) proportion ('*proportio*' in Latin, '*analogia*' in Greek), (iii) "from one" (*ab uno*), and (iv) "to one" (*ad unum*).⁹⁴ The last two subdivisions were sometimes joined together

⁹¹ See Ashworth, "Analogy and Equivocation," 100-115; *Les théories de l'analogie du XIIIe au XVIe siècle* (Paris: Vrin, 2008), chap. 1.

⁹² Aristotle, *Categories*, 1a1-9. In Boethius' translation the passage reads: "Aequivoca dicuntur quorum nomen solum commune est, secundum nomen vero substantiae ratio diversa, ut animal homo et quod pingitur [. . .] Univoca vero dicuntur quorum et nomen commune est et secundum nomen eadem substantiae ratio, ut animal homo atque bos." Boethius, trans., *Categoriae vel Praedicamenta*, ed. L. Minio-Paluello (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1961), p. 5, lines 3-5, 9-11. On the interpretation of the notion of '*substantiae ratio*', see Ashworth, "Analogy and Equivocation," 104.

⁹³ See Boethius, *In Categoriae Aristotelis libri quatuor*, in *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series latina*, vol. 64, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris, 1891), col. 166, lines, 18-30.

⁹⁴ For references, see Ashworth, "Analogy and Equivocation," 101-102. For further discussion on Boethius' division of equivocation, see Ashworth, "Analogy, Univocation, and Equivocation in Some Early Fourteenth-Century Authors," in *Aristotle in Britain during the Middle Ages*, ed. John Marenbon (Belgium: Brepols, 1996), 235-36.

under the label of signification ‘*ut unum*’.⁹⁵ In the thirteenth century, the last two were covered under the term ‘*analogia*’.⁹⁶

The Discussion of Equivocation in Aristotle’s *De sophisticis elenchis*. The second source is Aristotle’s *De sophisticis elenchis*, where Aristotle distinguishes between three modes of equivocation: (i) when the term signifies more than one thing, (ii) when the term is used equivocally by custom, and (iii) when terms signify more than one thing in combination, but alone only one thing.⁹⁷ In his *Tractatus*, Peter of Spain identifies Aristotle’s second mode of equivocation as involving diverse things that are signified *secundum prius et posterius*. His example is ‘healthy’ (‘*sanum*’) as said of a person and of urine.⁹⁸ He does not use ‘*ens*’ as an example, but later in the treatise Peter speaks of a sort of unity “by proportion” which is said *secundum prius et posterius*; his examples are ‘*ens*’ as said of all beings, and ‘*sanum*’ as said of all healthy things:

Et est aliud unum simpliciter quod est unum et sub uno nomine. Et hoc subdivitur per quinque partes. Quia huius unius quoddam est quod est unum proportione, et est illud quod est dictum secundum prius et posterius, ut ‘*ens*’ de omnibus entibus et ‘*sanum*’ de omnibus sanis et ‘*bonum*’ de omnibus bonis.⁹⁹

[Among the modes of unity,] there is a second ‘one’, simply speaking, which is [both] one and under one name. This is subdivided into five parts. For, to this ‘one’ belongs something that is one proportionally, and it is that which is said *secundum prius et posterius*, as ‘*ens*’ is said of all beings, and ‘healthy’ of all healthy things, and ‘good’ of all good things.

In addition, earlier in the treatise, Peter remarks that ‘*ens*’ is equivocal because different *rationes* were involved:

Predicari autem *univoce* est predicari secundum unum nomen et rationem unam

To be predicated univocally is to be predicated according to one name and one

⁹⁵ For references, see Ashworth, “Analogy and Equivocation,” 102.

⁹⁶ Ashworth, “Analogy, Univocation, and Equivocation,” 237.

⁹⁷ Aristotle, *De sophisticis elenchis*, 166a15-20.

⁹⁸ Peter of Spain, *Tractatus*, p. 100.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 177, lines 19-24.

sumptam secundum nomen . . . Et ob hoc ens non potest esse genus quia, licet secundum unum nomen predicetur de omnibus, non tamen secundum rationem unam. Ratio enim entis, secundum quod dicitur de substantia, est ens per se; secundum autem quod dicitur de aliis novem predicamentis, est ens in alio. Et ita predicatur secundum diversas rationes. Et ideo non predicatur univoce, sed potius equivoce aut multipliciter.¹⁰⁰

ratio taken according to that name . . . That is why *ens* cannot be a genus; for, although it is predicated of all things according to one name, [it is not predicated] according to one *ratio*. The ratio of *ens*, as said of a substance, is *ens per se*; as said of the other nine predicaments, it is *ens in alio*. Thus, the name ‘*ens*’ is predicated according to different *rationes*. And, for that reason, it is not predicated univocally but equivocally or in different ways.

Peter’s remarks above indicate that there is a kind of unity among the different conceptions or *rationes* involved in the signification of analogous terms. The various conceptions or *rationes* involved are ‘one’ according to a certain ‘*proportio*’ or ‘relation’, so that one is ‘prior’ and the others ‘posterior’. Hence, the language of signification *secundum prius et posterius*.

Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* and the Work of Arabic Authors. The recovery of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* and the introduction into the Latin west of the work of Arabic authors constitute a third source.¹⁰¹ In *Metaphysics* 4.2 (1003a33-35) Aristotle remarks that ‘*ens*’ is predicated of both substance and accidents without being equivocal.¹⁰² This remark directly contradicts Porphyry’s claim in his *Isagoge* that ‘*ens*’ is said equivocally.¹⁰³ In order to solve the difficulty, logicians interpreted Aristotle’s remark in the *Metaphysics* as a denial that ‘*ens*’ is equivocal according to the first mode of equivocation distinguished in *De sophisticis elenchis*. The term ‘*ens*’ is equivocal

¹⁰⁰ Peter of Spain, *Tractatus*, p. 25, lines 15-21.

¹⁰¹ See Ashworth, “Analogy and Equivocation,” 107-109; *Théories de l’analogie*, 28-31.

¹⁰² See *Metaphysica Lib. I-X, XII-XIV. Translatio Anonyma sive “Media”*, ed. G. Vuillemin-Diem (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 60: “Ens autem multis quidem dicitur modis, sed ad unum et unam aliquam naturam et non equivoce, sed quemadmodum salubre omne ad sanitatem . . .”

¹⁰³ See *Categoriarum supplementa: Porphyrii Isagoge. Translatio Boethii et Anonymi Fragmentum vulgo vocatum “Liber sex principiorum,”* ed. L. Minio-Paluello and B. G. Dod (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1966), 12: “Vel, si omnia quis entia vocet, aequivoce (inquit) nuncupabit, non univoce.”

according to the second mode of equivocation. In the long commentary on *Metaphysics* 4.2 (1003a33-1003b10), Averroes remarks that Aristotle classifies the term ‘healthy’ as a case of relation to one as an end, the term ‘medical’ as a case of relation to one as an agent, and the term ‘ens’ as a case of relation to one subject.¹⁰⁴ Accordingly, to accommodate ‘ens’ into Boethius’ subdivision of deliberate equivocals, logicians expanded the last two subdivisions into three.¹⁰⁵ Another important Arabic source was Al-Ghazali’s *Logic*, through which logicians acquired the notion of ambiguous terms (of which ‘ens’ is an example) which are intermediaries between equivocal and univocal terms and which are said of different things in a prior and a posterior way (*secundum prius et posterius*).¹⁰⁶ Al-Ghazali refers to such ambiguous terms as ‘*convenientia*’, that is, terms related by agreement.¹⁰⁷

b. The Semantic Structure of Analogous Terms

Lambert’s exposition of analogous terms illustrates how the various sources discussed above came together in the mind of mid-thirteenth century logicians. Indeed, of the three authors we are studying, Lambert alone incorporates the term ‘*analogia*’ into his discussion of equivocation. He writes:

¹⁰⁴ Averroes, *Aristotelis Opera cum Averrois Commentariis*, vol. 8 (Frankfurt, Minerva, 1962), f. 65va: “Et intendebat per hoc declarare, quod attributa ei, aut attribuuntur eidem fini, aut eidem agenti, aut eidem subiecto, sicut nouem praedicamenta substantiae.”

¹⁰⁵ Ashworth, “Analogy, Univocation, and Equivocation,” 236.

¹⁰⁶ See C. H. Lohr, “*Logica Algazelis*: Introduction and Critical Text,” *Traditio* 21 (1965): 246: “*Convenientia* sunt media inter univoca et aequivoca, ut ‘ens,’ quod dicitur de substantia et accidente. . . . Esse vero prius habet substantia; deinde accidens, mediante alio. Ergo est eis esse secundum prius et posterius. Hoc dicitur *ambiguum*, eo quod aptatur ad hoc et ad hoc.” The notion of ambiguous terms which are intermediaries between equivocal and univocal had a long tradition in Arabic logic. See Harry Wolfson, “The Amphibolous Terms in Aristotle, Arabic Philosophy and Maimonides,” *Harvard Theological Review* 31 (1938).

¹⁰⁷ The use of the word ‘*convenientia*’ is important because Albert the Great explicitly remarks in his commentary on the *Categories* that ‘*analogia*’ were what the Arabs called ‘*convenientia*’. Ashworth, “Analogy and Equivocation,” 108.

Secunda species provenit ex eo quod aliqua dictio significat unum predicatum tamen a pluribus, ita quod ab uno per prius, ab alio sive aliis per posterius, unde secundum istam speciem equivocatio fit in terminis analogis. Terminus analogus unum significat sub diversis tamen intentionibus: hoc est, sub ratione prioris et posterioris in hiis a quibus predicatur, ut ens unum significat, sed prius est predicatum a substantia, per posterius ab accidente, unde est terminus analogus.¹⁰⁸

The second species [of equivocation] arises from the fact that an expression signifies one thing that is nonetheless predicated of many in such a way that it is [predicated] primarily of one, and secondarily of another or of others. Thus, this species of equivocation occurs in analogous terms. An analogical term signifies one thing, nonetheless under different concepts (*intentionibus*), that is, under the concept (*ratio*) of priority and posteriority in connection with those things of which it is predicated, as ‘*ens*’ signifies one thing, but it is predicated primarily of substance and secondarily of accident; thus ‘*ens*’ is an analogous term.

Following this passage, Lambert examines the term ‘healthy’ (‘*sanum*’) as said of animal, urine, food, and diet. He explains that the “one thing” signified by the term ‘*sanum*’ is health. When ‘*sanum*’ is said of the animal, health is signified *per prius*; when ‘*sanum*’ is said of urine, food, and diet, health is signified *per posterius*. Lambert suggests that ‘*sanum*’ is said *per prius* of the animal inasmuch as health is first in the animal as in a subject, whereas it is said *per posterius* of the others inasmuch as each of the objects involved relates to the health in animals in some way, e.g., as a sign or as a cause of health.¹⁰⁹ Based on Lambert’s definition of analogy in the passage quoted above, we may deduce that the term ‘*sanum*’, when said of animal, urine, food, and diet, signifies the same thing, namely health, but under different concepts (*ratio* or *intentio*).

Several other points regarding the logicians’ understanding of the semantic structure of analogous terms are important before we conclude this section.

We begin with a quick note regarding analogy and imposition. When the term ‘*ens*’ is predicated of an accident, or when the term ‘*sanum*’ is predicated of food, it

¹⁰⁸ Lambert, *Logica*, p. 149, lines 22-30.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 150, lines 10-20.

appears as if the term ‘*ens*’ and ‘*sanum*’ acquire a new signification which, as it happens, is neither the same nor completely different from their original signification (i.e. from the signification they have standing outside a propositional context).¹¹⁰ Yet, from the point of view of terminist logic and the doctrine of imposition, the “new” signification, cannot be the direct result of use and context. Within the semantic framework of terminist logic, words signify precisely what they were imposed to signify. Terminist logicians were generally willing to concede that some grammatical features such as case are relational, but there was a strong belief that once a term’s signification is set by imposition, it is not altered by sentential context.¹¹¹ Thus, in order to explain the perceived alterations in the signification of terms like ‘*ens*’ and ‘*sanum*’ when they are predicated of different objects, without at the same time destroying the theory of signification, logicians needed to place the source of the new signification at the moment of the imposition of the term with signification.¹¹² This does not mean, of course, that all significations of a term must be ascribed to its original imposition; within the terminist framework, it is possible for a term to acquire an additional or secondary signification by an additional act of imposition. The central point here is that the signification of a term must be the result of an act of imposition. This proved to be quite a challenge for terminist logicians when applied to equivocal terms in general. The most common account runs as follows. Purely equivocal terms (such as ‘*canis*’) are imposed to signify more than one thing, when taken alone, and only one thing, when taken in certain propositional contexts. The case of analogous terms was thought to be the opposite. They are imposed to signify only one

¹¹⁰ Ashworth, “Signification and Modes,” 61.

¹¹¹ Ashworth, “Analogy and Equivocation,” 107. On this issue, see also Ebbesen, “Dead Man is Alive,” 47, 51-52.

¹¹² Ebbesen, “Dead Man is Alive,” 47-48; and Ashworth, “Signification and Modes,” 62.

thing when taken alone (e.g., the term ‘*ens*’ by itself signifies only substance), and one or the other significate, when taken in a propositional context, so that senses must be distinguished before verification can take place.¹¹³

In examining the semantic structure of analogous terms, terminist logicians in general shared the view that the variation in signification of analogous terms has nothing to do with their *res significata* but rather with the intellect’s conception of the *res significata*. Discussions on analogy in the thirteenth century were largely centered on the precise nature of the conception or conceptions involved.¹¹⁴ One subject of debate, having to do with the interpretation of the phrase ‘*per prius et posterius*’, concerns the question of whether the various significations of an analogous terms are either the result of one *ratio* or *intentio* used in different ways (William of Sherwood) or the result of more than one *ratio* or *intentio* used in very similar ways (Lambert of Auxerre and Peter of Spain).¹¹⁵ Aquinas, we shall see, takes diverse positions on the matter, eventually arriving at the claim that the conceptions involved are neither one nor many. In addressing the issue, William agrees that a term must have signification before it enters a proposition, but he argues that within a propositional context slight variations in a term’s signification can take place. “This applies,” he writes, “not to every word, but to that [word] whose signification or consignification is one concept (*intentio*) shared (*participata*) by many *secundum prius et posterius*.”¹¹⁶ But, even if one claims that there is in fact more than one *ratio* involved, there is no denying the similarities among them.

¹¹³ Ashworth, “Signification and Modes,” 63.

¹¹⁴ Ashworth, “Analogy, Univocation, and Equivocation,” 233.

¹¹⁵ Ashworth, “Analogy and Equivocation,” 124.

¹¹⁶ *Introductiones*, p. 277, lines 72-74: “Et hoc est non in omni dictione, sed in illa, cuius significatio vel consignificatio est una intentio participata a pluribus secundum prius et posterius.”

Peter of Spain, we have seen, speaks of a certain unity among the various *rationes* or conceptions involved, which, he explains, are “one” according as they are ordered *secundum prius et posterius*.¹¹⁷ Thus, with regards to the number of *rationes* involved in analogous signification, we may say that there is a sense in which more than one *ratio* or *conceptio* is involved, and there is another sense in which only one *ratio* or *conceptio* is involved. When we look at the internal semantic structure of the analogous term, we find a single *res significata* and distinct but similar *conceptiones* or *rationes*. There is a primary (*prior*) conception, which provides the primary signification of the term, and one or more secondary conceptions which are consequent upon (*posterius*) the primary one. In this manner, the primary conception is somehow contained in all secondary conceptions, so that one may speak of there being only one *ratio* involved.

We turn next to the second part of the chapter, devoted to a review of Aquinas’ theory of signification.

2.2 Aquinas’ Theory of Signification

Now that I have reviewed the main notions of the standard thirteenth-century theory of signification, I turn to that theory in Aquinas. In examining Aquinas’ theory of signification, I consider the following topics: Aquinas’ view on the nature of the *conceptio* and *res* signified by terms; his theory of *modi significandi*, specially the concrete and abstract modes of signification; and his account of the semantic structure of analogous terms. As we shall see from the following discussion, there is significant overlap between Aquinas’ theory of signification and that of terminist logicians of the mid-thirteenth century.

¹¹⁷ See *Tractatus*, p. 177, lines 19-24.

2.2.1. Aquinas' Account of the Nature of the *Conceptio* and *Res* Signified by Terms

In terminist semantics, we might recall, the notion of signification was understood to entail a twofold 'signing' relationship: between a term, on the one hand, and a concept or a thing, on the other. For Aquinas, a term *immediately* signifies a concept or conception in the mind (*conceptio, intellectus, ratio, intentio, or verbum interius*)¹¹⁸, but *ultimately* it signifies the thing (*res*) that is the object of that conception.¹¹⁹ The signification of the *res* is thus for Aquinas always mediated by the *conceptio* signified by the term. He writes:

Respondeo dicendum quod, secundum Philosophum, voces sunt signa intellectuum, et intellectus sunt rerum similitudines. Et sic patet quod voces referuntur ad res significandas, mediante conceptione intellectus. Secundum igitur

I answer that, according to the Philosopher, words are signs of 'intellections' and 'intellections' are the likenesses of things. And so, it is evident that words are related to the things signified through the mediation of the conception of the intellect.

¹¹⁸ I have found that in the context of signification the terms '*conceptio*' and '*intellectus*' appear more often than any of the other terms. For the sake of consistency in the exposition, though, throughout the following pages I use '*conceptio*' or 'conception' to refer to this side of a term's signification. In addition, with this use, I seek to avoid possible misunderstandings given the various meanings of '*ratio*'. Also, the notion of '*verbum interius*' appears more often in epistemological than in semantic contexts, although, as we shall see, the two are deeply connected. Regarding the notion of '*intentio*', which I will also use on occasion, it should be noted that in the context that interests us it is used as equivalent to '*conceptio*'. Aquinas speaks of both '*conceptio rei intellectae*' and '*intentio rei intellectae*' as what the intellect produces and properly understands (*ST I*, q. 27, a. 1; *SCG I*, c. 53); and he identifies '*verbum interius*' with both '*conceptio*' (*De pot.*, q. 8, a. 1; *De ver.*, q. 4, a. 2) and '*intentio*' (*SCG IV*, c. 11). Another notion we will encounter is that of '*definitio*', but this notion is quite ambiguous. It is sometimes identified with the *ratio* or conception signified by a term (*In I Post. Anal.*, lect. 4, lines 110-112; *De pot.*, q. 8, a. 1; and q. 9, a. 5), but '*definitio*' can also be that which signifies the intention or *ratio* of the thing understood (*SCG I*, c. 53).

More will be said about these terms and phrases when we discuss the nature of the conception signified by terms. For now, I point out that (i) strictly speaking, what a term signifies in the mind is 'that which the intellect understands' about the thing signified, and (ii) 'that which the intellects understands' can be considered as both a psychological and a logical entity. Whichever term is used, then, greatly depends on the context.

¹¹⁹ Ashworth, "Signification and Modes," 45; Gyula Klima, "The Semantic Principles Underlying Saint Thomas Aquinas' Metaphysics of Being," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 5 (1996): 100.

quod aliquid a nobis intellectu cognosci
potest, sic a nobis potest nominari.¹²⁰

Therefore, according as something is
known by us in an ‘intellection’, in this
way it can be named by us.

The doctrine of the mediation of the intellect’s *conceptio* in the signification of the *res* establishes a relation between signification and intellection, and more broadly between semantics and epistemology, that deeply shapes Aquinas’ theory of signification.¹²¹ As I indicated earlier, the relation between semantics and epistemology is characteristic of the version of terminist logic that is distinctive of mid-thirteenth century Latin Europe (c. 1250-75), a version sometimes called ‘pre-modism’, in which is highlighted a correspondence between the *modi significandi* of terms and the *modi intelligendi* of our intellect.¹²² Notice how this theme emerges in the passage last quoted: the manner in which something is named parallels that in which it is known. We will encounter this same theme often as we discuss Aquinas’ account of the nature of the *res* and *conceptio* signified by terms.

A. The *Res* Signified in Aquinas

Regarding the nature of the *res significata* of a term, we should mention first that Aquinas identifies the *res significata* of a term with a form or nature rather than with an

¹²⁰ *ST I*, q. 13, a. 1, Leonine ed., vol. 4, p. 139. See also *In I Periher.*, lect. 2, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 11, lines 109-12: “[I]deo necesse fuit Aristotili dicere quod uoces significant intellectus conceptiones immediate, et eis mediantibus res;” and *ST I*, q. 13, a. 4, ad 1, Leonine ed., vol. 4, p. 145: “[N]omen non significat rem, nisi mediante conceptione intellectus.”

¹²¹ Regarding the repercussions of Aquinas’ claim that words signify concepts immediately and external things through the mediation of concepts, Robert Pasnau notes that “This semantic claim is not just something to which Aquinas dutifully adheres when confronted with Aristotle’s text; it is also a claim that he fully incorporates into his own thinking about mind. In his theological writings as well he makes it one of the central and characteristic features of the mental word: that it is that which spoken words signify immediately.” Robert Pasnau, “Aquinas on Thought’s Linguistic Nature,” *Monist* 80 (1997): 561.

¹²² On this issue, see the discussion on pp. 28-29 above.

individual or a collection of individuals.¹²³ The *res significata* of the term ‘man’, for example, is not any particular man but human nature or humanity. As Aquinas explains, the term ‘man’ signifies (*significat*) human nature and stands for (*supponit*) individuals having that form, i.e., individual human beings.¹²⁴

[H]oc enim nomen <i>homo</i> non significat aliquem singularium hominum, sed solum hominem in communi. ¹²⁵	This name ‘man’ does not signify any individual man, but only man in general.
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The fact that a term signifies a nature has implications, of course, for what it of itself stands for in propositions, for its *per se* supposition. And so, Aquinas observes:

Quia enim forma significata per hoc nomen <i>homo</i> , idest humanitas, realiter dividitur in diversis suppositis, per se supponit pro persona. ¹²⁶	Since the form signified by this name ‘man’, namely, humanity, is really divided in different subjects, in itself it supposits for a person [i.e., an individual of a rational nature].
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One might think that the term ‘humanity’ signifies human nature while the term ‘man’ signifies an individual human being. The difference in signification between these terms, however, does not rest in the *res* they signify. Aquinas points out that the terms ‘man’

¹²³ Ashworth, “Signification and Modes,” 52-53; Klima, “Semantic Principles,” 110-11. The exception are proper names, which Aquinas notes signify an individual rather than a form or nature (*ST I*, q. 13, a. 9).

¹²⁴ As a reminder, ‘supposition’ is the property a term has to stand for a thing or a collection of things in a propositional context.

¹²⁵ *De pot.*, q. 9, a. 4, ad 18, Marietti ed., p. 74.

¹²⁶ *ST I*, q. 39, a. 4 ad. 3, Leonione ed., vol. 4, p. 402. Similarly, in the corpus of the next article, Aquinas holds that the term ‘*Deus*’ signifies the divine essence, but can stand for a divine person: “Nam hoc nomen *Deus*, quia significat divinam essentiam ut in habente, ex modo suae significationis naturaliter habet quod possit supponere pro persona” (*ST I*, q. 39, a. 5, Leonine ed., vol. 4, p. 405). For Aquinas’ use of supposition theory, see Henk Schoot, “Aquinas and Supposition: The Possibilities and Limitations of Logic in Divinis,” *Vivarium* 31 (1993); and Ralph McInerney, *Logic and Analogy* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961), 64-66.

and ‘humanity’ signify the same *res*, human nature or humanity, according to different modes of signification.¹²⁷

The identification of the *res significata* of a term with a form or nature rather than with an individual thing is a direct consequence of the mediation of the intellect’s *conceptio* in the signification of the *res*. The *res significata* of a term is the object of the intellect’s conception immediately signified by the term.¹²⁸ As such, the *res significata* is that which the *conceptio* signified by the term makes us aware of, and this is some form or nature without its individuating conditions.¹²⁹ The object of the intellect’s conception, the thing that is understood and subsequently signified, is thus intrinsically qualified by the way in which the intellect works. Aquinas writes:

Ulterius autem considerandum est quod intellectus, per speciem rei formatus, intelligendo format in seipso quandam intentionem rei intellectae, quae est ratio ipsius, quam significat definitio. Et hoc quidem necessarium est: eo quod intellectus intelligit indifferenter rem

In addition, it must be considered that the intellect, informed by the species of the thing, forms in itself in understanding a certain intention of the thing understood, which is its ratio, which the definition signifies. This is necessary because the intellect understands a thing indifferently,

¹²⁷ See *De ente*, c. 2, Leonine ed., vol. 43, p. 373, lines 292-94: “Sic igitur patet quod essentiam hominis significat hoc nomen homo et hoc nomen humanitas, sed diuersimode.” We shall discuss Aquinas’ conception of ‘modes of signification’ in the following section.

¹²⁸ This is to my mind the most accurate characterization of the nature of the *res significata*, for it highlights the mediation of the intellect in the signification of the *res*. Ultimately, the distinction between *res significata* and *significatum* follows on the distinction between *res intellecta* and *intellectum*. See *SCG IV*, c. 11, Leonine ed., vol. 15, p. 32, lines 26-33: “Dico autem *intentionem intellectam* id quod intellectus in seipso concipit de re intellecta. Quae quidem in nobis neque est ipsa res quae intelligitur; neque est ipsa substantia intellectus; sed est quaedam similitudo concepta in intellectu de re intellecta, quam voces exteriores significant; unde et ipsa intentio *verbum interius* nominatur, quod est exteriori verbo significatum.”

¹²⁹ Klima, “Semantic Principles,” 101 and 103-106. Ashworth’s characterization of the *res significata* as “natures and properties as externally exemplified” and as “externally existent” is rather unfortunate (see “Signification and Modes,” 52-53). By these remarks Ashworth seeks to illustrate the distinction found in Aquinas between ‘the thing signified’ and ‘the conception signified’, but such characterization of the *res significata* suggests that the *res significata* is in every case a form or nature actually existing in the nature of things. However, as we shall see, for Aquinas, the intellect can conceive, and signify, not only forms that exist in reality, but also something completely non-existent as well as something that exists only in the operation of the intellect itself. See *In I Sent.*, d. 2, q. 1, a. 3; *De pot.*, q. 1, a. 1, ad 10.

absentem et praesentem, in quo cum intellectu imaginatio convenit; sed intellectus hoc amplius habet, quod etiam intelligit rem ut separatam a conditionibus materialibus, sine quibus in rerum natura non existit; et hoc non posset esse nisi intellectus sibi intentionem praedictam formaret.¹³⁰

[whether] absent or present. In this the imagination agrees with the intellect. But, in addition, the intellect has that it understands the thing as separated from the material conditions without which it does not exist in reality. And this could not be so unless the intellect forms for itself the aforementioned intention.

Accordingly, the object of the intellect's conception signified by the term 'man' cannot be humanity in its individual and material particularity, i.e. *this* or *that* man. The *res significata* of the term 'man', the object of the intellect's conception signified by this term, is not an individual human being, but human nature or humanity.

We should be careful, however, not to mistake the *res significata* of terms with a universal that can only exist in the mind. Aquinas explains that "humanity is something in reality, but there it does not have the ratio of a universal, for there is not some humanity outside the soul that is common to many."¹³¹ Human nature as such exists in reality only in *this* or *that* man; it is only accidental to this nature to be apprehended by the intellect without its individuating conditions:

[H]umanitas quae intelligitur, non est nisi in hoc vel in illo homine, sed quod humanitas apprehendatur sine individualibus conditionibus, quod est ipsam abstrahi, ad quod sequitur intentio universalitatis, accidit humanitatis secundum quod percipitur ab intellectu, in quo est similitudo naturae speciei, et non individualium principiorum.¹³²

The humanity which is understood exists only in this or that man, but that humanity be apprehended without the conditions of individuality, that is, that it be abstracted, [such that] to it belongs the intention of universality, befalls humanity according as it is perceived by the intellect, in which there is that likeness of the nature of a species and not [that of] individuating principles.

¹³⁰ SCG I, c. 53, Leonine ed., vol. 13, p. 150, lines 3-14B.

¹³¹ *In I Sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 1, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 486: "Humanitas enim est aliquid in re, non tamen ibi habet rationem universalis, cum non sit extra animam aliqua humanitas multis communis."

¹³² *ST I*, q. 85, a. 2, ad 2, Leonine ed., vol. 5, p. 334.

Certainly, the form signified by a term in *this* particular thing is numerically different from the form signified by the same term in *that* particular thing. Nevertheless, there is something in reality that is the same in *this* and *that* particular thing and that corresponds to the object of the conception formed by the intellect. As Aquinas explains:

<p>[N]on enim oportet, si hoc est homo et illud homo, quod eadem sit humanitas numero utriusque, sicut in duobus albis non est eadem albedo numero; sed quod hoc similetur illi in hoc quod habet humanitatem sicut illud; et intellectus accipiens humanitatem non secundum quod est hujus, sed ut est humanitas, format intentionem communem omnibus.¹³³</p>	<p>[I]t is not necessary that, if <i>this</i> is a man and <i>that</i> is a man, they both have numerically the same humanity, just as in two white things whiteness is not numerically the same; but rather that <i>this</i> man be ‘assimilated’ to <i>that</i> man in that <i>this</i> man has humanity just as does <i>that</i> man; and the intellect, taking humanity not as it belongs to this [man], but as it is humanity, forms an intention that is common to all.</p>
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Therefore, although the *res significata* is generally identified with some form or nature without its individuating conditions, it should not be regarded in itself as a universal, as a one over the many; what is common to many and has the ratio of universality is rather the conception or intention formed by and as in the intellect. What the conception of ‘man’ makes us aware of, i.e. the object of this conception, is, not the intention of humanity, but human nature.

The *res significata* of the term ‘man’ is, therefore, neither a particular nor a universal;¹³⁴ it is rather that which in the nature of things renders *this* and *that* man

¹³³ *In II Sent.*, d. 17, q. 1, a. 1, Mandonnet ed., vol. 2, p. 414.

¹³⁴ Avicenna’s logical conception of common natures, i.e. of nature as considered in an absolute way, is at the background. See, Sten Ebbesen, “Concrete Accidental Terms: Late Thirteenth Century Debate about Problems Relating to Such Terms as *Album*,” in *Meaning and Inference in Mediaeval Philosophy. Studies in the Memory of Jan Pinborg*, ed. Norman Kretzmann (Dordrecht: 1988), 114. For a discussion on the threefold consideration of common natures, see Ignacio Angelelli, “The Logical Significance of the ‘Absolute Consideration’ of Nature,” in *Atti del IX congresso Tomistico internazionale*, vol. 2 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1991). On the absolute consideration of nature in Aquinas, see Frederick Wilhelmsen, “A Note:

equally a man. So considered, the *res significata* of a term is often characterized as the form or nature that renders an individual such that it actually falls under the term. The *res significata* of a term is that on account of which the term is said of (also “imposed upon”) some individual. The *res significata* of ‘man’ is that on account of which the term ‘man’ is said of *this* and *that* man. Humanity is that by which something is denominated ‘man’, just as whiteness is that by which something is denominated ‘white’. At the same time, if one considers the “imposition” of a term with signification, the *res significata* of a term is identified with the form or nature from which the term is originally “imposed with” signification. On this distinction Aquinas writes:

[I]n quolibet nomine est *duo* considerare: scilicet *id a quo* imponitur nomen, quod dicitur *qualitas nominis*; et *id cui* imponitur, quod dicitur *substantia nominis*. Et nomen, proprie loquendo, dicitur *significare* formam sive qualitatem, a qua imponitur nomen; dicitur vero *supponere* pro eo cui imponitur.¹³⁵

In a name two things can be considered: that *from which* the name is imposed, which is called the quality of the name; and that *upon which* the name is imposed, which is called the substance of the name. A name, properly speaking, is said to signify the form or quality *from which* it is imposed, and it is said to stand for that *upon which* it is imposed.

We will discuss in some detail the dynamics of imposition and denomination in Aquinas shortly. For now I will remark on the assigned role of the *res significata* in the passage just quoted. The *res* that a term signifies is the form or nature from which the term is imposed with its signification as well as that on account of which an individual is denominated by a term.¹³⁶ Thus, to use Aquinas’ terminology, the *res significata* of the term ‘man’, i.e. human nature or humanity, is that from which the term ‘man’ is

The Absolute Consideration of Nature in *Quaestiones Quodlibetales VIII*,” *New Scholasticism* 57 (1983).

¹³⁵ *In III Sent.*, d. 6, q. 1, a. 3, Mandonnet ed., vol. 3, p. 232. The distinction between the substance and the quality of a name has its origin in Priscian’s claim that a name signifies substance with quality. Ashworth, “Signification and Modes,” 47.

¹³⁶ This role of the *res significata* of terms will help us identify the *res significata* of the terms ‘*ens*’ and ‘*esse*’ in Chapter III.

“imposed with” its signification as well as that on account of which the term ‘man’ is “imposed upon” individual human beings.¹³⁷

As a final note on the nature of the *res significata*, I want to point out that, as Klima rightly remarks, “the *significata* of common terms need not necessarily be regarded metaphysically as forms in all cases.”¹³⁸ Without doubt, a significant number of terms signify a *res* that is metaphysical a form and that has actual existence in the nature of things. However, the intellect can conceive and hence signify not only forms that exist in reality, but also something completely non-existent as well as something that exists only in the operation of the intellect itself. For example, there are terms such as ‘genus’ and ‘species’ that signify a *res* that has nothing but mental existence.¹³⁹ On the other hand, there are terms such as ‘blind’ that signify a privation, and terms such as ‘chimera’ that signify an imagination. On the diversity of things signify by terms, Aquinas writes:

[E]orum quae significantur nominibus, invenitur triplex diversitas. Quaedam enim sunt quae secundum esse totum completum sunt extra animam; et hujusmodi sunt entia completa, sicut homo et lapis. Quaedam

There is a three-fold diversity among things signified by names. For some are outside the soul according to their total, complete being; and of this kind are complete beings, such as a man and a

¹³⁷ Notice that a term *stands for* and *is imposed upon* the things having the form or nature the term *signifies*. A term *signifies* the form or nature from which it was imposed, and *stands for*, for example, the individuals having the form signified by the term and upon whom the term *is imposed* precisely on account of their having that form.

¹³⁸ Klima, “Semantic Principles,” 107n37. Klima’s observation highlights the fact that although there is a historical relation between Aquinas’ semantics and a hylomorphist metaphysics, the former does not imply the later. Indeed, Klima notes that even for those thinkers who were otherwise committed to a hylomorphist metaphysics, the fact that not all terms signify a *res* that is metaphysically a form was a commonplace.

¹³⁹ The type of conception signified by these terms is called ‘second intention’ because it has as its object an intention or conception. The terms that signify such type of conception are called ‘terms of second imposition’. For discussion and references on second intentions in Aquinas, see Klima, “Semantic Principles,” 99-102; Robert Schmidt, *The Domain of Logic According to Saint Thomas Aquinas* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966), 117-29. Since neither ‘*ens*’ nor ‘*esse*’ are identified as terms of second imposition, we will not concern ourselves with the signification of such terms beyond what has been noted. It is sufficient to know that they too signify a *res* and a *conceptio* in the mind, but the *res significata* is not *metaphysically* a form. The same is true for ‘*ens*’ and ‘*esse*’, as we shall see.

<p>autem sunt quae nihil habent extra animam, sicut somnia et imaginatio Chimerae. Quaedam autem sunt quae habent fundamentum in re extra animam, sed complementum rationis eorum quantum ad id quod est formale, est per operationem animae, ut patet in universali.¹⁴⁰</p>	<p>stone. Some have nothing outside the soul, such as dreams and the imagination of a chimera. And some have a foundation in reality outside the soul, but the completeness of their ratio, with respect to that which is formal, is through the operation of the soul, as is clear in the case of the universal.</p>
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Therefore, although the *res significata* is characterized as a form or nature, we should not take this claim to imply that the *res significata* of terms is in every case metaphysically a form. ‘Form’ is used here for the object of semantics, as, for example, ‘humanity’, not as, first of all, an ontological feature such as ‘a substantial form’ (which is not humanity, but the soul).

What should we make, then, of the characterization of the *res significata* as a form or nature? When the *res significata* of a term is characterized as a ‘form’, what is implied is that the *res* a term ultimately signifies is signified *in the mode of form*. As

Aquinas explains:

<p>[I]llud a quo aliquid denominatur, non oportet quod sit semper forma secundum rei naturam, sed sufficit quod significetur per modum formae, grammaticae loquendo.¹⁴¹</p>	<p>That by which something is denominated need not always be a form in reality; it is sufficient for it to be signified, grammatically speaking, in the mode of a form.</p>
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We mentioned before that the *res significata* of a term is identified with that which renders an individual such that it actually falls under the term. Now, although there is nothing in the nature of things that is, say, a chimera – and hence no ‘form’ of chimera actually exists – from a semantic perspective the term ‘chimera’ is said to signify a *res*

¹⁴⁰ *In I Sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 1, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 486. To this threefold division of the *res significata* corresponds a threefold division of the *conceptio intellectus* signified by terms; some concepts have a foundation in reality, either immediate or remote, and some concepts do not, such as ‘genus’, as opposed to ‘universal’ (see *In I Sent.*, d. 2, q. 1, a. 3). A similar division of conceptions is found in *De pot.*, q. 1, a. 1, ad 10.

¹⁴¹ *De pot.*, q. 7, a. 10, ad 8, Marietti ed., p. 211.

which is *that by which* something is denominated a chimera. In this sense, we speak of the *res* signified by the term ‘chimera’ as a form. The same analysis applies to the *res significata* of the term ‘blind’, which signifies a privation: blindness is that by which something is denominated ‘blind’, and as such it is signified as if it were some form. This analysis is consistent with Aquinas’ theory of predication. Aquinas remarks that in forming a proposition the intellect either applies to or removes from the thing signified by the subject-term some form signified by the predicate-term.¹⁴² In the case of a privation or deformity, which has no being in the nature of things, Aquinas says that the privation is predicated of a subject “as if it were some form.”¹⁴³

Notice that although some terms signify a *res* that is nothing in the nature of things, it is not the case that there is no identifiable *res significata* for these terms. The mediation of the intellect’s *conceptio* in the signification of the *res* – i.e. the fact that the *res significata* is the object of the intellect’s conception immediately signified by the term– makes it possible for terms to retain their signification even if the external objects they denote become extinct;¹⁴⁴ similarly, it makes possible for terms like ‘chimera’ to have signification even if there is no such thing as a chimera in the nature of things. As Aquinas points out, anything our intellect is able to conceive we are able to name.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² *ST I*, q. 16, a. 2, Leonine ed., vol. 4, p. 208: “[I]n omni propositione aliquam formam significatam per praedicatum, vel applicat alicui rei significatae per subiectum, vel removet ab ea.”

¹⁴³ *In II Sent.*, d. 37, q. 1, a. 2, ad 3, Mandonnet ed., vol. 2, p. 947: “[I]ntellectus componit privationem cum subjecto, sicut formam quamdam.”

¹⁴⁴ *De ver.*, q. 18, a. 4, ad 10, Leonine ed., vol. 22/2, p. 543: “Alio modo dicitur aliquis cognoscere rem in propria natura per modum definitionis: dum scilicet cognoscit aliquis quid sit propria natura alicuius rei; et sic etiam res non existens potest in propria natura cognosci, ut si omnes leones essent mortui, possem scire quid est leo;” also *SCG I*, c. 66.

¹⁴⁵ See *ST I*, q. 13, a. 1, Leonine ed., vol. 4, p. 139: “[A]liquid a nobis intellectu cognosci potest, sic a nobis potest nominari.” Note that this claim does not commit Aquinas to the view that the possession of a concept is a *sufficient* condition for being able to express that concept; the possession of a concept is rather a *necessary* condition for our ability to use language

From a purely semantic perspective, the terms ‘man’ and ‘chimera’ share the same semantic structure; each signifies some conception in the mind and the object of that conception. The fact that the conception signified by the term ‘man’ has an immediate foundation in reality adds nothing to the signification of ‘man’ over that of ‘chimera’. Whether or not the *res significata* of a term is actually realized in some individual or another does not enter into the signification of the term. Indeed, one may know what a term signifies without knowing whether there is something in reality to which the term applies. Furthermore, knowledge of what a term signifies does not guarantee that we are able to provide a proper definition of the term.¹⁴⁶

B. Aquinas and the *Conceptio* Signified

We turn our attention now to the nature of the intellect’s conception signified by terms. As we have seen, although our terms are ultimately imposed to signify some *res*, they do not do so directly. For Aquinas, a term *immediately* signifies an intellectual conception, namely, the intellect’s conception of the *res* that the term is *ultimately* imposed to signify. Accordingly, Aquinas describes the *conceptio* signified by a term as “the intellect’s conception of the *res* signified by the term.”¹⁴⁷ There are two points to be

successfully. Given that significant words immediately signify a concept in the mind, a significant word necessarily entails the existence of a corresponding mental concept in the original linguistic community. Pasnau, “Thought’s Linguistic Nature,” 563-66. Now, a mental concept may or may not have a foundation in reality, but in either case there surely is some identifiable *res intellecta*, i.e. the object of the mental concept.

¹⁴⁶ What is in the background here is the distinction between ‘nominal’ and ‘real’ definition, or between the *quid nominis* and the *quid rei*. The distinction is frequently mentioned by Aquinas. *In II Post. Anal.*, lects. 6 and 8; *In V Meta.*, lect. 4, n. 805; *SCG I*, c. 35; *De pot.*, q. 7, a. 2; *ST I*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 2.

¹⁴⁷ *ST I*, q. 13, a. 4, Leonine ed., vol. 4, p. 144: “Ratio enim quam significat nomen, est conceptio intellectus de re significata per nomen.” Aquinas’s use of the term ‘*ratio*’ in the context of signification can be rather ambiguous. The term ‘*ratio*’ is used in reference to both the ‘conception’ signified by a term (*ST I*, q. 13, a. 4 just quoted) and the ‘form’ that is the object of

made regarding the nature of this conception: (i) it is a simple or non-composite conception, and (ii) it is not equivalent to knowledge.

a. Simple vs. Complex Conceptions

Let us begin by distinguishing between the signification of a term and the signification of a proposition. Aquinas writes:

[S]ignificatio orationis differt a significatione nominis uel uerbi, quia nomen uel uerbum significat simplicem intellectum, oratio autem significat intellectum compositum.¹⁴⁸

The signification of a proposition differs from the signification of a noun or verb, because a noun or a verb signifies a simple understanding, a proposition signifies a composite understanding.

Both a term and a proposition signify an intellectual conception (here: ‘*intellectus*’), but the nature of each conception differs. The conception signified by a term is simple, whereas the conception signified by a proposition is complex or composed. Aquinas relates the conception signified by a term to the first operation of the intellect and the conception signified by a proposition to the second operation of the intellect:

Set dicendum est quod duplex est operatio intellectus, ut supra habitum est; ille qui dicit nomen uel uerbum secundum se, constituit intellectum quantum ad primam operationem, que est conceptio alicuius . . . non autem constituit intellectum quantum ad secundam operationem, que est intellectus componentis et diidentis.¹⁴⁹

It should be said that the operation of the intellect is twofold, as was held above; and he who speaks a noun or a verb by itself brings about an understanding with respect to the first operation, which is the conception of something, . . . but [the verb or the noun said by itself] does not bring about an understanding with respect to the second operation, which belongs to the intellect composing and dividing.

that conception. For the latter use, see *In VIII Meta.*, lect. 1, n. 1687, Marietti ed., p. 403-404: “Forma uero, quae et ratio nominatur, quia ex ipsa sumitur ratio speciei, dicitur substantia quasi ens aliquid actu, et quasi ens separabile secundum rationem a materia.” For a discussion of Aquinas’ doctrine of the *ratio* signified by terms as being both in the mind and in the thing, see Klima, “Semantic Principles,” 99-104.

¹⁴⁸ *In I Perih.*, lect. 6, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 32, lines 20-23.

¹⁴⁹ *In I Perih.*, lect. 5, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 29, lines 277-86.

Therefore, a term, as opposed to a proposition, immediately signifies the intellect's simple conception of some *res* – a conception that is effected by the intellect through its first operation.

Especially in epistemological contexts, Aquinas calls the conception formed by the intellect, whether simple or composed, 'word' ('*verbum*') or 'inner word' ('*verbum interius*'). He writes:

*Hoc ergo est primo et per se intellectum, quod intellectus in seipso concipit de re intellecta, sive illud sit definitio, sive enuntiatio, secundum quod ponuntur duae operationes intellectus, in III de Anima. Hoc autem sic ab intellectu conceptum dicitur verbum interius, hoc enim est quod significatur per vocem; non enim vox exterior significat ipsum intellectum, aut formam ipsius intelligibilem, aut ipsum intelligere, sed conceptum intellectus quo mediante significat rem: ut cum dico, «homo» vel «homo est animal».*¹⁵⁰

[V]erbum intellectus nostri, secundum cuius similitudinem loqui possumus de verbo divino, est id ad quod operatio intellectus nostri terminatur, quod est ipsum intellectum, quod dicitur conceptio intellectus, sive sit conceptio significabilis

Therefore, what is primarily and per se understood is what the intellect in itself conceives about the thing understood, whether it be a definition or a proposition – according as two operations of the intellect are affirmed in *De Anima* 3. And this [thing] conceived by the intellect in this way is called the interior word, for this is what is signified by the voice; for, the exterior voice does not signify the intellect itself, or its intelligible form, or the act of understanding, but the concept of the intellect through whose mediation it signifies the thing: as when I say, 'man', or, 'Man is an animal'.

The word of our intellect, according to whose likeness we can speak of the divine word, is that in which the operation of our intellect terminates, which is what is understood itself, which is called the conception of the intellect – whether it be a

¹⁵⁰ *De pot.*, q. 9, a. 5, Marietti ed., p. 236. Note that here the terms '*definitio*' and '*enuntiatio*' are used to refer, not to the external linguistic expression, but to the internal conception, and that propositions are also "conceived." For the use of '*definitio*' as the internal conception signified, see also, *De pot.*, q. 8, a. 1, Marietti ed., p. 215: "Intellectus enim sua actione format rei definitionem, vel etiam propositionem affirmativam seu negativam. Haec autem conceptio intellectus in nobis proprie verbum dicitur: hoc enim est quod verbo exteriori significatur: vox enim exterior neque significat ipsum intellectum, neque speciem intelligibilem, neque actum intellectus, sed intellectus conceptionem qua mediante refertur ad rem" (note in this passage that the conception signified by a term is differentiated from the intelligible species and from the act of the intellect); *In I Post. Anal.*, lect. 4, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/2, p. 19, line 11: "[D]effinitio enim est ratio quam significat nomen;" and *In I Sent.*, d. 33, q. 1, a. 1, ad 3. For an example of the use of '*definitio*' as the external linguistic expression, see *SCG* I, c. 53 in note 130.

per vocem incomplexam ut accidit quando intellectus format quidditates rerum, sive per vocem complexam ut accidit quando intellectus componit et dividit.¹⁵¹

conception signifiable by (i) a non-complex word (*vox*), as occurs when the intellect forms the quiddities of things; or by (ii) a complex word (*vox*), as occurs when the intellect composes and divides.

The ‘inner word’, then, is that which the intellect conceives about the thing understood. It is the immanent product of the intellect, that which the intellect produces through either of its two operations. Aquinas calls the ‘inner word’ alternatively conception (*conceptio*) and concept (*conceptus*),¹⁵² although intention (*intentio*) is also used.¹⁵³

Now, according to the two operations of the intellect, two different kinds of conceptions are produced, each kind is signified by linguistic expressions of diverse nature: one simple, the other complex or composed. The conception signified by a simple ‘external word’, such as the term ‘man’, is a simple conception. The conception signified by a complex ‘external word’, such as the proposition ‘Man is an animal’, is complex. On the distinction between simple and complex words Aquinas writes:

Voces enim incomplexae neque verum neque falsum significant; sed voces complexae, per affirmationem aut negationem veritatem aut falsitatem habent . . . Et cum voces sint signa intellectuum, similiter dicendum est de conceptionibus intellectus. Quae enim sunt simplices, non

Non-complex words signify neither truth nor falsity; but complex words, through affirmation or negation, have truth and falsity . . . And, since words are the signs of concepts, the same is said with respect to the conceptions of the intellect. Those which are simple do not have truth and

¹⁵¹ *De ver.* q. 4, a. 2, Leonine ed., vol. 22/1, p. 123-24, lines 101-109.

¹⁵² *De pot.*, q. 9, a. 5; *De ver.* q. 4, a. 2, both quoted above. In light of these texts, Gilson’s terminological distinction between ‘*conceptio*’ and ‘*conceptus*’ (where ‘judgment’ is a ‘*conceptio*’ but not a ‘*conceptus*’) is highly questionable.

¹⁵³ *SCG IV*, c. 11, Leonine ed., vol. 15, p. 32, lines 32-33B: “[I]psa intentio *verbum interius* nominatur, quod est exteriori verbo significatum.” On the different meanings of the term ‘*intentio*’ in Aquinas, see Henri-Dominique Simonin, “La notion d’ ‘*intentio*’ dans l’oeuvre de s. Thomas d’Aquin,” *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 19 (1930); also Schmidt, *Domain of Logic*, 94-129. A nice summary of the role of ‘*intentio*’ in Aquinas’ doctrine of cognition can be found in L.M. De Rijk, “Medieval Intentionality,” 113-126. For the Arabic sources of the notion of ‘*intentio*’ in its logico-semantic sense, see Kwame Gyekye, “The Terms ‘Prima Intentio’ and ‘Secunda Intentio’ in Arabic Logic,” *Speculum* 46 (1971); Christian Knudsen, “Intentions and Impositions,” in Kretzmann, Kenny, and Pinborg (eds), *Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, 479-82.

habent veritatem neque falsitatem, sed solum illae quae sunt complexae per affirmationem vel negationem.¹⁵⁴

falsity, but only those which are complex through affirmation or negation [have truth and falsity].

Notice that the simplicity of the internal and external ‘word’ is not material but formal.

The term ‘man’ is materially simple, but it is equivalent to phrases such as ‘rational animal’ or ‘animal with two legs’, which are materially composite. These phrases and the single term ‘man’ signify a conception that is formally simple, although it too can be linguistically expressed by a phrase such as ‘what has humanity’ (*habens humanitatem*).¹⁵⁵ The complexity of the interior and exterior ‘word’ is associated with its being the subject of truth and falsity, and hence with predication. As noted by Aquinas, only in predication is a comparison made between the thing denoted by the subject-term and the form signified by the predicate-term.¹⁵⁶ Such comparison makes possible the conception of truth as *adaequatio intellectus et rei*.¹⁵⁷ The conception signified by simple words is not subject to truth and falsity because it contains no predication. A conception is said to be simple or non-composite (*conceptio incomplexa*) because it lacks the composition of a proposition. As Aquinas explains:

Cum aliquod incomplexum vel dicitur vel intelligitur, ipsum quidem incomplexum, quantum est de se, non est rei aequatum nec rei inaequale: cum aequalitas et inaequalitas secundum comparationem dicantur; incomplexum autem, quantum est de se, non continet aliquam comparationem vel applicationem ad rem. Unde de se nec verum nec falsum dici potest: sed tantum complexum, in quo designatur comparatio

When something non-complex (*incomplexum*) is said or understood, the *incomplexum*, as it is in itself, is neither equal nor unequal to the thing; because equality and inequality are said according to a comparison. But the *incomplexum*, as it is in itself, does not contain a comparison or application to the thing. Thus, in itself, it cannot be said to be true or false; but only the *complexum*, in which is designated a

¹⁵⁴ *In VI Meta.*, lect. 4, n. 1223-1224, Marietti ed., p. 309.

¹⁵⁵ The reason for this phrasing of the conception signified by the term ‘man’ will be explained in the next section, once we discuss ‘modes of signification’.

¹⁵⁶ See, *ST I*, q. 16, a. 2.

¹⁵⁷ We shall explore this connection further in Chapter IV in examining Aquinas’ theory of predication.

incomplexi ad rem per notam
compositionis aut divisionis.¹⁵⁸

comparison of the *incomplexum* to the
thing through the note of composition and
division [is said to be true or false].

Truth and falsity are not *per se* found in the first operation of the intellect and in its product (*conceptio, intentio, definitio*).¹⁵⁹ The first operation results in a simple, non-composite conception which is signified by a linguistic expression such as the single term ‘man’ or the phrase ‘rational animal’.

We have shown, then, that for Aquinas the intellect’s conception signified by terms is simple or non-composite, that is, it lacks the composition of subject and predicate, which characterizes the sort of conception that propositions signify.

b. Signification and Knowledge

After the distinction between simple and composite conception and signification, the second point to be made regarding the nature of the intellect’s conception of the *res* signified by our terms is that it is not equivalent to knowledge.¹⁶⁰ Even though we can come to know the real definition of what our terms signify, this knowledge is not required for signification, that is, for our ability to use the terms of a language successfully. Our

¹⁵⁸ *SCG I*, c. 59, Leonine ed., vol. 13, p. 167, lines 24A-1B.

¹⁵⁹ There is a sense, nonetheless, in which both truth and falsity are found in the first operation of the intellect. Aquinas notes that falsity may be accidentally found in the ‘definition’ in three ways: because one applies the definition to the wrong thing, because the definition contains a logical contradiction (e.g. ‘non-sensitive animal’), or because the definition does not denote a real thing (e.g. ‘four-footed flying animal’). *In I Sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 1, ad 7; *In IX Meta.*, lect. 11, n. 1908; *ST I*, q. 58, a. 5; q. 85, a. 6. Similarly, in a certain respect, truth may also be found in the first operation or in the ‘definition’. *In I Post. Anal.*, lect. 5, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/2, p. 26, lines 179-82: “[L]icet deffinitio in se non sit propositio in actu, est tamen uirtute proposition, quia, cognita deffinitione, apparet deffinitionem de subiecto uere praedicari;” and *In I Sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 1, ad 7, where the definition is said to be true insofar as the quiddity is an *ens rationis*: “[Q]uididitatis esse est quoddam esse rationis, et secundum istud esse dicitur veritas in prima operatione intellectus: per quem etiam modum dicitur definitio vera;” Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 489.

¹⁶⁰ Klima, “Semantic Principles,” 100, 104.

intellect can have an initial apprehension of human nature without its individualizing conditions, even without this apprehension yet amounting to a determinate and complete knowledge of what such nature is in itself.

Aquinas' discussion on the imposition of the term '*lapis*' with signification is helpful on this issue.¹⁶¹ He points out that we know substances only indirectly through their properties and effects; yet we impose our terms to signify, not these properties and effects, but the form or nature of the substance. Thus, even though we know stones through their propensity to hurt feet (*laedere pedem*), we impose the term '*lapis*' to signify the nature, stone.¹⁶² Indeed, we do not apply the term '*lapis*' to everything that has the propensity to hurt feet. It would thus be a mistake to identify the *res* signified by the term '*lapis*' with 'foot-hurting'. The least cognition we have of a stone as such provides the basis for our imposing a term to signify the stone's nature. In this sense, the nature of stone can still be viewed as that from which, on the part of the thing, the name was imposed.¹⁶³ Since we know a stone's nature only through its properties and effects, the intellect's conception of the nature of stone does not in itself guarantee that we are

¹⁶¹ *ST I*, q. 13, a. 8 corpus and ad 2; q. 13, a. 2, ad 2; q. 59, a. 1, ad 2. For a more detailed discussion of Aquinas' handling of the *lapis* example, see Ashworth, "Signification and Modes," 49-50.

¹⁶² *De ver.*, q. 4, a. 1, ad 8, Leonine ed., vol. 22/1, p. 121-22, lines 343-46: "[L]apis imponitur ab effectu qui est laedere pedem, et hoc non oportet esse principaliter significatum per nomen sed illud loco cuius hoc ponitur."

¹⁶³ Aquinas distinguishes between *id a quo nomen imponitur ex parte rei* and *id a quo nomen imponitur ex parte imponentis*. Thus, in the case of the term '*lapis*', that from which the term was imposed *ex parte rei* is the nature of stone, whereas that from which it was imposed *ex parte imponentis* is the property to hurt feet (*De ver.*, q. 4, a. 1, ad 8). We must not confuse this distinction with the one previously discussed between that *from which* a term is imposed (*id a quo imponitur nomen*) and that *upon which* a term is imposed (*id cui imponitur nomen*). For a discussion on the two distinctions, including references to their historical background, see Ashworth, "Signification and Modes," 47-50. A useful overview on the imposition of words in Aquinas can be found in McInerney, *Logic and Analogy*, 54-59.

able to provide a real definition of the nature of stone; such conception suffices, however, for us to be able to use the term ‘*lapis*’ successfully.¹⁶⁴

In regards to our ability to use terms in a language successfully, it makes no difference whether or not one has complete knowledge of what the *res* signified is. One may know the meaning of a term or its nominal definition (the *quid nominis*) without knowing what the thing signified is in itself (the *quid rei*). Our terms have signification inasmuch as they signify or sign a conception in the mind, but having such a conception is not equivalent to knowing what the object of that conception is. Moreover, having such a conception does not amount to knowledge of whether the term in question denotes a real thing, that is, whether the things the term stands for have actual existence in the nature of things.¹⁶⁵ Thus, knowing the signification of the term precedes any answer to the questions ‘is it’ and ‘what is it’. Aquinas observes that knowledge of whether something is (*an sit*) precedes knowledge of what something is (*quid sit*), but knowing whether something is presupposes knowledge of the signification of the term.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ *De ver.*, q. 4, a. 1, ad 9, Leonine ed., vol. 22/1, p. 122, lines 350-58: “[Q]uantum ad rationem verbi pertinet non differt utrum aliquid intelligatur per similitudinem vel essentiam: constat enim quod exterius verbum significat omne illud quod intelligi potest, sive per essentiam sive per similitudinem intelligatur. Et ideo omne intellectum, sive per essentiam sive per similitudinem intelligatur, potest verbum interius dici.”

¹⁶⁵ *De pot.*, q. 9, a. 4, ad 18, Marietti ed., p. 64: “[L]icet universale non possit esse praeter singularia, potest tamen intelligi, et per consequens significari. Et propter hoc sequitur, si non est aliquod singularium, quod non sit universale. Non tamen sequitur, si non intelligitur aut significatur aliquod singularium, quod non intelligatur vel significetur universale: hoc enim nomen *homo* non significat aliquem singularium hominum, sed solum hominem in communi.”

¹⁶⁶ *In I Post. Anal.*, lect. 2, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/2, p. 11, lines 63-69: “[Q]uia antequam sciatur de aliquo an sit, non potest sciri proprie de eo quid est (non entium enim non sunt definitiones), unde quaestio «an est» praecedit quaestionem «quid est»; sed non potest ostendi de aliquo an sit nisi prius intelligatur quid significatur per nomen.” *In II Post. Anal.*, lect. 7, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/2, p. 199, lines 122-24: “[E]st impossibile, ut scilicet sciamus *quid est, ignorantes si est*.” *In VII Meta.*, lect. 7, n. 1666, Marietti ed., p. 397: “Nam esse est praesuppositum ad hoc quod quaeritur quid est.” On the relation between the questions ‘*an sit*’ and ‘*quid sit*’ in Aquinas, see Jan Aertsen, *Nature and Creature. Thomas Aquinas’s Way of Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 12-53; David Twetten, “To Which ‘God’ Must a Proof of God’s Existence Conclude for Aquinas?”

To conclude our discussion on Aquinas' understanding of the nature of the *conceptio* and *res* signified by terms, I want to point out that Aquinas recognizes that the duality of signing of *conceptio* and *res* is a source of ambiguity when one inquires about what a term signifies.¹⁶⁷ Even though it is important for the purpose of our investigation to keep these two notions separated, it is equally important not to lose sight of the fact that a term's signification is always comprised by the 'conception signified' and the 'thing signified'. Even more important is not to lose sight of the *interconnection* between the two sides of a term's signification. We must keep in mind that, for Aquinas, the signification of the *res* is always mediated by the intellect's *conceptio* of the *res*. One corollary of the aforementioned semantic structure of terms is that the *res significata* of a term is signified according to the mode or manner in which it is conceived by the intellect. The mediated character of the signification of the *res* grounds, as we are about to see, Aquinas' claim of a correlation between *modi significandi* and *modi intelligendi*, a correlation that will be key to identifying the sort of simple conception the terms 'ens' and 'esse' signify.

in *Laudemus Viros Gloriosos: Essays in Medieval Philosophy in Honor of Armand Augustine Maurer, C.S.B.*, ed. R. E. Houser (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007) 146-83, at 155-59. It should be noted that in early texts Aquinas states that the quiddity of a thing may be known without knowing whether the thing exists (see, e.g., *De ente*, c. 4; *In I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 4, a. 2). This statement is a central premise of the so-called "*intellectus essentiae* argument" for the distinction between being and essence, an argument that has been the subject of great debate. The discussion centers on the question whether or not the argument proves that the distinction between being and essence is real and not merely conceptual. For a survey of the discussion, see Walter Patt, "Aquinas' Real Distinction and Some Interpretations," *New Scholasticism* 26 (1988).

¹⁶⁷ *De ver.*, q. 4, a. 4, ad 3.

2.2.2. Aquinas on Modes of Signification

A. Preliminary Remarks

Thirteenth-century theologians made use of the logical notion of *modi significandi* in order to address questions regarding religious language, especially the possibility of naming God. Their approach to the notion varies just as it did for logicians. Bonaventure (1227-1274), for example, links the notion of *modus significandi* with that of *modus intelligendi* or *ratio cognoscendi*: the ‘mode of signification’ of a term follows on the ‘mode of understanding’. For Albert the Great (1200-1280), on the other hand, *modus intelligendi* and *modus significandi* correspond primarily to the *modus essendi* of the thing understood and signified.¹⁶⁸ Aquinas too uses the notion of *modus significandi* primarily in the context of religious language and the divine names.¹⁶⁹ Regarding Aquinas’ approach to the notion of *modus significandi*, I have found that Aquinas’ understanding of the notion resembles that of Peter of Spain.¹⁷⁰ Aquinas’s doctrine of modes of signification links the *modus significandi* of a term to the *modus intelligendi* of the conception of the *res*. As it did for Peter of Spain, the doctrine of the mediation of the

¹⁶⁸ On Bonaventure and Albert the Great, see Rosier, “*Res significata et modus significandi*,” 147-50. On the general use of the notion of *modus significandi* among theologians of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, see M.-D. Chenu, “Grammaire et théologie aux XIIe et XIIIe siècles,” in *Archives d’Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Age* 10 (1935-36).

¹⁶⁹ We shall briefly touch on the topic of divine names in Aquinas at the end of this section.

¹⁷⁰ Ashworth, on the contrary, identifies Aquinas’s use of the notion of *modus significandi* with the most common use of the notion wherein ‘*modus significandi*’ is linked with the different parts of speech. See “Signification and Modes,” 57; and “Analogy and Equivocation,” 105. She expresses, however, some hesitation in the face of selected passages (*In I Sent.*, d. 18, q. 1, a. 2; *ST I*, q. 13, a. 11) where Aquinas does not link the notion of *modus significandi* very closely to the notion of word-class: “It is not clear,” she writes, “whether we are dealing with word-class or with an extended notion of *modi significandi* that is independent of word-class” (“Signification and Modes,” 58-59). Perhaps the reason is that in her review of modes of signification, Ashworth does not recognize the second, logical, sense of *modus significandi* distinguished earlier in this chapter.

intellect's conception in the signification of the *res significata* plays a central role in Aquinas' understanding of modes of signification. Given that the *res significata* of a term is signified through the intellect's conception, the mode in which the *res* is signified by a term is a consequence of the mode in which the *res* is conceived by the intellect. Aquinas writes: "the mode of signification in the terms that are by us imposed upon things follows on [our] mode of understanding."¹⁷¹ Therefore, the *modus significandi* of a term is a reflection of the *modus intelligendi* in which the *res significata* is conceived by the intellect. As such, though, the *modus significandi* of a term is a feature, not of the intellect's mode, but of the *conceptio* signified by the term. The term 'man' signifies a conception of humanity which is linguistically expressed by a phrase like 'what has humanity' ('*habens humanitatem*'). The mode in which the term 'man' signifies humanity is contained in the conception signified: 'man' signifies humanity 'as subsisting in a subject' or 'as a substance' (*per modum substantiae*).

There is in Aquinas a necessary correspondence between the *modus intelligendi* and *modus significandi*, but there is no necessary correspondence between the *modus essendi* of the *res significata* and the *modus significandi* of the term.¹⁷² The mode in which the *res significata* of a term is conceived by the intellect may or may not

¹⁷¹ *De pot.*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 7, Marietti ed., p. 56: "[M]odus significandi in dictionibus quae a nobis rebus imponuntur sequitur modum intelligendi; dictiones enim significant intellectuum conceptiones, ut dicitur in principio *Periher.*" See, also, *SCG I*, c. 30, Leonine ed., vol. 13, p. 92, lines 31-32A: "Nam nomine res exprimimus eo modo quo intellectu concipimus;" *ST I*, q. 45, a. 2, ad 2; *De pot.*, q. 7, a. 5, ad 2; *In VII Meta.*, lect. 1, n. 1253-54.

¹⁷² On this point, see Keith Buersmeyer, "Aquinas on the *Modi Significandi*," *Modern Schoolman* 64 (1987): 79-81; Rosier, "*Res significata et modus significandi*," 151-52; and Rocca, "*Res Significata and Modus Significandi*," 189-90. This is an essential point for Aquinas. As Rocca remarks, it is precisely because there is no correspondence between the creaturely mode of signification of the terms we predicate of God and God's objective mode of being that Aquinas is able to maintain that, although the reality (*res*) signified by the predicate term might be suitable to God, we need to deny our mode of signification in all divine predication.

correspond to the mode of being of the *res*. The term ‘whiteness’ (*albedo*), for instance, signifies whiteness in the mode of a substance (*per modum substantiae*), yet whiteness does not have the mode of being of a substance.¹⁷³ In addition, observe that within this semantic framework it is possible for more than one term to signify the same *res* according to different modes; such is the case of the term ‘man’ (*homo*) and the term ‘humanity’ (*humanitas*).¹⁷⁴ As a result, terms cannot be differentiated only in reference to their *res significata*. Indeed, Aquinas points out that the unity or diversity of words, whether simple or complex, does not depend merely on the unity or diversity of the thing signified; it depends, rather, on the unity or diversity of either the external word (as in the case of synonyms that signify the same *res*) or the understanding (as in the case of ‘man’ and ‘humanity’).¹⁷⁵

Throughout his writings Aquinas recognizes various modes of signification, some of which overlap. Following on the traditional distinctions made by logicians, Aquinas maintains that substantive names signify thorough the mode of substance (*per modum substantiae*) or substantively (*substantive*), while adjectival names signify through the mode of accident (*per modum accidentis*) or adjectivally (*adiective*).¹⁷⁶ However, as we shall see next, a term like ‘white’ (*albus*), which is an adjectival name, is also said to

¹⁷³ *In V Meta.*, lect. 9, n. 894, Marietti ed., p. 239: “Hoc autem nomen album significat subiectum ex consequenti, in quantum significat albedinem per modum accidentis. Unde oportet, quod ex consequenti includat in sui ratione subiectum. Nam accidentis esse est inesse. Albedo enim etsi significet accidens, non tamen per modum accidentis, sed per modum substantiae.”

¹⁷⁴ See *De ente*, c. 2, Leonine ed., vol. 43, p. 373, lines 292-94: “Sic igitur patet quod essentiam hominis significat hoc nomen homo et hoc nomen humanitas, sed diuersimode.”

¹⁷⁵ See *Quodl. IV*, q. 9, a. 2, Leonine ed., vol. 25/2, p. 338-39, lines 58-60/63-66: “Manifestum est autem quod unitas uocis significatiue uel diuersitas non dependet ex unitate uel diuersitate rei significate . . . Dependet igitur unitas uel diuersitas uocis significatiue, siue complexe siue incomplexe, ex unitate uel diuersitate uocis aut intellectus.”

¹⁷⁶ *ST I*, q. 39, a. 3, Leonine ed., vol. 4, p. 400: “[N]omina substantiua significant aliquid per modum substantiae: nomina uero adiectiua significant aliquid per modum accidentis;” also *In I Sent.*, d. 9, q. 1, a. 2; *In V Meta.*, lect. 9, n. 894.

signify in a concrete mode (*in concretione*). In the following pages I shall concentrate on the distinction between abstract and concrete modes of signification given that these are the modes of signification Aquinas frequently assigns to the terms ‘*ens*’ and ‘*esse*’.¹⁷⁷

B. Concrete and Abstract Modes of Signification in Aquinas

The distinction between an abstract and a concrete term may be summarized as follows: A concrete term signifies something as composite and as subsistent, either as a subject or in a subject, whereas an abstract term signifies something as simple and as that whereby something is. Aquinas writes:

[Q]uod significatur concretive, significatur ut per se existens, ut homo vel album . . . quod significatur in abstracto, significatur per modum formae, cujus non est operari vel subsistere in se, sed in alio.¹⁷⁸

What is signified concretely is signified as existing per se, as ‘man’ or ‘white’ . . . what is signified in the abstract is signified in mode of form, to which it belongs, not to act or to subsist in itself, but [to subsist] in another.

[O]mnia nomina a nobis imposita ad significandum aliquid completum subsistens, significant in concretione, prout competit compositis; quae autem imponuntur ad significandas formas simplices, significant aliquid non ut subsistens, sed ut quo aliquid est, sicut albedo significat ut quo aliquid est album.¹⁷⁹

[A]ll words imposed by us to signify something complete and subsistent signify in the concrete, as befits composite things. Words imposed to signify simple forms signify something not as subsistent, but as that whereby something is, as ‘whiteness’ signifies as that whereby something is white.

¹⁷⁷ On the distinction between abstract and concrete modes of signification in Aquinas, see e.g. Ralph McInerney, “Can God Be Named By Us. Prolegomena to Thomistic Philosophy of Religion,” *Review of Metaphysics* 32 (1978) 53-73; Buersmeyer, “Aquinas on the *Modi Significandi*,” 79-83; Jordan, “Modes of Discourse,” 411-15. Klima discusses the distinction in relation to supposition theory (“Semantic Principles,” 110-113). For Aquinas’ use of the grammatical distinction between abstract and concrete terms in his Trinitarian theology, see James Egan, “Naming in St. Thomas’ Theology of the Trinity,” in *From an Abundant Spring*, ed. *The Thomist* staff (New York: P. J. Kennedy & Sons, 1952).

¹⁷⁸ *In I Sent.*, d. 33, q. 1, a. 2, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 770.

¹⁷⁹ *ST I*, q. 13, a. 1, ad 2, Leonine ed., vol. 4, p. 140.

If we consider signification alone, a concrete term and its abstract counterpart differ only with respect to the *conceptio* they signify, not with respect to the *res* they signify. The terms ‘man’ and ‘humanity’, for instance, signify the same *res* (humanity inherent in composite things), but the *conceptio* differs: ‘humanity’ signifies humanity with precision, that is, by ‘prescinding’ from other things, as ‘that whereby something is’, whereas ‘man’ signifies humanity without prescinding, but ‘mixed together’ with other things, and as subsisting.¹⁸⁰ Thus, Aquinas points out that the terms ‘humanity’ and ‘man’ signify the same nature but while the term ‘humanity’ signifies human nature “*ut partem*” or “*per modum partis*,” the term ‘man’ signifies human nature “*ut totum*” or “*per modum totius*.”¹⁸¹ Similarly, the *modi significandi* of abstract and concrete terms are said to differ inasmuch as a concrete term signifies “*per modum completi participantis*” and an abstract term signifies “*per modum diminuti et partis formalis*.”¹⁸² Notice that the difference in mode of signification between the terms ‘man’ and ‘humanity’ explains why we predicate

¹⁸⁰ See *De ente*, c. 2; *In I Sent.*, d. 23, q. 1, a. 1. On the difference between signification “with precision” (*cum praecisione materiae designatae*) and “without precision” (*sine praecisione materiae designatae*), see Joseph Owens, “The Accidental and Essential Character of Being in the Doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas,” in *St. Thomas Aquinas on the Existence of God: Collected Papers of Joseph Owens*, ed. John R. Catan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1980). Owens speaks of “abstraction” with or without precision, but that is not an expression Aquinas uses. On the other hand, the semantic distinction between abstract and concrete terms corresponds to two ways of abstraction Aquinas distinguishes: abstraction of the form from matter, and abstraction of the universal from the particular (*De Trin.*, q. 5, a. 3; *ST I*, q. 40, a. 3; *In I Meta.*, lect. 10, n. 158).

¹⁸¹ *De ente*, c. 2, Leonine ed., vol. 43, p. 373, lines 292-304: “Sic igitur patet quod essentiam hominis significant hoc nomen homo et hoc nomen humanitas, sed diuersimode, ut dictum est: quia hoc nomen homo significat eam ut totum, in quantum scilicet non praecedit designationem materie sed implicite continet eam et indistincte, sicut dictum est quod genus continet differentiam; et ideo predicatur hoc nomen homo de indiuiduis. Sed hoc nomen humanitas significat eam ut partem, quia non continet in significatione sua nisi id quod est hominis in quantum est homo, et praecedit omnem designationem; unde de indiuiduis hominis non predicatur;” *In VII Meta.*, lect. 5, n. 1379, Marietti ed., p. 339: “[H]omo significat ut totum, humanitas significat ut pars;” and *Quodl. IX*, q. 2, a. 1, ad 1.

¹⁸² *Super De causis*, prop. 22, Saffrey ed., p. 116, lines 25-27: “[O]mne nomen a nobis impositum, vel significat per modum completi participantis sicut nomina concreta, vel significat per modum diminuti et partis formalis sicut nomina abstracta.”

the term ‘man’ and not ‘humanity’ of a human being, even though the term ‘man’ *signifies* humanity, and a human being is denominated ‘man’ from his humanity.¹⁸³

But the distinction between concrete and abstract modes of signification applies not only to names, substantive or adjectival; it also applies to infinitive verbs and their respective verbal nouns and participles, for instance, ‘*esse*’, ‘*essendum*’, and ‘*ens*’.

Aquinas contrasts the pair ‘*esse*’ and ‘*ens*’ and the pair ‘*currere*’ and ‘*currens*’ as signifying in the abstract and concrete respectively:

Aliud autem significamus per hoc quod dicimus esse et aliud per id quod dicimus id quod est, sicut et aliud significamus cum dicimus currere et aliud per hoc quod dicitur currens. Nam currere et esse significantur in abstracto sicut et albedo; sed quod est, id est ens et currens, significantur sicut in concreto, uelut album.¹⁸⁴

We signify one thing by saying ‘to be’ (*esse*) and another by saying ‘that which is’ (*id quod est*), just as also we signify one thing when we say ‘to run’ (*currere*) and another when ‘the [one] running’ (*currens*) is said. For, ‘*currere*’ and ‘*esse*’ are signified in the abstract, as is ‘whiteness’; but ‘*quod est*’, namely ‘*ens*’, and ‘*currens*’ are signified in the concrete, as is ‘white’.

The semantic structure of the pair ‘*currens*’ and ‘*currere*’, as well as that of ‘*ens*’ and ‘*esse*’, is parallel to that of ‘white’ and ‘whiteness’; they share the same *res significata* but differ in their mode of signification. The pair ‘*ens*’ and ‘*esse*’, then, is simply one among other examples of a concrete term and its abstract counterpart. They signify the same *res*, but while ‘*ens*’ signifies *esse* in a concrete mode, ‘*esse*’ signifies *esse* in an abstract mode.

A problem arises, however, with regards to Aquinas’ account of the mode of signification of verbs of the infinitive mode when one considers the following passage:

¹⁸³ I shall return to this topic at the end of the section. Also, notice that in light of the introduction of ‘modes of signification’, the previous account of the imposition of a term upon things, wherein a term is *imposed upon* a thing on account of its having the ‘form’ signified by the term, needs further qualification.

¹⁸⁴ *In De hebdom.*, lect. 2, Leonine ed., vol. 50, p. 270-71, lines 39-45.

[V]ita non hoc modo se habet ad vivere, sicut essentia ad esse; sed sicut *cursus* ad *currere*; quorum unum significant actum in abstracto, aliud in concreto.¹⁸⁵

The relation between ‘*vita*’ and ‘*vivere*’ is not the same as that between ‘essence’ and ‘*esse*’; it is rather the same as ‘*cursus*’ and ‘*currere*’, one of which signifies the act in the abstract, the other in the concrete.

In the preceding translated text (*In De hebdom.*, lect. 2) Aquinas claims that the term ‘*currere*’ signifies in the abstract, yet in this text (*ST I*, q. 54, a. 1, ad 2) he declares that it signifies in the concrete. How is it possible for ‘*currere*’ to signify both in the abstract and in the concrete? The answer is found in the following passage, where Aquinas distinguishes the different modes in which action is signified:

[P]otest autem actio significari tripliciter: uno modo, per se in abstracto, uelut quedam res, et sic significatur per nomen; ut ‘actio’, ‘passio’, ‘ambulatio’, ‘cursus’ et similia; alio modo per modum actionis, ut scilicet est egrediens a substantia et inherens ei ut subiecto, et sic significatur per uerba aliorum modorum, que attribuuntur personis; sed, quia etiam ipse processus uel inherencia actionis potest apprehendi ab intellectu et significari ut res quedam, inde est quod ipsa uerba infinitiui modi, que significant ipsam inherenciam actionis ad subiectum, possunt accipi ut uerba, ratione concretionis, et ut nomina, prout significant quasi res quasdam.¹⁸⁶

Action can be signified in three ways. In one mode, per se in the abstract, as a certain thing, and thus it is signified by a noun, such as ‘action’, ‘passion’, ‘a walk’, ‘a run’ (*cursus*), and the like. In another mode, through the mode of action, as proceeding from a substance and inhering in it as in a subject, and in this way it is signified by verbs of the different modes, which [verbs] are attributed to persons. But because the proceeding itself or the inherence of an action can be apprehended by the intellect and signified as a certain thing, verbs in the infinitive mode, which signify inherence of action in a subject, can be taken as verbs by reason of ‘concretion’ and as nouns according as they signify, as it were, certain things.

We should observe that this distinction is brought out to explain why verbs of the infinitive mode, unlike other modes of verbs, can be placed in the subject position. In light of the distinction, then, there are three modes of signifying action. In the first place, action is signified *per se* as a certain thing and in the abstract by a noun such as ‘*cursus*’.

¹⁸⁵ *ST I*, q. 54, a. 1, ad 2, Leonine ed., vol. 5, p. 39, quoted also by Gilson (see Chapter I, note 37). For Gilson’s interpretation of this passage, see Étienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952), 231-32.

¹⁸⁶ *In I Perihier.*, lect. 5, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 26, lines 59-72.

It is evident that when an action is signified by a noun as a certain thing, the term may serve as a subject or a predicate term. In another mode, action is signified “as proceeding from a substance and inhering in it as in a subject.” In this way action is signified by verbs, in any of their grammatical modes, with their indications of person, tense, and mood. An example would be ‘*currit*’ (he or she runs). Aquinas accordingly describes this mode of signification as “*per modum actionis.*”¹⁸⁷ And, just as actions are not found in the world as existing *per se*, but as existing in their subjects, so verbs are predicated of subjects; thus, the mode in which verbs signify action explains why the verb is always in the predicate role: action as action requires a subject. Finally, action is signified by one term (a verb of the infinitive mode, such as ‘*currere*’) in two different modes according to the mode in which the “inherence of action” is conceived by the intellect. In the first place, when the intellect apprehends the inhering action as a certain thing, the action is signified in the abstract. In this case the infinitive takes on the function of a noun and thus may occupy the subject position (Aquinas’ principal interest in the context). But when the intellect takes the inhering action *per modum concretionis*, namely, in the concrete as mixed together with the subject in whom it inheres as its action, the infinitive is a verb proper and thus cannot be placed in the subject position.

Here we begin to see the answer to our question. Just as two terms can signify the same *res* in different modes (as the terms ‘man’ and ‘humanity’ do), so it is possible for one and the same term to signify the same *res* in different modes. According to the mode in which the *res significata* is conceived by the intellect, the term ‘*currere*’ signifies the

¹⁸⁷ See also the following passage where these two modes of signifying action, by the noun ‘*cursus*’ and the verb ‘*currit*’, are mentioned: “[C]ursus’, quia significat actionem non per modum actionis, set per modum rei per se existentis, eo quod est nomen, non significat tempus; ‘currit’ uero, cum sit uerbum significans actionem, consignificat tempus;” *In I Periher.*, lect. 5, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 27, lines 93-97.

same *res*, the act of running, either in the concrete, in which case the term functions grammatically as a verb (as in the proposition ‘dux dicit Pheidippidem currere’: ‘the commander tells Pheidippides to run’), or in the abstract, in which case the term functions grammatically as a noun and may thus serve as the subject of a proposition.

Let us now return to the texts in question in order to resolve the dilemma. In the first passage (*In De hebdom.*, lect. 2), the term ‘*currere*’ is the abstract counterpart of the concrete term ‘*currens*’; the relation between these terms is paralleled with that of ‘whiteness’ and its concrete counterpart ‘white’. A particular attribute of this kind of concrete-abstract pairs of terms is that the abstract term both *signifies* and *stands for* its *res significata* (in what the terminists call ‘simple’ supposition), which is the *res significata* of its concrete counterpart. This is why we can refer to the *res significata* of the concrete term by its abstract counterpart: we say that ‘man’ *signifies* humanity (but *stands for* a human being, (in what is called ‘personal’ supposition)).¹⁸⁸ Now, in the second passage (*ST I*, q. 54, a. 1, ad 2) a different kind of concrete-abstract pair of terms is introduced. The relation between the terms ‘*cursus*’ and ‘*currere*’ is paralleled to that of ‘*vita*’ and ‘*vivere*’. Here the abstract terms are ‘*cursus*’ and ‘*vita*’, and the concrete terms are ‘*currere*’ and ‘*vivere*’. Notice that unlike the abstract terms at *In De hebdom.*, lect. 2, the abstract terms ‘*cursus*’ and ‘*vita*’ do not *stand for* their respective *res significata*. That role belongs to the abstract terms ‘*currere*’ and ‘*vivere*’ because, as we shall see next, the terms ‘*currere*’ and ‘*vivere*’ signify their *res* as a form or as ‘that by which’, whereas ‘*cursus*’ and ‘*vita*’ signify their *res* as existing per se.

¹⁸⁸ See Klima, “Semantic Principle,” 112-13. The distinction between abstract and concrete signification can also be explained in terms of supposition. Aquinas notes that a concrete term has a mode of signification such that although it signifies a form, it stands for a person; an abstract term has a mode of signification such that it does not stand for individuals (see *ST I*, q. 39, a. 4 and 5).

Now, at *In De hebdom.*, lect. 2, grammatically speaking, the contrast is between two names (noun and/or adjective) that signify the same *res* in different modes, while at *ST I*, q. 54, a. 1, ad 2 the contrast is between a name (a noun) and a verb that signify the same *res* in different modes. Consider the following parallel text:

‘[C]ursus’, quia significat actionem non per modum actionis, set per modum rei per se existentis, eo quod est nomen, non significat tempus; ‘currit’ vero, cum sit verbum significans actionem, consignificat tempus.¹⁸⁹

The term ‘*cursus*’, because it signifies an action, not in the mode of action but in the mode of a thing existing per se, by the fact that it is a noun does not signify time. The term ‘*currit*’, however, since it is a verb signifying action, consignifies time.

If we consider signification alone, the abstract terms ‘*cursus*’ and ‘*currere*’ and the concrete terms ‘*currit*’ and ‘*currens*’ all signify the same *res*, the act of running, in different modes according to different modes of understanding. Therefore, although the *res significata* is the same, the conception signified varies. The terms ‘*cursus*’ and ‘*currere*’ signify in the abstract inasmuch as the *res* is conceived and signified as simple and not as composite; they differ, however, in that while ‘*cursus*’ signifies action as existing per se, ‘*currere*’ signifies action as a form or as ‘that by which’. The terms ‘*currit*’ and ‘*currens*’ signify in the concrete inasmuch as the *res* is conceived and signified as composite. They differ inasmuch as ‘*currit*’ signifies the *res* as in a subject while ‘*currens*’ signifies the *res* as a subject. Incidentally, it is the abstract ‘*currere*’ which both signifies and stands for the *res significata* of all four terms.

¹⁸⁹ *In I Perihier.*, lect. 5, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 27, lines 93-97.

C. Concluding Remarks on Aquinas' Account of Modes of Signification

By way of conclusion, I want briefly to comment on two general points regarding Aquinas' account of *modi significandi* that are gathered from the previous discussion on the different modes of signifying action.

First, although different parts of speech are mentioned in connection to one mode of signification or another, the discussion of modes of signification is not intended to establish a grammatical distinction between different parts of speech. On the contrary, these distinctions are already presupposed, since what brings about the distinction of modes of signifying action is the question how a term (*'currere'*) that would otherwise function as a verb in a proposition can sometimes function as a noun does. Aquinas certainly recognizes that the *modi significandi* of terms have grammatical implications (we have seen him, for example, describing verbs as signifying *per modum actionis* and substantive nouns as signifying *per modum substantiae*), but his theory of modes of signification does not link the notion of *modus significandi* as such to the grammatical properties of terms. Indeed, although references to different parts of speech in the context of the distinction between modes of signification are common in Aquinas, there are instances where the notion of *modus significandi* is not directly connected to any particular part of speech.¹⁹⁰ The *modi significandi* of terms are for Aquinas first and foremost a function of our *modi intelligendi*. It is precisely in this capacity, that is, inasmuch as they reflect our modes of understanding, that the notion of *modi significandi*, as we shall see shortly, plays a central role in Aquinas' theory of religious language.

¹⁹⁰ See *In I Sent.*, d. 18, q. 1, a. 2; and *ST I*, q. 13, a. 11.

Second, Aquinas' approach to the notion of *modi significandi* is in line with one of the central doctrines in the tradition of terminist logic: it is not use and context that determines the signification of a term, but rather the signification of a term is what determines its use in any given propositional context.¹⁹¹ Whether a term can be placed in the subject position, in the predicate position, or both, ultimately depends for Aquinas on the mode of signification of the term. Now, regarding terms that can be placed in the predicate position, whether or not the term can be predicated of this or that subject is also determined by the mode of signification of the term. Early on we mentioned that the *res significata* of a term is that on account of which something is denominated by that term. The statement is true, but in light of the foregoing discussion on modes of signification it needs further qualification. Both 'man' and 'humanity' signify human nature, but only 'man' may be predicated of an individual man. The term 'man' may be predicated of Socrates, not only on account of its *res significata*, that is, not on account of its signifying human nature, but also on account of the *mode* in which human nature is *signified* by the term 'man'. The concrete term 'man' can be predicated of an individual man because it signifies human nature *ut totum* or *per modum totius*, that is, it signifies 'what has humanity' ('*habens humanitatem*'). The abstract term 'humanity', on the other hand, cannot be predicated of an individual man because it signifies human nature *ut partem* or *per modum partis*, that is, it signifies humanity as a form or as 'that by which' [man is man].¹⁹² In the predication of a term, then, a distinction needs to be made between the *res significata* and the *modus significandi* of the term. Both belong to the conception signified.

¹⁹¹ See Ebbesen, "Dead Man is Alive," 47, 51-52.

¹⁹² See *De ente*, c. 2; *Quodl. IX*, q. 2, a. 1, ad 1.

The distinction is central to Aquinas' account of the divine names. For Aquinas, our difficulty in naming God results primarily from imperfections in the *modi significandi* of our terms. There are indeed terms that are improper of God given their *res significata*, and these terms can be said of God only metaphorically. But, if we consider modes of signification alone, argues Aquinas, all of our terms fall short when naming God because we impose our terms with signification on the basis of our modes of understanding. Even when we impose our terms to signify absolute perfections which are suitable to God, such as wisdom and goodness, our *modus intelligendi* and therefore our *modus significandi* of those perfections will always fall short. Our terms have either a concrete or an abstract mode of signification. A concrete term predicated of God has the advantage of signifying what subsists, but the disadvantage of suggesting composition. An abstract term predicated of God has the advantage of simplicity, but the disadvantage of signifying as 'that by which'. Accordingly, Aquinas writes:

Quia igitur et Deus simplex est, et subsistens est, attribuimus ei et nomina abstracta, ad significandam simplicitatem eius; et nomina concreta, ad significandum subsistentiam et perfectionem ipsius, quamvis utraque nomina deficiant a modo ipsius, sicut intellectus noster non cognoscit eum ut est, secundum hanc vitam.¹⁹³

And because God is simple and subsistent, we attribute to Him abstract names to signify His simplicity, and concrete names to signify His subsistence and perfection; although both these names fall short of His mode [of being] just as our intellect in this life does not know Him as He is.

As a result, Aquinas maintains that we have to deny or transcend the *modus significandi* of our terms when we predicate them of God, even if the perfection signified is otherwise suitable to God.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ *ST I*, q. 13, a. 1, ad 2, Leonine ed., vol. 4, p. 140. See also *In I Sent.*, d. 4, q. 1, a. 1; *ST I*, q. 3, a. ad 1; *De pot.*, q. 8, a. 2, ad 7.

¹⁹⁴ See *In I Sent.*, d. 22, q. 1, a. 2, ad 1; *De pot.*, q. 7, a. 5, ad 2; *SCG I*, c. 30.

Aquinas does not deny the possibility of predicating a concrete or an abstract term of God. We can use the same terms of God and creatures, that is, both God and creatures can receive the same predicate; thus, we say ‘God is good’ and ‘that woman is good’. In either case the mode of signification of the term ‘good’ is the same; whether ‘good’ is predicated of God or a woman, it signifies goodness in a concrete mode.¹⁹⁵ Now, given that concrete mode of signification of the term ‘good’ is not suitable to God’s mode of being, we must transcend the mode of signification of goodness contained in the term ‘good’ when we predicate it of God, that is, we must *predicate* goodness of God in a different *mode* from the one that belongs to creatures: God is goodness itself, we add. It is in the context of predication, then, that we have to deny or compensate for the mode of signification of the terms we apply to God. In order to account for the difference in *modi predicandi* when we predicate the same term of God and creatures, Aquinas introduces into the discussion the notion of ‘analogy’.¹⁹⁶

2.2.3. Aquinas on the Signification of Analogous Terms

In this last section, I concentrate on Aquinas’ semantic account of analogous terms. We shall see that Aquinas’ treatment of the various issues related to the signification of these terms overlaps with that of contemporary terminist logicians.

One of the issues regarding the signification of analogous terms that was subject to debate among terminist logicians was the number of conceptions or *rationes* involved. Aquinas offers different answers to this question.¹⁹⁷ In his commentary on the *Sentences*,

¹⁹⁵ Rocca, “Res Significata and Modus Significandi,” 189-90.

¹⁹⁶ See Jordan, “Modes of Discourse,” 415; Buersmeyer, “Aquinas on the *Modi Significandi*,” 85-86; Rosier, “*Res significata et modus significandi*,” 155.

¹⁹⁷ Ashworth, “Analogy and Equivocation,” 124.

he claims that only one *intentio* is involved which is used in different ways. In *De principiis naturae* he speaks of a plurality of *rationes*.¹⁹⁸ In the *Summa theologiae* we are told that neither one *ratio* nor diverse *rationes* are involved.¹⁹⁹ Similar remarks are made in the commentary on the *Metaphysics*. Here, Aquinas explains that the *rationes* involved are “partly different and partly not.”

Sed sciendum quod aliquid praedicatur de diversis multipliciter: *quandoque* quidem secundum rationem omnino eandem, et tunc dicitur de eis univoce praedicari, sicut animal de equo et bove. - *Quandoque* vero secundum rationes omnino diversas; et tunc dicitur de eis aequivoce praedicari, sicut canis de sidere et animali. - *Quandoque* vero secundum rationes quae partim sunt diversae et partim non diversae: diversae quidem secundum quod diversas habitudines important, unae autem secundum quod ad unum aliquid et idem istae diversae habitudines referuntur; et illud dicitur «analogice praedicari».²⁰⁰

It should be understood that something is predicated of different things in many ways. Sometimes it is predicated according to a *ratio* that is entirely the same, and then it is said to be predicated univocally of [things], as animal is predicated of a horse and of an ox. Sometimes it is predicated according to *rationes* that are entirely different, and then it is said to be predicated of them equivocally, as dog is predicated of a star and of an animal. Sometimes it is predicated according to *rationes* which are partly different and partly not; they are different inasmuch as they imply different relationships, and one inasmuch as these different relationships are referred to one and the same thing, and [then the term] is said to be predicated analogously.

According to this passage, the *rationes* involved in analogical predication are different with respect to the relationships they imply but the same with respect to the one thing they signify.

But, for Aquinas, as for the logicians, the unity among the *rationes* or conceptions involved results not only from their sharing one *res significata*. In the *Summa theologiae* Aquinas suggests that the one thing which serves as the focal point for the *rationes*

¹⁹⁸ See *In I Sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 2 ad 1; *De principiis naturae*, c. 6, n. 46.

¹⁹⁹ See *ST I*, q. 13, a. 5, Leonine ed., vol. 4, p. 146: “Neque enim in his quae analogice dicuntur, est una ratio, sicut est in univocis; nec totaliter diversa, sicut in aequivocis.”

²⁰⁰ *In IV Meta.*, lect. 1, n. 535, Marietti, ed., p. 151.

involved in analogous predication is not the nature signified, but the *ratio* according to which the term is predicated primarily (*per prius*). Speaking of terms which are predicated analogically of many, Aquinas points out that a term of this kind must be predicated primarily of that which is placed in the definition or *ratio* of the things of which the term is predicated secondarily. The example is ‘healthy’ (*sanum*): ‘healthy’ as predicated of animals comes into the *definitio* or *ratio* of ‘healthy’ as predicated of medicine inasmuch as medicine is said to be ‘healthy’ according as it is the cause of health in animals.²⁰¹ Therefore, the *ratio* according to which a term is predicated primarily must be contained in the *ratio* according to which the term is predicated secondarily. The reason the ‘primary *ratio*’ is contained into the ‘secondary *rationes*’ is that the secondary *rationes* are the result of some qualification to the primary *ratio*. In *De veritate* Aquinas writes:

[Q]uod aliquid simpliciter dictum intelligitur quandoque de eo quod per posterius dicitur ratione alicuius adiuncti, sicut ens in alio intelligitur accidens; et similiter vita ratione eius quod adiungitur, scilicet liber, intelligitur de vita creata, quae per posterius vita dicitur.²⁰²

That which is said *simpliciter* is sometimes understood of that which is said secondarily by reason of something adjunct. As when ‘a being’ [with the adjunct] ‘in another’ is understood [as] an accident. And similarly ‘life’, by reason of what is added, namely, ‘book’, is understood of created life, which is called ‘life’ secondarily.

Without doubt different conceptions or *rationes* are involved in analogous predication, but an analogous term is not purely equivocal, because there is one primary conception

²⁰¹ See *ST I*, q. 13, a. 6, Leonine ed., vol. 4, p. 150: “[I]n omnibus nominibus quae de pluribus analogice dicuntur, necesse est quod omnia dicantur per respectum ad unum: et ideo illud unum oportet quod ponatur in definitione omnium. Et quia ratio quam significat nomen, est definitio, ut dicitur in *IV Metaphys.*, necesse est quod illud nomen per prius dicatur de eo quod ponitur in definitione aliorum, et per posterius de aliis, secundum ordinem quo appropinquant ad illud primum vel magis vel minus: sicut *sanum* quod dicitur de animali, cadit in definitione *sani* quod dicitur de medicina, quae dicitur sana in quantum causat sanitatem in animali; et in definitione *sani* quod dicitur de urina, quae dicitur sana in quantum est signum sanitatis animalis.”

²⁰² *De ver.*, q. 7, a. 5, ad 3, Leonine ed., vol. 22/1, p. 206.

from which all others are derived by reason of some addition or qualification. All secondary significations of analogous terms contain, therefore, a reference to the primary signification of the term. In this sense, each secondary signification is an extension of the original signification of the term.

The examples in the previous translated text show how the original *ratio* of an analogous term is subject to qualification by addition: when ‘in another’ is added to the primary *ratio* of ‘a being’ (*ens*), the term is predicated of an accident. But the original or primary *ratio* of a term can also be subject to qualification by removing something from it, as when the element of composition is removed from the *ratio* of ‘good’ when predicated of God. We have seen that Aquinas often remarks that we need to deny or transcend the mode of signification of our terms when we predicate them of God. It was also mentioned that the way to do so involves analogous predication. The doctrine of the *modus significandi* certainly plays a central role in Aquinas’ account of the divine names, but so does the doctrine of analogy. Within the context of the divine names, as others have pointed out, the doctrine of analogy extends that of modes of signification; analogy represents the means by which we transcend the bonds of the imperfect *modi significandi* of our terms.²⁰³ Notice that it is only within the context of Aquinas’ discussion on the divine names that the two doctrines come together. As Ashworth has shown, the notion of *modus significandi* plays no role on Aquinas’ theory of analogy as such.²⁰⁴ Unlike other cases where a term features various significations that contain the same *res significata*, the various significations of an analogous term are not the result of changes in the mode of signification of the *res*. The reason an analogous term retains its mode of signification

²⁰³ See Jordan, “Modes of Discourse,” 415; Buersmeyer, “Aquinas on the *Modi Significandi*,” 85.

²⁰⁴ See Ashworth, *Les théories de l’analogie*, 34-37; and “Analogy and Equivocation,” 126.

throughout its various significations is that the secondary significations share in the conception primarily signified, and it is the primary conception that sets the mode of signification of the term.

The unity among the conceptions involved in analogous predication is what distinguishes the various significations of an analogous term from the various significations of an univocal term that signifies the same *res* according to different *modi significandi*. In the case of the term ‘*currere*’, which signifies the same *res* in the abstract and in the concrete mode, there are two very distinct conceptions of the same *res* involved. The only thing that relates the two conceptions signified by the term ‘*currere*’ is their sharing one *res significata*. In the case of ‘*sanum*’ or ‘*ens*’, on the other hand, the mode of signification remains the same even as the conception signified varies with each occurrence of the term. Indeed, an analogous term retains its mode of signification throughout its various significations. For example, regardless of whether the term ‘*ens*’ is said of a substance or of an accident, ‘*ens*’ has the same mode of signification (it signifies *esse* in a concrete mode).²⁰⁵

I would like to close this section with some final remarks regarding analogy and predication. In the semantic structure of an analogous term, the secondary significations of the analogous term are accounted for by the qualifications to the original *ratio* or conception signified. As we indicated earlier, within the framework of the theory of signification to which Aquinas subscribes, the secondary significations of a term are set by an act of imposition. Yet, it is only within a propositional context that the various

²⁰⁵ On the relation (or lack thereof) between Aquinas’ doctrine of analogy and his doctrine of modes of signification, see Ashworth, *Les théories de l’analogie*, 34-37; and “Analogy and Equivocation,” 126. On this point Ashworth disagrees with Ralph McInerny. See Ashworth, “Signification and Modes,” 60-61; *Les théories de l’analogie*, 36-37.

significations of an analogous term can properly be differentiated. Indeed, according to the logicians, an analogous term is so imposed that when standing alone it signifies only its primary signification.²⁰⁶ Therefore, although the notion of *modus significandi* is in no way central to analogous signification, the notion of *modus praedicandi* is. Aquinas seems to agree on this point, as he explicitly links a term's analogous significations with the term's modes of predication.²⁰⁷ The subject of the role of the notion of *modus praedicandi* in Aquinas' doctrine of analogy is worth pursuing; but it is beyond the scope of our present investigation.

What we need to take away from the present discussion is that although an analogous term is more complex in its signification than a univocal term, both kinds of term have the same basic semantic structure. Regardless of which signification an analogous term features, it signifies a conception in the mind and the object of that conception. Furthermore, the qualifications introduced to the primary conception signified by an analogous term so as to form secondary conceptions do not alter the mode of signification of the term. The term '*ens*', for instance, regardless of the sense in which it is used, signifies its *res significata*, which is *esse*, in the concrete mode. In the next chapter, we shall examine Aquinas' account of the signification of '*ens*' and '*esse*', both analogous terms. Our focus will be on their modes of signification. The question we shall consider is whether, for Aquinas, the conception signified by the terms '*ens*' and '*esse*' is

²⁰⁶ On analogy and imposition, see the discussion beginning on p. 48 above.

²⁰⁷ See *In I Sent.*, d. 22, q. 1, a. 2 ad 2, where Aquinas says that an analogous term is divided according to different *modi praedicandi*; he then explains that '*ens*' is divided among the ten categories according to ten *modi praedicandi*. The link between modes of predication and the division of '*ens*' among the ten categories is not uncommon (see, e.g., *In III Phys.*, lect. 5, n. 15), but the *Sentences* text is the only one I know of where analogy is explicitly mentioned.

simple (as with any other term) or complex (as the doctrine of the judgment of *esse* suggests).

CHAPTER III

AQUINAS ON THE SIGNIFICATION OF *ESSE*

Now that we have delineated Aquinas' theory of signification in the preceding chapter, we are ready to examine Aquinas' account of the signification of the terms that signify *esse*, namely, of '*ens*' and '*esse*'. At the end of this chapter it will emerge that for Aquinas the conception of *esse* signified by these terms (given the language of Aquinas' semantics reviewed in Chapter II) is simple in nature. Accordingly, this chapter offers conclusive evidence that, given his semantic theory, Aquinas recognizes a simple conception of *esse*.

The chapter is divided into three sections, the first of which consists of a review of the main features of the signification of the terms '*ens*' and '*esse*' gathered from the preceding chapter's discussion of Aquinas' signification theory. In the subsequent two sections I examine Aquinas' account of the signification of (i) the term '*ens*' and its abstract counterpart '*esse*', and (ii) the verb '*est*'. We shall see that Aquinas' semantic analysis of the terms '*ens*' and '*esse*' is in essence no different from that of other pairs of concrete and abstract terms such as '*currens*' and '*currere*', '*homo*' and '*humanitas*'. Likewise, his analysis of the verb '*est*' is in essence no different from that of other verbs such as '*currit*'. The terms '*ens*', '*esse*', and '*est*' signify the same *res significata*, which in this case is *esse*, but they signify according to different *modi significandi*, modes that track the different *modi intelligendi* of *esse*, which result in the *conceptio incomplexa* signified by each term.

Such semantic analysis of the terms ‘*ens*’, ‘*esse*’, and ‘*est*’ is perfectly in line with the theory of signification to which Aquinas subscribes. Let us point out at the outset, then, that there is no evidence to the claim advanced by Gilson that Aquinas subscribes to a semantic perspective wherein (all) verbs and verbal nouns, and notably, of course, ‘*esse*’ and ‘*ens*’, signify *esse* and the ‘judgment’ of *esse* (whereas nouns such as ‘*homo*’ and ‘*humanitas*’ signify essences and their ‘concepts’).¹ The semantic view Gilson attributes to Aquinas is dictated by the doctrine that essence alone, not *esse*, can be grasped in a ‘concept’; as Gilson puts it, *esse* “cannot be known by the simple conceptual apprehension of an essence, which it is not.”² Indeed, if only essence can be conceptualized in a simple *conceptio*, then, as Gilson observes, verbs and verbal nouns, none of which signify an essence but rather an act, must signify in the mind not a ‘concept’ but a ‘judgment’, namely, a complex *conceptio*.³ Having already identified essence and ‘concept’, on the one hand, and *esse* and ‘judgment’ on the other, Gilson has no problem declaring that “the same metaphysical distinction between *esse* and *essentia* . . . entails the logical distinction between simple apprehensions and judgments, as well as the grammatical distinction between nouns and verbs.”⁴

Aquinas’ writings on logic and semantics, however, reveal a very different picture. The fundamental distinction is that between terms and propositions. Propositions signify the composition or division of the intellect, that is, they signify a complex conception. Categorematic terms, on the other hand, regardless of their grammatical

¹ Étienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952), 230-32. According to Gilson’s terminology, a ‘concept’ (‘*conceptus*’) is the intellect’s simple apprehension of an essence; the term ‘conception’ (‘*conceptio*’), on the other hand, covers for him both judgment and conceptualization (221-27).

² *Ibid.*, 223.

³ *Ibid.*, 231-32.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 231.

function as nouns or verbs, signify the simple conception of some *res*.⁵ The *grammatical* distinction between nouns and verbs depends neither on the nature or content of the *res significata*, nor on that of the *conceptio* signified, but rather on the mode of signification of the *res*.⁶ Thus, ‘concepts’, the products of the first operation of the intellect, are not restricted to being signified only by nouns, as opposed to also by verbs. Moreover, as we shall see in the following pages, ‘concepts’ are not restricted to being about one metaphysical constituent alone, essence. Indeed, the noun ‘*ens*’ and the verb ‘*esse*’ signify a ‘concept’ of *esse*, not the ‘judgment’ of *esse*; that is to say, the conception of *esse* signified by ‘*ens*’ and by ‘*esse*’ is as simple in nature or content as the conception signified by any other categorematic term.

3.1 Preliminary Remarks on the Signification of the Terms ‘*Ens*’ and ‘*Esse*’ in Aquinas

This section provides an overview of the semantic features of the terms ‘*ens*’ and ‘*esse*’ that are gathered from the preceding discussion on Aquinas’ theory of signification, and discusses some of the difficulties associated with some of those

⁵ See, e.g., *In I Perihier.*, lect. 6, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 32, lines 20-23: “[S]ignificatio orationis differt a significatione nominis uel uerbi, quia nomen uel uerbum significat simplicem intellectum, oratio autem significat intellectum compositum;” also *De ver.* q. 4, a. 2; *De pot.*, q. 8, a.1; q. 9, a. 5; *In VI Meta.*, lect. 4, n. 1223-1224. On the nature of the conception signified by terms and proposition in Aquinas, see Chapter II (section 2.2.1).

⁶ See, *ST I*, q. 39, a. 3, Leonine ed., vol. 4, p. 400: “[N]omina substantiua significant aliquid per modum substantiae: nomina uero adiectiua significant aliquid per modum accidentis;” *In I Perihier.*, lect. 5, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 26, lines 59-72: “[P]otest autem actio significari tripliciter: uno modo, per se in abstracto, uelut quedam res, et sic significatur per nomen; ut ‘actio’, ‘passio’, ‘ambulatio’, ‘cursus’ et similia; alio modo per modum actionis, ut scilicet est egrediens a substantia et inherens ei ut subiecto, et sic significatur per uerba aliorum modorum, que attribuuntur personis; sed, quia etiam ipse processus uel inherencia actionis potest apprehendi ab intellectu et significari ut res quedam, inde est quod ipsa uerba infinitiui modi, que significant ipsam inherenciam actionis ad subiectum, possunt accipi ut uerba, ratione concretionis, et ut nomina, prout significant quasi res quasdam.” On Aquinas’ use of modes of signification to differentiate between nouns and verbs, see Chapter II (section 2.2.2).

features. There are three issues to consider: the first regard the mode of signification of these terms; the second their character as analogous terms; and the third, the nature of the ‘*conceptio*’ and ‘*res*’ signified by the terms ‘*ens*’ and ‘*esse*’.

3.1.1 The Modes of Signification of the Terms ‘*Ens*’ and ‘*Esse*’

Aquinas introduces the pair ‘*ens*’ and ‘*esse*’ as an example of a concrete term and its abstract counterpart, paralleling the signification of ‘*ens*’ and ‘*esse*’ to that of ‘white’ and ‘whiteness’ as well as that of ‘*currens*’ and ‘*currere*’.

Aliud autem significamus per hoc quod dicimus esse et aliud per id quod dicimus id quod est, sicut et aliud significamus cum dicimus currere et aliud per hoc quod dicitur currens. Nam currere et esse significantur in abstracto sicut et albedo; sed quod est, id est ens et currens, significantur sicut in concreto, uelut album.⁷

We signify one thing by saying ‘to be’ (*esse*) and another by saying ‘that which is’ (*id quod est*), just as also we signify one thing when we say ‘to run’ (*currere*) and another when ‘the [one] running’ (*currens*) is said. For, ‘*currere*’ and ‘*esse*’ are signified in the abstract, as is ‘whiteness’; but ‘*quod est*’, namely ‘*ens*’, and ‘*currens*’ are signified in the concrete, as is ‘white’.

For Aquinas, then, the terms ‘*ens*’ and ‘*esse*’ signify the same *res* according to different *modi significandi*. That is to say, they share the same *res significata* but differ with regard to the *conceptio* signified inasmuch as the *res* is understood (and hence signified) according to different *modi intelligendi*. In addition, we should note that the term ‘*esse*’, like the term ‘*currere*’, is an ambiguous term that is ambiguous even in its mode of signifying. The term ‘*esse*’ may be taken as signifying either in the abstract (in which case it is the abstract counterpart term of the term ‘*ens*’) or in the concrete (in which case it is the infinitive form of the verb ‘*est*’, as in the sentences ‘Plato cognoscit Socratem esse’). In order to differentiate the two possible modes of signification of the term ‘*esse*’, I will refer from this point on to the verb ‘*esse*’ as ‘*est*’, leaving the term ‘*esse*’ to stand

⁷ In *De hebdom.*, lect. 2, Leonine ed., vol. 50, p. 270-71, lines 39-45.

for the abstract counterpart of ‘*ens*’.⁸ As a result, we have three rather than two terms that signify *esse* to work with: ‘*ens*’, ‘*esse*’, and ‘*est*’. Each of these terms signifies *esse* according to different *modi significandi*. The term ‘*esse*’ signifies in the abstract mode, that is, it signifies *esse* with precision (*cum praecisione materiae designatae*) and as ‘that by which x is’ (*quo est*). The terms ‘*ens*’ and ‘*est*’ signify in the concrete mode, that is, without precision (*sine praecisione materiae designatae*); however, whereas ‘*ens*’ signifies *esse* in the mode of substance, ‘*est*’ signifies *esse* in the mode of action as inhering as in a subject. Given that there is for Aquinas a direct correspondence between *modus significandi* and *modus intelligendi*, insofar as the former follows from the later,⁹ the individual mode of signification of the terms ‘*ens*’, ‘*esse*’, and ‘*est*’ will play a central role in our investigation into the intellect’s *conceptio* each term signifies.

3.1.2 Analogy of ‘*Ens*’ and ‘*Esse*’

We cannot fail to remark on the fact that we are dealing with analogous terms. On that note, a distinction needs to be made between the primary (*per prius*) and secondary (*per posterius*) significations of each term. Although we shall make reference to the secondary significations Aquinas identifies for the terms ‘*ens*’, ‘*esse*’, and ‘*est*’, our focus will be on their primary signification. More precisely, given the purpose of the present chapter, the discussion will center on the nature of the primary *conceptio* signified by the terms ‘*ens*’, ‘*esse*’, and ‘*est*’.

From a purely semantic perspective, our focus on the primary *ratio* or *conceptio* signified is justified by the fact that we are examining these terms as standing alone and

⁸ When no distinction is made, however, the term ‘*esse*’ should be taken as standing for both its possible significations.

⁹ See *ST I*, q. 45, a. 2, ad 2; *De pot.*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 7; *In VII Meta.*, lect. 1, n. 1253-54.

not within a propositional context. Like other analogous terms, standing alone these terms signify only their primary signification. But the most important consideration, which we shall say more about later in the chapter, is that even as we add or remove from the primary conception of *esse* signified by each of these terms to form secondary conceptions, the conception signified remains a simple one, for the addition and division in question is not equivalent to the addition and division that constitutes a complex conception. For example, the addition of ‘in another’ to the simple conception ‘what has being’, forming the conception ‘(accidental) being’, does not turn the primary conception signified by ‘*ens*’ into a complex conception. Furthermore, although the term ‘*ens*’ may signify *per posterius* the composition of a proposition, as in ‘Socrates is wise’, as an *ens rationis*, the conception signified by ‘*ens*’ in this instance is not in itself a judgment or complex conception.

3.1.3 The ‘*Conceptio*’ and ‘*Res*’ Signified by ‘*Ens*’ and ‘*Esse*’

As we saw in Chapter II, categorematic terms, on Aquinas’ theory of signification, immediately signify a conception in the mind, but ultimately they signify the object of that conception.¹⁰ The object of the intellect’s conception signified by the terms ‘*ens*’, ‘*esse*’, and ‘*est*’ – i.e., their *res significata*, is not difficult to identify; clearly, these terms signify *esse* as their *res*. Recall that in the case of a concrete term and its abstract counterpart, such as the pair ‘*homo*’ and ‘*humanitas*’ or the pair ‘*currens*’ and ‘*currere*’, the abstract term both *signifies* and *stands for* or *supposits for* the *res* signified

¹⁰ See *In I Perihet.*, lect. 2, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 11, lines 109-12: “[I]deo necesse fuit Aristotili dicere quod uoces significant intellectus conceptiones immediate, et eis mediatibus res;” *ST I*, q. 13, a. 1, Leonine ed., vol. 4, p. 139: “[V]oces referuntur ad res significandas, mediante conceptione intellectus;” and *ST I*, q. 13, a. 4, ad 1, Leonine ed., vol. 4, p. 145: “[N]omen non significat rem, nisi mediante conceptione intellectus.”

by the concrete term (and, by parity of reasoning, the same is true for any such pair of terms). Thus, the term ‘*humanitas*’ both signifies and supposits for the *res* signified by the term ‘*homo*’. Similarly, the term ‘*currere*’ both signifies and supposits for the *res* signified by the terms ‘*cursus*’, ‘*currens*’, and ‘*currit*’. Given that Aquinas identifies the terms ‘*ens*’ and ‘*esse*’ as an example of a concrete term and its abstract counterpart, paralleling their signification with that of ‘*currens*’ and ‘*currere*’,¹¹ the abstract term ‘*esse*’ must both signify and supposit for the *res* signified by the concrete term ‘*ens*’ and by the verb ‘*est*’.

Recall also that the *res significata* of a concrete term is that on account of which something is denominated by that term. For instance, *humanitas* is that on account of which an individual is denominated ‘*homo*’, just as *albedo* is that on account of which something is denominated ‘*album*’. Aquinas identifies *esse* or *actus essendi* as that by which something is denominated ‘*ens*’ in act in the world:

Alio modo esse dicitur actus entis in quantum est ens, id est quo denominatur aliquid ens actu in rerum natura.¹²

In another way, *esse* is said to be the act of ‘a being’ inasmuch as it is ‘a being’, that is, that by which something is denominated ‘a being’ in act in reality.

Therefore, the *res significata* of the terms ‘*ens*’, ‘*esse*’, and ‘*est*’, the object of the intellect’s conception signified by these terms, is *esse* in the sense of *actus essendi*, that which the abstract term ‘*esse*’ not only signifies but also supposits for.

The claim that the *esse* is the object of the conception signified by linguistic expressions such as ‘*ens*’, ‘*esse*’, and ‘*est*’ is not, I believe, a subject of contention. The

¹¹ See *In De hebdom.*, lect. 2, Leonine ed., vol. 50, p. 270-71, lines 39-45 quoted above (note 7).

¹² *Quodl.* IX, q. 2, a. 2, Leonine ed., vol. 25/1, p. 94, lines 41-43. See also *In IV Meta.*, lect. 2, n. 553, Marietti ed., p. 155: “[H]oc vero nomen Ens, imponitur ab actu essendi;” *ST I*, q. 5, a. 1, ad 1, Leonine ed., vol. 4, p. 56: “[S]ecundum primum esse, quod est substantiale, dicitur aliquid ens simpliciter;” *In I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 1, a. 1, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 195: “[H]oc nomen ‘qui est’ vel ‘ens’ imponitur ab ipso actu essendi.”

real issue is whether or not *esse* may be conceived by the intellect in the same manner in which the intellect conceives a form or nature such as humanity and whiteness, that is, through the intellect's first operation, in a simple or non-composite conception (*conceptio incomplexa*). Everyone agrees that *esse* as *actus essendi* is simple.¹³ The question is whether this 'simple' can be grasped in a non-complex mental act, and so can be the *res significata* of the simple terms 'ens', 'esse', and 'est'.

If we consider Aquinas' account of the nature of the *conceptio* signified by terms as opposed to propositions, wherein terms signify a simple conception whereas propositions signify a complex or composite conception,¹⁴ the nouns 'ens' and 'esse' as well as the verb 'est' ought to signify a simple, non-composite conception of *esse* as act. However, according to the traditional doctrine of the judgment of *esse*, grounded on an interpretation of Aquinas' comments in his early *Scriptum on the Sentences* and *Super De trinitate*, a simple conception of *esse* is not possible.¹⁵ For Aquinas, it appears, what the intellect apprehends in simple conceptualization is essence. Since *esse*, for him, is not an essence, it cannot be the object of conceptualization. Therefore, most Aquinas scholars conclude, *esse* is grasped by the intellect only in judgment.

A possible way to reconcile Aquinas' theory of signification and the doctrine of the judgment of *esse* is to maintain that the terms 'ens', 'esse', and 'est' constitute an exception on account of their *res significata*. One might argue that the terms 'ens', 'esse', and 'est' do not signify, as Aquinas' theory of signification indicates, a simple conception

¹³ Insofar as *esse* as *actus essendi* is one of the two principles in things, 'that by which' something is or exists in the reality, it is in itself simple.

¹⁴ See *In I Periher.*, lect. 6, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 32, lines 20-23: "[S]ignificatio orationis differt a significatione nominis uel uerbi, quia nomen uel uerbum significat simplicem intellectum, oratio autem significat intellectum compositum."

¹⁵ See chapter 1, passim.

of *esse*, since one is impossible, but rather the judgment of *esse*.¹⁶ But such a reconstruction of Aquinas' semantic theory faces several problems, which we shall discuss in detail in the subsequent sections of this chapter. Aquinas' account of the signification of the terms '*ens*', '*esse*', and '*est*' contains every indication that these terms signify a simple conception. Aquinas explicitly denies that the noun '*ens*' and the verb '*est*' signify a judgment or composed conception. Moreover, in several places the intellect's conception of *ens* is identified explicitly as a simple conception.¹⁷ There is ample evidence that Aquinas recognizes a simple conception of *esse*. If that is indeed the case, and I submit that it is, then we have reason to question the doctrine of the impossibility of a simple conceptual apprehension of *esse* and the interpretation of Aquinas' remarks in the commentaries on the *Sentences* and on the *De trinitate* that supports it.

Whether or not Aquinas rules out the possibility of a simple conception of *esse* in those texts is a topic we shall address in the Chapter IV. Let us return now to the question of the simple *conceptio* of *esse*. In the next section I examine Aquinas' account of the signification of the term '*ens*' and its abstract counterpart '*esse*' to show that, indeed, these terms signify a simple conception rather than a judgment.¹⁸

¹⁶ For an example of this line of argument, see Étienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 230-31.

¹⁷ See *In III Sent.*, d. 23 q. 2 a. 2 qc. 1; *De pot.*, q. 9, a. 5; *De ver.* q. 4, a. 2 and q. 14, a. 1; *SCG I*, c. 59; *Quodl.* V, q. 5 a. 2; *In VI Meta.*, lect. 4, n. 1223-1224; *In I Periher.*, lect. 5 and 6.

¹⁸ A similar endeavor has been undertaken by Ralph McInerny in *Being and Predication: Thomistic Interpretations* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 173-228. McInerny's main concern is the "predicability" of existence; those who deny a "concept" of *esse* also deny that '*est*' can function as a predicate term in an existential proposition such as 'Socrates is'. McInerny's criticism of this doctrine is directed in particular at Gilson's remarks on the matter in *Being and Some Philosophers* (including Gilson's response to Louis-Marie Régis' review of the first edition of the book). McInerny's treatment of the issue of whether '*est*' is a predicate contains multiple remarks regarding the nature of the conception signified by the terms

3.2 Aquinas on the Signification of the Concrete Term ‘*Ens*’ and its Abstract Counterpart ‘*Esse*’

3.2.1 The Signification of the Concrete Term ‘*Ens*’

If there is a term that appears to signify a complex conception, it is ‘*ens*’. The term ‘*ens*’ signifies ‘*quod est*’, says Thomas repeatedly; that is, it signifies ‘what is’ or ‘what has being’. Accordingly, it appears to signify the complex conception ‘something is’. On this subject, Aquinas writes:

Et tamen maxime uidebatur de hoc quod dico ‘ens’, quia ‘ens’ nichil aliud est quam ‘quod est’, et sic uidetur <et> rem significare, per hoc quod dico <‘quod’, et esse, per hoc quod dico> ‘est’. Et si quidem hec dictio ‘ens’ significaret esse principaliter sicut significat rem que habet esse, procul dubio significaret aliquid esse; set ipsam compositionem, que importatur in hoc quod dico ‘est’, non principaliter significat, set consignificat eam in quantum significat rem habentem esse; unde talis consignificatio compositionis non sufficit ad ueritatem uel falsitatem, quia compositio in qua consistit ueritas et falsitas non potest intelligi nisi secundum quod innectit extrema compositionis.¹⁹

Nevertheless, [that something is signified to exist] seemed [to Aristotle] especially [true] in the case of the expression ‘*ens*’, because ‘*ens*’ is nothing other than ‘what is’, and thus it appears to signify <both> a thing, by expressing <‘what’, and *esse*, by expressing> ‘is’. If the expression ‘*ens*’ were to signify *esse* principally just as it does signify a thing that has *esse*, without doubt it would signify that something is; but [‘*ens*’] does not principally signify the composition itself that is conveyed in saying ‘is’; rather, [‘*ens*’] consignifies [composition] inasmuch as it signifies a thing having *esse*. But such consignifying of composition is not sufficient for truth or falsity because the composition in which truth and falsity consist can be understood only according as it connects the extremes of a composition.

In this passage, taken from the commentary on Aristotle’s *Perihermeneias*, Aquinas comments on Aristotle’s remark that verbs, in and by themselves, have signification but they do not signify whether something is or is not (*si est aut non est*). That this is so, observes Aquinas, Aristotle proves by those terms most susceptible to appear to assert

‘*ens*’ and ‘*est*’ (See in particular pp. 181-87 and 218-27). In this regard, McNerny’s study points us in the right direction.

¹⁹ *In I Periher.*, lect. 5, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 31, lines 362-76.

that something is, namely the verb ‘*est*’ and the participle ‘*ens*’. Indeed, ‘*ens*’, says Aristotle, in and by itself is nothing (*ipsum ens nihil est*).²⁰

After examining the readings of other commentators, Aquinas offers his own. The conception signified by ‘*ens*’ implies the composition of *thing* and *esse* inasmuch as ‘*ens*’ signifies ‘what is’, ‘what has *esse*’, or ‘a thing having *esse*’. Thus, it could appear to signify a thing to be. Yet, the term ‘*ens*’ does not signify the composition signified when one says ‘something is’, i.e., the kind of composition to which truth or falsity applies. Were ‘*ens*’ to signify *esse* principally (*principaliter*) in the way that it signifies ‘a thing that has *esse*’, adds Thomas, it would signify that something is. But, of course, it does not signify *esse* principally (but rather ‘that which is’).²¹ Aquinas’ next point is one that we have not seen before. It should be said, he points out, that the term ‘*ens*’ consignifies composition inasmuch as it signifies ‘a thing having *esse*’. As for Aristotle’s remark that ‘*ens*’ by itself is nothing (*ipsum ens nihil est*), Aquinas explains:

Et ideo, ut magis sequamur uerba Aristotelis, considerandum est quod ipse dixerat quod uerbum non significat rem esse uel non esse; addit autem quod non solum uerbum non significat rem esse uel non esse, set nec hoc ipsum ‘ens’ significat rem esse uel non esse, et hoc est quod dicit: «nihil est», id est non significat aliquid esse.²²

Therefore, so as to follow more [closely] the words of Aristotle, we should consider that he had said that the verb does not signify a thing to be or not to be; and he adds that not only does the verb not signify a thing to be or not to be, but not even this [term] ‘*ens*’ itself signifies a thing to be or not to be, and this is what [he means when] he says: ‘it is nothing’, that is, it does not signify something to be.

²⁰ See Aristotle, *De Interpretatione*, 16b19-25. The Latin translation Aquinas has reads *ipsum ‘est’ nihil est* instead of *ipsum ‘ens’ nihil est* as corresponds to the Greek original. Aquinas is aware of this (see *In I Periher.*, lect. 5, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 30, lines 311-12) and comments on both readings.

²¹ Notice that when Aquinas denies that ‘*ens*’ signifies *esse* principally, he does not have in mind the *res significata* of ‘*ens*’, which is *esse*. He is referring to the way in which *esse* is signified by ‘*ens*’. We shall discuss the sense of ‘*principaliter*’ as Aquinas uses it here shortly, but note that it should not be confused with ‘*per prius*’.

²² *In I Periher.*, lect. 5, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 31, lines 355-61.

In short, the doctrine Aquinas relays for us here is that although ‘*ens*’ signifies ‘what is’ (‘*quod est*’), it does not signify ‘something is’ (‘*aliquid est*’).

In the following pages, I explore in detail two of Aquinas’ remarks regarding the signification of ‘*ens*’ found in the first of the two passages quoted above. The first is that “the term ‘*ens*’ consignifies composition.” Here I explain the distinction between signification and consignification and examine the sense in which ‘*ens*’ is said by Aquinas to *consignify* rather than *signify* composition. The second remark, closely related to the first, is that “the term ‘*ens*’ does not signify composition,” that is, it does not signify the kind of composition to which truth or falsity applies. The central issue here, we shall see, is the distinction between the sense in which a proposition signifies *esse* and the sense in which the term ‘*ens*’ signifies *esse*. After we have examined these two remarks by Aquinas on the signification of ‘*ens*’, we will be in a position to explain why ‘*ens*’ does not signify ‘something is’ (‘*aliquid est*’), and hence, it does not signify a judgment.

A. The Term ‘*Ens*’ Consignifies Composition

The notion of ‘*consignificatio*’ has its origins in Boethius’ logical works. It was originally used to refer to the additional signification of time by verbs, which differs from the proper signification of time by nouns such as ‘today’ and by adverbs of time. Beginning in the late eleventh century logicians and grammarians progressively began to expand the notion to include the consignification of person, tense, and mood by verbs as well as the consignification of number, gender, and sometimes case by nouns and

adjectives.²³ In the thirteenth century, the notion of ‘consignification’ acquired various connotations; one of them refers to the idea of a secondary signification, or signification *ex consequenti*, to that which the term signifies principally (*principaliter*).²⁴ In this sense, the consignification of a term was regarded as an ‘accidental’ property, or as resulting from the accidental properties of a term. In addition, the notion of consignification at large was often linked to a term’s mode of signification, so that the two notions were used interchangeably.²⁵ Specifically, in the sense of the notion that interests us here, to have consignification was to have an ‘accidental’ mode of signification.²⁶

Aquinas keeps the notions of consignification and mode of signification separate.²⁷ He speaks of the consignification of time by verbs and participles, as in the case of the participle ‘*datum*’; he also mentions the consignification of gender, but he is not particularly concerned with such merely grammatical issues.²⁸ Although Aquinas does not identify a term’s consignification as a mode of signification in the way logicians

²³ Irène Rosier, “*Res significata et modus significandi*: Les implications d’une distinction médiévale,” in *Sprachtheorien in Spätantike und Mittelalter*, ed. Sten Ebbesen (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1995), 137.

See, Lambert, *Logica*, ed. Franco Alessio (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1971), p. 9, lines 37-39: “Dicitur autem [nomen] consignificare illud quod ei accidit ultra principale significatum ut «homo» consignificat nominativum casum et numerum singularem, et alia que sibi accidunt.”

²⁴ Ashworth, “Signification and Modes of Signifying in Thirteenth-Century Logic: A preface to Aquinas on Analogy,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 1 (1991): 53-54. Note that the distinction between what a term signifies secondarily or *ex consequenti* (i.e., what it consignifies) and what it signifies principally (*principaliter*) must not be confused with the distinction between the primary (*per prius*) and secondary (*per posterius*) signification of analogous terms.

²⁵ Ashworth, “Signification and Modes,” 54.

²⁶ See, Peter of Spain, *Tractatus*, ed. L. M. De Rijk (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1972), p. 133, lines 5-7: “In nomine etiam est alius accidentalis modus significandi a parte accidentium, secundum quod nomen significat masculine vel feminine, et sic de aliis.” Also, when discussing different types of equivocation in terms, Peter writes that two of them arise from the side of the signification of the term, whereas a third type arises “from the side of consignification, in which the diversity expected is not of the things signified, but of modes of signification” (*Tractatus*, p. 105, lines. 26-27). On accidental modes of signification, see Ashworth, “Signification and Modes,” 55-56.

²⁷ Ashworth, “Signification and Modes,” 57.

²⁸ For references in Aquinas, see Ashworth, “Signification and Modes,” 57.

often did, I have found that the two notions are nonetheless closely related: one can speak of an “*ex consequenti* relation,” and at times Aquinas uses this language. A term’s consignification is not a mode of signification, but in some cases it results *ex consequenti* from the mode of signification of a term. For example, Aquinas points out that the term ‘white’ (‘*album*’) signifies quality alone, namely whiteness, but given that it signifies whiteness *per modum accidentis*, its *ratio* includes *ex consequenti* the subject of whiteness and hence the term ‘white’ (‘*album*’) may be said to signify the subject of whiteness *ex consequenti*. The term ‘whiteness’ (‘*albedo*’), in contrast, does not signify whiteness *per modum accidentis* but rather *per modum substantiae*; as an abstract noun, it does not consignify any subject.

Nec est verum quod Avicenna dicit, quod praedicata, quae sunt in generibus accidentis, principaliter significant substantiam, et per posterius accidens, sicut hoc quod dico album et musicum. Nam album ut in praedicamentis dicitur, solam qualitatem significat. Hoc autem nomen album significat subiectum ex consequenti, inquantum significat albedinem per modum accidentis. Unde oportet, quod ex consequenti includat in sui ratione subiectum. Nam accidentis esse est inesse. Albedo enim etsi significet accidens, non tamen per modum accidentis, sed per modum substantiae. Unde nullo modo consignificat subiectum.²⁹

What Avicenna says is not true: that predicates that belong to the genera of accidents principally signify a substance and secondarily an accident, as in what I call ‘white’ and ‘musical’. For, ‘white’, as it is said in the categories, signifies quality alone. But this term ‘white’ signifies a subject *ex consequenti*, inasmuch as it signifies whiteness in the mode of accident. Therefore, its *ratio* includes some subject *ex consequenti*, for, ‘to be’ (*esse*) for an accident is ‘to be in’ (*inesse*). The term ‘whiteness’ also signifies an accident, yet not in the mode of accident, but in the mode of substance. Thus, in no way does it consignify a subject.

Similarly, Aquinas relates the consignification of time by verbs to their mode of signification. Verbs signify action alone, but given that they are imposed to signify action *per modum actionis*, that is, in the concrete as mixed together with the subject from whom it proceeds, the notion of time is included *ex consequenti*, we may say, in the *ratio*

²⁹ *In V Meta.*, lect. 9, n. 894, Marietti ed., p. 239.

or *conceptio* of the corresponding action. Consequently, verbs do not signify time principally (*principaliter*), in the way a term such as ‘today’ does; rather, they consignify time inasmuch as the notion of time is included *ex consequenti* in the conception verbs signify by virtue of their mode of signification:

‘[C]ursus’, quia significat actionem non per modum actionis, set per modum rei per se existentis, eo quod est nomen, non consignificat tempus; ‘currit’ uero, cum sit uerbum significans actionem, consignificat tempus, quia proprium est motus tempore mensurari, actiones autem nobis note sunt in tempore; dictum est autem supra quod consignificare tempus est significare aliquid ut tempore mensuratum; unde aliud est significare tempus principaliter ut rem quamdam, quod potest nomini conuenire, aliud autem est significare cum tempore, quod non conuenit nomini, set uerbo.³⁰

Since ‘*cursus*’, insofar as it is a noun signifies action, not in the mode of an action, but in the mode of a thing existing per se, it does not consignify time. But ‘*currit*’, since it is a verb signifying action, consignifies time, because to be measured by time is proper to motion, and actions are known by us in time. It was said above, moreover, that to consignify time is to signify something as measured in time. Thus, it is one thing to signify time principally, as a certain *res* ([or] thing), which [signification] can belong to a noun; and another thing to signify *with* time, which belongs, not to a noun, but to the verb.

Similar remarks can be made regarding the conception signified by concrete terms. The *conceptio* signified by concrete terms, by virtue of their *modus significandi*, implies composition; accordingly, a concrete term consignifies composition. We have seen in the previous chapter that a concrete term signifies its *res* without prescinding (*sine praecisione materiae designatae*) and hence as composite, either as a subject with attributes or as an attribute in a subject. Aquinas, then, describes the signification of concrete terms as signifying “*ut totum*” and “*per modum completi participantis* (through the mode of the complete thing as participating).”³¹ A concrete term such as ‘*homo*’

³⁰ See *In I Perihier.*, lect. 5, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 27, lines 93-105.

³¹ Cf. *In VII Meta.*, lect. 5, n. 1379 (Marietti ed., p. 339): “[H]omo significat ut totum, humanitas significat ut pars;” *Super De causis*, prop. 22 (Saffrey ed., p. 116, lns. 25-27): “[O]mne nomen a nobis impositum, vel significat per modum completi participantis sicut nomina concreta, vel significat per modum diminuti et partis formalis sicut nomina abstracta.” Cf. also *De ente*, c. 2, lns. 292-304; *Quodl. IX*, q. 2, a. 1, ad 1.

signifies its *res* (humanity) without prescinding, but ‘mixed together with other things’, as their subject. Thus, the *conceptio* signified by the term ‘*homo*’ implies or includes composition inasmuch as it signifies its *res significata* (humanity) *ut totum*, as a whole. In order to represent linguistically the conception signified by the concrete term ‘*homo*’ grammarians use the phrase ‘*habens humanitatem*’ (‘what has humanity’). Similarly, the conception signified by the concrete term ‘*ens*’ may be linguistically represented by the phrase ‘*habens esse*’ (‘what has *esse*’). Notice that the term ‘*ens*’ and the term ‘*homo*’ were imposed to signify this whole unit: ‘the thing having *esse*’ and ‘the thing having *humanitas*’. Surely, then, a certain composition of *thing* and *esse* and of *thing* and *humanitas* is implied in the conception signified by the term ‘*ens*’ and by the term ‘*homo*’, but none of these terms was imposed to signify this composition, namely, ‘the composition of a thing and *esse*’ or ‘the composition of a thing and *humanitas*’. Rather, the term ‘*ens*’ and the terms ‘*homo*’ were imposed to signify ‘the subject of *esse*’ and ‘the subject of *humanitas*’ respectively. In other words, neither ‘*ens*’ nor ‘*homo*’ signifies composition. Given their concrete mode of signification, though, the *conceptio* each term signifies includes composition *ex consequenti*; accordingly, we may say, they consignify composition.

In order to understand fully the conceptual distinctions at work here, more needs to be said regarding the *modus significandi* of concrete terms. We mentioned already that Aquinas describes a concrete term as signifying *ut totum*, but another of Aquinas’ characterizations of the mode of signification of concrete terms is that they signify *ut subsistens* or *ut per se existens*. Aquinas writes:

[Q]uod significatur concretive, significatur ut per se existens, ut homo vel album.³² What is signified in the concrete is signified as existing per se, as ‘man’ or ‘white’.

[O]mnia nomina a nobis imposita ad significandum aliquid completum subsistens, significant in concretionem, prout competit compositis.³³ All nouns imposed by us to signify something as complete and subsistent signify in the concrete, as befits composite things.

A concrete term signifies its *res* as complete and subsistent, either in the mode of a noun ‘as a subject (of attributes)’ (as in the case of ‘*homo*’ and ‘*ens*’) or in the mode of an adjective, ‘as in a subject’ (as in the case of ‘*album*’). Although both ‘*homo*’ and ‘*album*’ signify some subject, the term ‘*homo*’, we may say, signifies the subject of humanity *principaliter*, not *ex consequenti*, whereas the term ‘*album*’ as an adjectival noun signifies the subject of whiteness *ex consequenti*. The term ‘*album*’ signifies the subject of whiteness *ex consequenti* because it signifies whiteness *per modum accidentis*, i.e., ‘as in a subject’.³⁴ The subject of whiteness is implied or contained *ex consequenti* in the conception signified by ‘*album*’; as a result, ‘*album*’ *consignifies* the subject of whiteness. In contrast, the term ‘*homo*’ signifies the subject of humanity *principaliter*, we may say, because it signifies humanity *per modum substantiae* and ‘as a subject (with attributes)’.³⁵ Like ‘*homo*’ the term ‘*ens*’ signifies its *res*, *esse*, in the concrete ‘as a subject (with attributes)’, for ‘*ens*’ signifies ‘what has *esse*’. Accordingly, the term ‘*ens*’

³² *In I Sent.*, d. 33, q. 1, a. 2, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 770.

³³ *ST I*, q. 13, a. 1, ad 2, Leonine ed., vol. 4, p. 140.

³⁴ See *In V Meta.*, lect. 9, n. 894 quoted above in note 29.

³⁵ See *ST I*, q. 39, a. 3, Leonine ed., vol. 4, p. 400: “[N]omina substantiva significant aliquid per modum substantiae : nomina vero adiectiva significant aliquid per modum accidentis, quod inhaeret subiecto;” also *De pot.*, q. 9, a. 6; *In I sent.*, d. 9, q. 1, a. 2.

Note that abstract terms may also be said to signify “*per modum substantiae*” inasmuch as they signify their *res* ‘as a certain thing’. See, e.g., *In V Meta.*, lect. 9, n. 894, Marietti ed., p. 239: “Albedo enim etsi significet accidens, non tamen per modum accidentis, sed per modum substantiae. Unde nullo modo consignificat subiectum.” But, unlike a concrete term which signifies its *res* as ‘complete and subsistent’, an abstract term signifies its *res* as ‘that by which’; which fact explains why it neither signifies nor consignifies a subject.

signifies the subject of *esse* (*subiectum essendi*) *principaliter*, as Aquinas maintains in the following passage. Describing the signification of the concrete term ‘*ens*’ alongside the concrete term ‘*currens*’, Aquinas writes:

[Q]uod est, idest ens et currens, significatur sicut in concreto velud album . . . [S]et id ipsum quod est, significatur sicut subiectum essendi, sic id quod currit significatur sicut subiectum currendi: et ideo sicut possumus dicere de eo quod currit, sive de corrente, quod currat, inquantum subiicitur cursui et participat ipsum; ita possumus dicere quod ens, sive id quod est, sit, inquantum participat actum essendi.³⁶

[T]hat which is, that is, ‘a being’ and ‘[one] running’, are signified as in the concrete, as is ‘white’ . . . ‘[T]hat which is’ is signified as the subject of being, as ‘that which runs’ is signified as the subject of running. Thus, just as we can say of ‘that which runs’, or of ‘a runner’, that it runs, inasmuch as it is the subject of running and participates in it, we can say that ‘a being’, or ‘that which is’, is, inasmuch as it participates in the act of being.

As we mentioned before, given its concrete mode of signification, the *conceptio* signified by the term ‘*ens*’ implies or includes composition *ex consequenti*, not principally; as a result, ‘*ens*’ *consignifies* composition. Following Aquinas’ standard account of the *conceptio* signified by terms as opposed to propositions, the conception signified by ‘*ens*’, namely ‘*quod est*’ or ‘*habens esse*’, is a simple or non-composite conception (*conceptio incomplexa*), so that, as Aquinas puts it, “as in itself [incomplexum], does not contain a comparison or application to a thing.”³⁷ On close examination we find that although some composition is implied in ‘*ens*’, there is, in fact, no comparison or application of *esse* to a thing in the conception signified by ‘*ens*’; there is only the subject of *esse* (*subiectum essendi*) or the thing having *esse* (*habens esse*). Since what is conceived by the intellect and subsequently signified by the term ‘*ens*’ is not the comparison or application of *esse* to a thing, the term ‘*ens*’ does not signify ‘the composition of a thing and *esse*’. Rather, the term ‘*ens*’ *consignifies* composition or

³⁶ *In De hebdom.*, lect. 2, Leonine ed., vol. 50, p. 271, lines 44-45, 52-59.

³⁷ *SCG I*, c. 59, Leonine ed., vol. 13, p. 167, lines 28-30: “[I]ncomplexum autem, quantum est de se, non continet aliquam comparationem vel applicationem ad rem.”

signifies composition *ex consequenti*. The term ‘*ens*’ consignifies composition inasmuch as the *conceptio* signified by ‘*ens*’ consists in the intellect’s conception of *esse* without prescinding (*sine praecisione materiae designatae*) and hence as composite.

We have explained, then, the sense in which Aquinas says that ‘*ens*’ consignifies composition. I turn now to another remark by Aquinas regarding the signification of ‘*ens*’, namely, that ‘*ens*’ does not signify composition.³⁸

B. The Term ‘*Ens*’ Does not Signify Composition

We should not mistake the kind of composition ‘*ens*’ consignifies with the kind of composition it does not signify. In the passage quoted at the beginning of this section (3.2.1), Aquinas tells us that the composition consignified by ‘*ens*’ is not the kind of composition to which truth or falsity applies, for it lacks a connection between the extremes of the composition.

[T]alis consignificatio compositionis non sufficit ad ueritatem uel falsitatem, quia compositio in qua consistit ueritas et falsitas non potest intelligi nisi secundum quod innectit extrema compositionis.³⁹

[S]uch consignifying composition is not sufficient for truth or falsity because the composition in which truth and falsity consist cannot be understood unless it connects the extremes of the composition.

As we shall see next, the kind of composition ‘*ens*’ does not signify is the kind of composition sufficient for truth or falsity. The fact that ‘*ens*’ does not signify, and does not consignify, the kind of composition to which truth or falsity applies explains why, for Aquinas, ‘*ens*’ does not signify ‘something is’ (*aliquid est*).⁴⁰ We begin by examining what sort of composition Aquinas considers to be sufficient for truth or falsity.

³⁸ See *In I Periher.*, lect. 5, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 31, lines 362-76.

³⁹ *In I Periher.*, lect. 5, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 31, lines 372-76.

⁴⁰ See *In I Periher.*, lect. 5, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 31, lines 355-61.

On the subject of the conceptions of the intellect signified by words (*voces*), both complex and simple, Aquinas writes:

Voces enim incomplexae neque verum neque falsum significant; sed voces complexae, per affirmationem aut negationem veritatem aut falsitatem habent . . . Et cum voces sint signa intellectuum, similiter dicendum est de conceptionibus intellectus. Quae enim sunt simplices, non habent veritatem neque falsitatem, sed solum illae quae sunt complexae per affirmationem vel negationem.⁴¹

Non-complex words signify neither truth nor falsity; but complex words, through affirmation or negation, have truth and falsity . . . And, since words are the signs of concepts, the same is said with respect to the conceptions of the intellect. Those which are simple do not have truth and falsity, but only those which are complex through affirmation or negation [have truth and falsity].

There are two important points to take from this passage. The first one is that Aquinas considers as subject of truth or falsity only those conceptions which are complex (*conceptiones complexae*). Non-complex conceptions, or *conceptiones incomplexae*, on the other hand, do not have truth or falsity. Now, elsewhere, Aquinas points out that a proposition signifies a complex conception, whereas a term, namely a noun or a verb, signifies a simple conception.

[S]ignificatio orationis differt a significatione nominis uel uerbi, quia nomen uel uerbum significat simplicem intellectum, oratio autem significat intellectum compositum.⁴²

The signification of a proposition (*oratio*) differs from the signification of a noun or verb, because a noun or a verb signifies a simple understanding, a proposition signifies a composite understanding.

[D]uplex est significatio uocis, una que refertur ad intellectum compositum, alia autem que refertur ad intellectum simplicem, prima significatio competit orationi, secunda uero competit parti orationis.⁴³

[T]he signification of a word (*vox*) is twofold: one [signification] refers to a composite understanding; the other refers to a simple understanding. The first signification belongs to a proposition; whereas the second belongs to a part of a proposition.

⁴¹ *In VI Meta.*, lect. 4, n. 1223-1224, Marietti ed., p. 309.

⁴² *In I Perih.*, lect. 6, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 32, lines 20-23.

⁴³ *In I Perih.*, lect. 6, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 32-33, lines 35-39.

Furthermore, Aquinas, while paraphrasing Aristotle, links the conception signified by a noun or verb with the first operation of the intellect, and the conception signified by a proposition with the intellect's second operation:

*Hoc ergo est primo et per se intellectum, quod intellectus in seipso concipit de re intellecta, sive illud sit definitio, sive enuntiatio, secundum quod ponuntur duae operationes intellectus, in III de Anima. Hoc autem sic ab intellectu conceptum dicitur verbum interius, hoc enim est quod significatur per vocem; non enim vox exterior significat ipsum intellectum, aut formam ipsius intelligibilem, aut ipsum intelligere, sed conceptum intellectus quo mediante significat rem: ut cum dico, «homo» vel «homo est animal».*⁴⁴

Therefore, what is primarily and per se understood is what the intellect in itself conceives about the thing understood, whether it be a definition or a proposition – according as two operations of the intellect are affirmed in *De Anima* 3. And this [thing] conceived by the intellect in this way is called the interior word (*verbum*), for this is what is signified by the [exterior] word (*vox*); for, the exterior word (*vox*) does not signify the intellect itself, or its intelligible form, or the act of understanding, but the concept of the intellect through whose mediation it signifies the thing: as when I say, ‘man’, or, ‘Man is an animal’.

Accordingly, the *conceptio* signified by a term, or simple word (*vox*), is that which the intellect produces through its first operation, that is, a simple conception (*conceptio incomplexa*), which is neither true nor false. A proposition, or complex word, on the other hand, signifies a complex conception (*conceptio complexa*), the product of the second operation of the intellect, and what is subject to truth or falsity.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ *De pot.*, q. 9, a. 5, Marietti ed., p. 236. See also, *In I Periher.*, lect. 5, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 29, lines 277-86): “Set dicendum est quod duplex est operatio intellectus, ut supra habitum est; ille qui dicit nomen uel uerbum secundum se, constituit intellectum quantum ad prima operationem, que est conceptio alicuius . . . non autem constituit intellectum quantum ad secundam operationem, que est intellectus componentis et diuidentis.”

⁴⁵ The same doctrine is found in *De ver.* q. 4, a. 2, Leonine ed., vol. 22/1, p. 123-24, lines 101-109: “[V]erbum intellectus nostri, secundum cuius similitudinem loqui possumus de verbo divino, est id ad quod operatio intellectus nostri terminatur, quod est ipsum intellectum, quod dicitur conceptio intellectus, sive sit conceptio significabilis per vocem incomplexam ut accidit quando intellectus format quidditates rerum, sive per vocem complexam ut accidit quando intellectus componit et dividit.”

The second point to take from above, and which further confirms the doctrine regarding the second operation of the intellect, complex conceptions, and propositions, is that Aquinas explains that a *conceptio complexa* is complex through affirmation or negation. The complexity of the conception to which truth or falsity applies is, therefore, associated with predication. Only in predication are the extremes (the subject-term and predicate-term) connected inasmuch as the intellect establishes a comparison between the thing denoted by the subject-term and the form signified by the predicate-term wherein the form or nature is either applied or removed from the thing.⁴⁶ Aquinas, thinking of the *complexum* in comparison with the *incomplexum*, writes:

Cum aliquod incomplexum vel dicitur vel intelligitur, ipsum quidem incomplexum, quantum est de se, non est rei aequatum nec rei inaequale: cum aequalitas et inaequalitas secundum comparisonem dicantur; incomplexum autem, quantum est de se, non continet aliquam comparisonem vel applicationem ad rem. Unde de se nec verum nec falsum dici potest: sed tantum complexum, in quo designatur comparatio incomplexi ad rem per notam compositionis aut divisionis.⁴⁷

When something non-complex (*incomplexum*) is said or understood, the *incomplexum*, as it is in itself, is neither equal nor unequal to the thing, because equality and inequality are said according to a comparison; the *incomplexum*, as it is in itself, does not contain a comparison or application to the thing. Thus, in itself, it cannot be said to be true or false; but only the *complexum*, in which is designated a comparison of the *incomplexum* to the thing through the note of composition or division [is said to be true or false].

The *incomplexum* or simple conception, then, does not contain a comparison to a thing by either affirmation or negation; as such it is not subject to truth or falsity. The *complexum* or complex conception, on the other hand, contains a comparison of the *incomplexum* to a thing. That is, a complex conception contains a comparison (through composition or

⁴⁶ See *ST I*, q. 16, a. 2, Leonine ed., vol. 4, p. 208: “[N]am in omni propositione aliquam formam significatam per praedicatum, vel applicat alicui rei significatae per subiectum, vel removet ab ea.” Note that the terms of a proposition are not taken equally; a term in the subject position is taken “materially”, i.e. what it supposits for, while a term in the predicate position is taken “formally”, i.e., what it signifies (See, e.g., *In I Sent.*, d. 4, q. 2, a. 3; *ST I*, q. 13, a. 12 and q. 31, a. 3, ad 2; *In IX Meta.*, lect. 11, n. 1898).

⁴⁷ *SCG I*, c. 59, Leonine ed., vol. 13, p. 167, lines 24a-1b.

division) of the simple conception signified by the predicate-term to the thing the subject-term denotes or supposits for. Note that although the conception signified by a proposition is complex, in itself it constitutes a unified unity. A *conceptio complexa* is one sole complex object of understanding.

[P]redicatum comparatur ad subiectum
sicut forma ad materiam . . . ex forma
autem et materia fit unum simpliciter.⁴⁸

[T]he predicate is related to the subject as
form to matter . . . from form and matter
results one thing simply.

What is conceived by the intellect through its second operation and subsequently signified by a proposition is the comparison itself, i.e., the composition of *res* and *incomplexum*, or a division of one from the other. In other words, a proposition or statement signifies one thing, a comparison of one thing to another, by way of composition (*per modum compositionis*) or division (*per modum diuisionis*).⁴⁹

Accordingly, Aquinas holds that a proposition signifies the composition or division of the intellect.⁵⁰ In other words, an affirmative proposition signifies composition, the composition of *res* and *incomplexum*.

Let us consider an example: the proposition ‘Socrates is a man’. The intellect’s *conceptio* signified by the proposition ‘Socrates is a man’ is a complex conception (*conceptio complexa*) conceived by the intellect through its second operation. It consists in the comparison of the simple conception ‘what has humanity’ (signified by the predicate-term ‘man’) to the subject ‘Socrates’ in the manner of composition. Accordingly, the proposition ‘Socrates is a man’ signifies composition, namely, the composition of Socrates and the simple conception ‘what has humanity’. The term ‘man’,

⁴⁸ See *In I Perihier.*, lect. 8, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 42, lines 176-79.

⁴⁹ See *In I Perihier.*, lect. 8, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 44, lines 336-55.

⁵⁰ See *ST I*, q. 85, a. 2, ad 3, Leonine ed., vol. 5, p. 335: “Unde ratio quam significat nomen, est definitio; et enuntiatio significat compositionem et diuisionem intellectus.”

in contrast, taken alone cannot be said to signify composition, for the intellect's *conceptio* 'what has humanity' which the term 'man' signifies does not consist in a comparison of one thing to another. The term 'man' does not signify *that* some *x* has humanity; rather, it signifies the humanity in a concrete mode, as a subject with attributes. The *conceptio* signified by the term 'man' is, therefore, a simple conception (*conceptio incomplexa*); it is the simple, non-composite conception of humanity as a subsistent subject which the intellect conceives through its first operation. Now, as a concrete term, the term 'man' consignifies composition, or signifies composition *ex consequenti*. But, the kind of composition the term 'man' consignifies is not the kind of composition the proposition 'Socrates is a man' signifies, for the composition that 'man' consignifies does not consist in a comparison of one thing to another and as such is not subject of truth or falsity. Rather, the composition the term 'man' consignifies is the kind of composition contained *ex consequenti* in the conception signified by a concrete term insofar as its *res* is conceived by the intellect without prescinding (*sine praecisione materiae designatae*) and hence as composite.

Given that the term '*ens*' signifies '*quod est*' ('what is'), it could appear to signify '*aliquid est*' ('something is'). However, the expression '*quod est*' is not equivalent to the expression '*aliquid est*'. The former represents to a simple conception, the latter a complex conception wherein a comparison is made between a thing and *esse*. Aquinas' remarks regarding the verb '*est*' within a propositional context are helpful here:

Ad cuius evidenciam considerandum est quod hoc uerbum 'est' quandoque in enunciatione predicatur secundum se, ut cum dicitur: «Sortes est», per quod nichil aliud intendimus significare quam quod Sortes sit in rerum natura; quandoque uero

To understand this one must consider that this verb 'is' is sometimes predicated in a proposition in itself, as when one says 'Socrates is', by which we do not intend to signify anything other than that Socrates exists in reality. But sometimes the verb

non predicator per se, quasi principale predicatum, set quasi coniunctum principali predicato ad connectendum ipsum subiecto, sicut cum dicitur: «Sortes est albus»: non enim est intention loquentis ut assertat Sortem esse in rerum natura, set ut attribuat ei albedinem mediante hoc uerbo 'est'; et ideo in talibus 'est' praedicatur ut adiacens principali praedicato.⁵¹

'is' is not predicated in itself, as if [it were] the principal predicate, but, as it were, conjoined to the principal predicate in order to connect it to the subject, as when one says 'Socrates is white'. For, it is not the intention of the speaker to assert that Socrates exists in reality, but to attribute to him whiteness by means of the verb 'is'; and for this reason 'is' in such cases is predicated as adjacent to the principal predicate. . . .

There are, then, according to Aquinas, two different kinds of propositions containing the verb '*est*': one where '*est*' is predicated *per se* (as in the proposition 'Socrates is', by which we signify that something is in reality), the other where '*est*' is adjacent to the predicate (as in the proposition 'Socrates is white', by which we signify that whiteness inheres in Socrates). The first kind is the one that interests us here. In a proposition such as '*Sortes est*' ('Socrates is'), the verb '*est*' is the predicate-term and '*Sortes*' is the subject-term. The proposition '*Sortes est*' signifies a complex conception. Specifically, the proposition '*Sortes est*' signifies the intellect's conception of the comparison or application of the simple conception of *esse*, signified by the predicate-term '*est*', to the subject-term Socrates. This is why Aquinas remarks in the passage immediately quoted above that the proposition '*Sortes est*' signifies that Socrates is in reality. Now, the kind of complex conception a proposition like '*Sortes est*' signifies is the kind of complex conception the term '*ens*' can appear to signify. The term '*ens*' signifies '*quod est*', but the '*est*' in '*quod est*' is not a predicate. The term '*ens*' does not signify something to be in reality, that is, it does not signify '*aliquid est*'. What is conceived by the intellect and signified by the term '*ens*' is rather what has *esse*, '*quod est*'.

⁵¹ *In II Perihier.*, lect. 2, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 88, lines 35-46.

If ‘*ens*’ were to signify that something is (‘*aliquid est*’), it would signify *esse* principally (*principaliter*), which it does not. The term ‘*ens*’ signifies *esse*, but it does not signify *esse* principally. The term ‘*ens*’ signifies *esse* in the same way the term ‘*homo*’ signifies *humanitas*; that is to say, ‘*ens*’ signifies *esse* to the extent that *esse* is the object of the conception it signifies. Properly speaking the term ‘*ens*’ signifies not *esse* but the conception of *esse* in the concrete, i.e., it signifies the thing having *esse* (‘*quod est*’). In contrast, the proposition ‘*aliquid est*’ signifies *esse* principally, for it signifies ‘to be’ (*esse*), i.e., it signifies ‘something is’. Every proposition may in fact be said to principally signify *esse*. In *In I Periher.*, lect. 6, Aquinas suggests that what signifies according to affirmation or negation signifies *esse uel non esse*. Thus, every proposition signifies *esse uel non esse* (i.e. to be, to be such and such, or not to be).⁵² Now, no term signifies that something is or is not. Aquinas writes that “no verb signifies the being or not being of a thing (*esse rei uel non esse*), that is, that a thing is or is not.”⁵³ And, he further remarks that “not even this term ‘*ens*’ signify a thing to be or not to be.”⁵⁴ Surely, inasmuch as ‘*ens*’ signifies ‘*quod est*’, it may be understood as signifying a thing and *esse*, but it cannot be said to signify the being of a thing (*esse rei*), for it does not signify the

⁵² Note that a proposition of the form ‘Socrates runs’ may be reconstructed as ‘Socrates is running’ (See *In V Meta.*, lect. 9, n. 893). In order to refer to the signification of a proposition, I prefer, however, the expression *esse rei uel non esse*, which Aquinas also uses, as in the following note, since every proposition signifies either ‘something is’ or ‘something is such and such’. The object of the intellect’s conception signified by a proposition is ultimately the being or not being of a thing. We shall examine the sense of the expression “*esse rei*,” when used in this context, in the next chapter.

⁵³ *In I Periher.*, lect. 5, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, pp. 29-30, lines 302-303: “nullum uerbum est signum *esse rei uel non esse*, id est quod res sit uel non sit.” See also, *In I Periher.*, lect. 5, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 30, lines 307-308: “[N]ullum uerbum significat hoc totum, rem esse uel non esse.” Similar remarks are made regarding the term the term ‘*homo*’. *In I Periher.*, lect. 6, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 34, lines 112-14: “[H]oc nomen ‘*homo*’ . . . significat *aliquid*, set not ut affirmatio aut negatio, quia non significat esse uel non esse.”

⁵⁴ *In I Periher.*, lect. 5, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 31 lines 359-60: “[S]et nec hoc ipsum ‘*ens*’ significat rem esse uel non esse.”

composition of a thing and *esse*. Rather, ‘*ens*’ signifies a thing having *esse* (*habens esse*) or the subject of being (*subiectum essendi*). Whereas the proposition ‘*aliquid est*’ signifies the *esse* of a thing (*esse rei*), the term ‘*ens*’ signifies the subject of being (*subiectum essendi*). Accordingly, the proposition ‘*aliquid est*’ signifies *esse* principally, whereas ‘*ens*’ signifies the subject of being principally.

We are now in a better position to understand Aquinas’ remarks regarding ‘*ens*’ in the passage quoted at the beginning of section 3.2.1:

Et tamen maxime uidebatur de hoc quod dico ‘ens’, quia ‘ens’ nichil aliud est quam ‘quod est’, et sic uidetur <et> rem significare, per hoc quod dico <‘quod’, et esse, per hoc quod dico> ‘est’. Et si quidem hec dictio ‘ens’ significaret esse principaliter sicut significat rem que habet esse, procul dubio significaret aliquid esse; set ipsam compositionem, que importatur in hoc quod dico ‘est’, non principaliter significat, set consignificat eam in quantum significat rem habentem esse; unde talis consignificatio compositionis non sufficit ad ueritatem uel falsitatem, quia compositio in qua consistit ueritas et falsitas non potest intelligi nisi secundum quod innectit extrema compositionis.⁵⁵

Nevertheless, [that something is signified to exist] seemed [to Aristotle] especially [true] in the case of the expression ‘*ens*’, because ‘*ens*’ is nothing other than ‘what is’, and thus it appears to signify <both> a thing, by expressing <‘what’, and *esse*, by expressing> ‘is’. If the expression ‘*ens*’ were to signify *esse* principally just as it does signify a thing that has *esse*, without doubt it would signify that something is; but [‘*ens*’] does not principally signify the composition itself that is conveyed in saying ‘is’; rather, [‘*ens*’] consignifies [composition] inasmuch as it signifies a thing having *esse*. But such consignifying of composition is not sufficient for truth or falsity because the composition in which truth and falsity consist can be understood only according as it connects the extremes of a composition.

The term ‘*ens*’ signifies ‘*quod est*’, but it does not signify that something is (‘*est*’ or ‘*aliquid est*’) because it does not signify the composition of some subject and *esse*. The term ‘*ens*’ consignifies composition inasmuch as, given its concrete mode of signification, some composition is implied or contained *ex consequenti* in the conception ‘*ens*’ signifies (henceforth, “composition₁”). The kind of composition ‘*ens*’ consignifies

⁵⁵ *In I Periher.*, lect. 5, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 31, lines 362-76.

is not, however, the kind of composition to which truth or falsity applies (henceforth, “composition₂”), wherein a comparison of one thing to another is made, and which a proposition such as ‘*aliquid est*’ signifies. On the other hand, although ‘*ens*’ signifies *esse*, it does not signify *esse* principally. The term ‘*ens*’ signifies *esse* insofar as *esse* is the object of the intellect’s conception which ‘*ens*’ immediately signifies. The term ‘*ens*’ does not signify *esse* in the sense of *esse rei vel non esse* i.e., the “composition₂” of some subject and *esse*; rather, ‘*ens*’ signifies *habens esse* or the subject of being. Therefore, the *conceptio* of *esse* that the term ‘*ens*’ signifies is not a complex conception (*conceptio complexa*). Like any other term, the term ‘*ens*’ signifies a simple conception (*conceptio incomplexa*), the intellect’s simple conception of its *res*, *esse*, in the concrete ‘as a subject (with attributes)’.

The analysis from a semantic perspective of the intellect’s *conceptio* signified by ‘*ens*’ as simple is in accordance with Aquinas’ remarks regarding *ens* as one of the *primae conceptiones* of the intellect.⁵⁶ The primary conceptions of the intellect are described by Aquinas as either simple (*incomplexa*) or complex (*complexa*); and among the primary simple conceptions Aquinas lists ‘*ens*’:

[P]raeexistunt in nobis quaedam scientiarum semina, scilicet primae conceptiones intellectus, quae statim lumine intellectus agentis cognoscuntur per species a sensibilibus abstractas, sive sint complexa, sicut dignitates, sive incomplexa, sicut ratio entis, et unius, et huiusmodi, quae statim intellectus apprehendit.⁵⁷

There pre-exist in us certain seeds of the sciences, that is, the first conceptions of the intellect, which are known at once by the light of the agent intellect through species abstracted from sensible things, whether they are complex, as are axioms, or non-complex, as is the *ratio* of being, of one, and so on, which the intellect at once apprehends.

⁵⁶ This line of argument is pursued in greater detail by McNerny (*Being and Predication*, 181-84). McNerny discusses Aquinas’ doctrine in light of Cajetan and John of St. Thomas.

⁵⁷ *De ver.*, q. 11, a. 1, Leonine ed., vol. 22/2-1, p. 350, lines 266-72. See also *Quodl. X*, q. 4, a. 1 where the *prima principia naturaliter nota* are described by Aquinas as either *complexa* or

Furthermore, elsewhere, once again discussing the primary conceptions of the intellect,

Aquinas identifies the conception of *ens* as attained through the first operation:

Ad huius autem evidentiam sciendum est, quod, cum duplex sit operatio intellectus: una, qua cognoscit quod quid est, quae vocatur indivisibilium intelligentia: alia, qua componit et dividit: in utroque est aliquod primum: in prima quidem operatione est aliquod primum, quod cadit in conceptione intellectus, scilicet hoc quod dico ens; nec aliquid hac operatione potest mente concipi, nisi intelligatur ens.⁵⁸

To make this evident it should be understood that since the operation of the intellect is twofold: one by which it knows that which [a thing] is, which is called the understanding of indivisibles; the other by which it composes and divides. There is in both something first. In the first operation there is some first that falls into the conception of the intellect, namely, what I call being (*ens*); and in this operation nothing can be conceived by the mind unless being (*ens*) is understood.

Aquinas, then, identifies *ens* not only as a simple conception attained through the intellect's first operation, but also as what is analytically first and thus indispensable for understanding anything else in this operation.⁵⁹

Its character of *prima conceptio* as described above renders the conception of *ens* the most universal.⁶⁰ Its universality is further revealed in the *modus significandi* of the term '*ens*'. Aquinas writes that '*qui est*' or '*ens*' is the most general and universal of all terms on account of its *modus significandi*, for whereas any other term determines some mode of the substance of a thing (*modus substantiae rei*), '*ens*' does not determine any mode of being (*modus essendi*).⁶¹ Indeed, according to its mode of signification, the term

incomplexa. For Aquinas' use of '*conceptio*' in this context, see also *Quodl. VIII*, q. 2, a. 2; and *De trin.*, q. 6, a. 4.

⁵⁸ *In IV Meta.*, lect. 6, n. 605, Marietti ed., p. 167-68.

⁵⁹ Aquinas further states that understanding of the principle of non-contradiction, one of the primary complex conceptions (i.e. the first principles, also called '*dignitates*'), depends on the understanding of the conception of '*ens*'. See *In IV Meta.*, lect. 6, n. 605; *ST I-II*, q. 94, a. 2; *SCG II*, c. 83.

⁶⁰ See *In I Meta.*, lect. 2, n. 46, Marietti ed., p. 13: "Sed dicendum, quod magis universalialia secundum simplicem apprehensionem sunt primo nota, nam primo in intellectu cadit ens."

⁶¹ See *ST I*, q. 13, a. 11 co and ad 1. On '*qui est*' as equivalent to '*ens*', see *In I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 1, a. 1, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 195: "[H]oc nomen «qui est» vel «ens» imponitur ab actu essendi."

‘ens’ signifies the conception of *esse* in the concrete mode as a subject, that is, ‘ens’ signifies the subject of being (*subiectum essendi*). Now, in different places, Aquinas remarks that ‘ens’ does not signify any form or nature but only *esse*.⁶² The reason ‘ens’ does not signify any essence is that it signifies the *subiectum essendi* without any determination as to its *modus essendi*.⁶³ In other words, the conception signified by ‘ens’ leaves the subject of *esse* (*quod est*) undetermined as to its *modus essendi*. Further evidence of the indeterminate character of the conception of ‘ens’ with respect to any *modus essendi* is that what is denominated ‘ens’ is denominated solely *ad actu essendi*.⁶⁴ In fact, it is precisely the indeterminate character of the conception signified by ‘ens’ with respect to the *modus essendi* of the *subiectum essendi* that makes it possible for ‘ens’ to be divided among its various analogous significations.

We have seen that at different places Aquinas states that ‘ens’ does not signify essence. Yet, at the same time he declares that ‘ens’ “signifies the essence of a thing (*essentia rei*) and is divided by the ten genera.”⁶⁵ In regards to this apparent contradiction, I point out that ‘ens’ is not said to signify essence as such as though it were the *res significata*. If we consider the *subject* of *esse* – i.e., the *quod* in ‘*quod est*’, then

⁶² See *In I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 4, a. 2 ad 2, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 223: “Ens autem non dicit quidditatem, sed solum actum essendi;” *ST I*, q. 13, a. 11, Leonine ed., vol. 4, p. 162: “Non enim significat formam aliquam, sed ipsum esse.”

⁶³ I am in debt to Ralph McInerny for this insight. See McInerny, *Being and Predication*, 218-21.

⁶⁴ See *In IV Meta.*, lect. 2, n. 553, Marietti ed., p. 155: “[H]oc vero nomen Ens, imponitur ab actu essendi;” *SCG I*, c. 25, Leonine ed., vol. 13, p. 77b, lines 13-14: “[N]omen autem *rei* a quidditate imponitur, sicut nomen *entis* ab esse.” Also, *In I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 1, a. 1; *Quodl. IX*, q. 2, a. 2.

⁶⁵ See *Quodl. II*, q. 2, a. 1, Leonine ed., vol. 25/2, p. 215, lines 66-72 (italics mark the citation of Averroes, *In Meta. 5.7*, made explicit by Aquinas): “[S]ed uerum est quod hoc nomen ‘ens’, secundum quod importat rem cui competit huiusmodi esse, sic significat *essentiam rei*, et diuiditur per decem genera. Non tamen uniuoce, quia non eadem ratione competit omnibus esse, set *substantie quidem per se, aliis autem aliter.*” See, also, *SCG III*, c. 8, Leonine ed., vol. 14, p. 22, lines 14-17: “*Ens* enim dupliciter dicitur, ut Philosophus in *Metaphysica* docet. Uno modo, secundum quod significat *essentiam rei*, et diuiditur per decem *praedicamenta*,” and *In II Sent.*, d. 37, q. 1, a. 2, ad 3.

‘*ens*’ signifies essence (as opposed to *esse*), because ‘essence’ names the *quod* formally: the *quod* is a ‘what’, or, better, what has whatness. Thus considered, ‘*ens*’ is divided by the ten genera, that is, ‘*ens*’ is predicated of substance and accident alike. Notice that this is only possible because no kind of essence is included in the conception signified by ‘*ens*’. A thing, substance or accident, is denominated ‘*ens*’ from *esse* alone, but is denominated ‘substance’ or ‘accident’ from its *modus essendi*.⁶⁶ Similar remarks apply to the more general division of ‘*ens*’ between what is commonly referred to as the distinction between ‘*ens reale*’ and ‘*ens rationis*’. Aquinas writes that in the former sense (‘*ens reale*’, or what he elsewhere calls *ens quod est extra animam* or *ens perfectum*⁶⁷), ‘*ens*’ signifies essence and is divided by the ten genera, for ‘essence’ names something in reality (*aliquid in natura existens*). In the latter sense (‘*ens rationis*’), ‘*ens*’ signifies the truth of a proposition and the composition of the intellect, for something *is* or *has being* in this sense insofar as it is the subject of a proposition, that is, when reason affirms or denies something of it.⁶⁸ Once again, the fact that ‘*ens*’ signifies the subject of being (*essendi*) without any determination as to its *modus essendi*, makes the division of ‘*ens*’

⁶⁶ See also *In V Meta.*, lect. 9, n. 885, Marietti ed., p. 237-38: “Ens igitur dividitur in substantiam et accidens, secundum absolutam entis considerationem . . . Divisio vero entis in substantiam et accidens attenditur secundum hoc quod aliquid in natura sua est vel substantia vel accidens.”

⁶⁷ *In V Meta.*, lect. 9, n. 889, Marietti ed., p. 238.

⁶⁸ See *In II Sent.*, d. 34, q. 1, a. 1, Mandonnet ed., vol. 2, p. 873: “Uno enim modo dicitur ens quod per decem genera dividitur: et sic ens significat aliquid in natura existens; sive sit substantia, ut homo; sive accidens, ut color. Alio modo dicitur ens, quod significat veritatem propositionis; prout dicitur, quod affirmatio est vera, quando significat esse de eo quod est; et negatio, quando significat non esse de eo quod non est; et hoc ens compositionem significat, quam intellectus componens et dividens adinvenit. Quaecumque ergo dicuntur entia quantum ad primum modum, sunt entia quantum ad secundum modum: quia omne quod habet naturale esse in rebus, potest significari per propositionem affirmativam esse; ut cum dicitur: color est, vel homo est. Non autem omnia quae sunt entia quantum ad secundum modum, sunt entia quantum ad primum: quia de privatione, ut de caecitate, formatur una affirmativa propositio, cum dicitur, caecitas est; nec tamen caecitas aliquid est in rerum natura; sed est magis alicujus entis remotio: et ideo etiam privationes et negationes dicuntur esse entia quantum ad secundum modum, sed non quantum ad primum.”

into its particular analogous senses possible. Incidentally, note that the composition of the intellect is no more contained in the conception signified by ‘*ens*’ than essence is.

Throughout its analogous significations, such as *ens perfectum* and even propositional *ens*, the conception of ‘*ens*’ remains a simple one. What is conceived by the intellect and signified by the term ‘*ens*’ is *esse* under the simple conception ‘*quod est*’ or ‘*habens esse*’. As we add or remove from it in analogous predication, the conception signified by ‘*ens*’ remains a simple one. The conception of ‘*ens rationis*’ is equivalent to the conception ‘what is in the mind’ or ‘what has being in the mind’. At no point ‘*ens*’ does signify ‘something is’.

3.2.2 The Signification of the Abstract ‘*Esse*’

Unlike what is the case with the concrete ‘*ens*’, Aquinas says very little about the signification of its abstract counterpart ‘*esse*’ beyond that it signifies *in abstracto* just as the terms ‘*albedo*’ and ‘*currere*’ do.⁶⁹ There is no reference to the possibility of the abstract ‘*esse*’ signifying some complex conception, as it is the case with both ‘*ens*’ and ‘*est*’. The omission is not surprising if one considers that the term ‘*esse*’, when taken not as a verb of the infinite mode but as the abstract counterpart of the concrete ‘*ens*’, does not appear to signify that some subject is. The abstract ‘*esse*’ is used to refer to the *res significata* of the terms ‘*ens*’ and ‘*est*’ and to that by which something is denominated ‘*ens*’.⁷⁰ In none of these cases its use suggests that its signification involves the conception that something is. With so little information on ‘*esse*’, it seems nearly

⁶⁹ See *In De hebdom.*, lect. 2, Leonine ed., vol. 50, p. 271, lines 43-45: “Nam currere et esse significantur in abstracto sicut et albedo; sed quod est, id est ens et currens, significantur sicut in concreto, uelut album.”

⁷⁰ See *Quodl.* IX, q. 2, a. 2; *In IV Meta.*, lect. 2, n. 553; *SCG I*, c. 25.

impossible for us to decide on the nature of the conception it signifies, or what Aquinas might have taken it to be. However, although not much is said about ‘*esse*’ itself, plenty of evidence as to its nature can be drawn from Aquinas’ account of the *modus significandi* of abstract terms such as ‘*albedo*’ and ‘*currere*’.

For Aquinas, we might recall, the mode in which the *res* is signified by a term follows upon the mode in which the *res* is conceived by the intellect.⁷¹ Accordingly, the *modus significandi* of a term is an indication of the sort of *conceptio* the term signifies. In the following pages, then, we shall examine the conception signified by the abstract term ‘*esse*’ based on what its *modus significandi* reveals about it. Our objective is to determine whether the term ‘*esse*’, insofar as it signifies in the abstract mode, may be interpreted as signifying a complex conception of *esse*. If the term ‘*esse*’ is to signify a complex conception, it must signify composition. Specifically, it must signify the kind of composition to which truth or falsity applies. In other words, the conception signified by ‘*esse*’ must consist in the composition of some subject and *esse*.

The first thing that characterizes an abstract term, in contrast to its concrete counterpart, is that it signifies its *res* with precision. Aquinas explains that a concrete term and its abstract counterpart signify the same *res*, but whereas the former potentially includes in its signification the individuating principles of the *res*, as well as accidental attributes, the latter explicitly excludes them. For that reason, Aquinas describes abstract terms as signifying *per modum partis* whereas concrete terms signify *per modum totius*:

⁷¹ *De pot.*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 7, Marietti ed., p. 56: “[M]odus significandi in dictionibus quae a nobis rebus imponuntur sequitur modum intelligendi; dictiones enim significant intellectuum conceptiones, ut dicitur in principio *Periher.*” See, also, *ST I*, q. 45, a. 2, ad 2, Leonine ed., vol. 4, p. 466: “[M]odus significandi sequitur modum intelligendi;” *SCG I*, c. 30, Leonine ed., vol. 13, p. 92, lines 31-32: “Nam nomine res exprimimus eo modo quo intellectu concipimus;” *De pot.*, q. 7, a. 5, ad 2; *In VII Meta.*, lect. 1, n. 1253-1254.

Nam *humanitas* significat principia essentialia speciei, tam formalia quam materialia, cum praecisione principiorum individualium: dicitur enim *humanitas* secundum quam aliquis est homo; homo autem non est aliquis ex hoc quod habet principia individualia, sed ex hoc solum quod habet principia essentialia speciei. *Humanitas* igitur significat sola principia essentialia speciei. Unde significatur per modum partis. *Homo* autem significat quidem principia essentialia speciei, sed non excludit principia individuantia a sui significatione: nam homo dicitur qui habet *humanitatem*, ex quo non excluditur quin alia habere possit. Et propter hoc homo significatur per modum totius: significat enim principia speciei essentialia in actu, individuantia vero in potentia.⁷²

‘Humanity’ signifies the essential principles of the species, both formal and material, by prescinding from the individuating principles. For, humanity is that in accord with which something is a human; but a human is not something [human] because it has individuating principles, but only because it has principles essential to [its] species. Therefore, humanity signifies only the essential principles of the species. Hence it is signified after the manner of a part (*per modum partis*). ‘Human’ even signifies the essential principles of the species, but without excluding the individuating principles from its signification. For, ‘human’ is said to be one who has humanity, from whom the possibility of having other things is not excluded. Thus, ‘human’ is signified after the manner of a whole (*per modum totius*), for it signifies the essential principles of the species actually, but the individuating principles potentially.

The conception signified by an abstract term, then, includes only that which belongs to the *res* as such, excluding anything extraneous to it. Aquinas writes:

[C]onsiderandum est quod circa quodcumque abstracte significatum hoc habet ueritatem quod non habet in se aliquid extraneum, quod scilicet sit preter essentiam suam, sicut *humanitas*, *albedo* et quecumque hoc modo dicuntur.⁷³

[A]s regards anything that is signified in the abstract, one should notice that this holds true: it does not have in itself anything extraneous, that is, something that is outside its essence, as [is the case with] *humanity*, *whiteness*, and whatever is said in this way.

⁷² *SCG* IV, c. 81, Leonine ed., vol. 15, p. 253, lines 15-31. See also, *In I Sent.*, d. 23, q. 1, a. 1; *In VII Meta.*, lect. 5, n. 1379, Marietti ed., p. 339: “[H]omo significat ut totum, *humanitas* significat ut pars;” *De ente*, c. 2, lns. 292-304; *Quodl. IX*, q. 2, a. 1, ad 1; *Comp. Theol.* I, c. 154; *Super De causis*, prop. 22 (Saffrey ed., p. 116, lines 25-27): “[O]mne nomen a nobis impositum, vel significat per modum completi participantis sicut nomina concreta, vel significat per modum diminuti et partis formalis sicut nomina abstracta.”

⁷³ *In De hebdom.*, lect. 2, Leonine ed., vol. 50, p. 272, lines 117-21.

Accordingly, Aquinas points out elsewhere that when a form such as whiteness is considered in the abstract, its *ratio* contains no determination to something else but rather is in itself infinite.⁷⁴ The result is that an abstract term signifies a simple thing, or better yet, it signifies its *res* as simple.⁷⁵ Therefore, the conception signified by an abstract term is, if anything, simpler than that of a concrete term insofar as it excludes composition with other attributes.

When discussing the signification of ‘*ens*’,⁷⁶ we mentioned that the conception signified by concrete terms includes composition on account of their mode of signification, for a concrete term signifies its *res* without precision and hence as composite. A sign of the consignification of composition by concrete terms is that some subject is always contained in the conception they signify, either *principaliter* when the *res* is conceived ‘as a subject (with attributes)’ (as in the case of ‘*homo*’) or *ex consequenti* when the *res* is conceived ‘as in a subject’ (as in the case of ‘*album*’). The conception signified by an abstract term, in contrast, prescind from the notion of individual subject. We have seen that when contrasting the signification of ‘*album*’ and ‘*albedo*’ Aquinas explains that whereas ‘*album*’ signifies some subject, albeit *ex consequenti*, ‘*albedo*’ does not.

Hoc autem nomen album significat subiectum ex consequenti, in quantum significat albedinem per modum accidentis. Unde oportet, quod ex consequenti includat in sui ratione subiectum. Nam accidentis esse est inesse. Albedo enim etsi significet accidens, non tamen per modum accidentis,

This term ‘white’ signifies a subject *ex consequenti*, inasmuch as it signifies whiteness in the mode of accident. Therefore, its ratio includes some subject *ex consequenti*, for, ‘to be’ (esse) for an accident is ‘to be in’ (inesse). The term ‘whiteness’ also signifies an accident, yet

⁷⁴ See *In I Sent.*, d. 43, q. 1, a. 1, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 1003: “Omnis enim forma in propria ratione, si abstracte consideretur, infinitatem habet; sicut in albedine abstracte intellecta, ratio albedinis non est finita ad aliquid.”

⁷⁵ See *SCG I*, c. 30; *ST I*, q. 13, a. 1, ad 2.

⁷⁶ See section 3.2.1

sed per modum substantiae. Unde nullo modo consignificat subiectum.⁷⁷

not in the mode of accident, but in the mode of substance. Thus, in no way does it consignify a subject.

Elsewhere, Aquinas further explains that ‘*albedo*’, although it signifies quality, does not signify its *res* “*ut inherentem*” in the way its counterpart ‘*album*’ does. He writes:

Albedo enim significat qualitatem, sed significat eam per modum substantie, quia non significat eam ut inherentem; set album significat eam per modum qualis, quia significat eam ut inherentem.⁷⁸

‘Whiteness’ signifies quality but in the mode of substance, for it does not signify quality *ut inherentem*; but ‘white’ signifies quality in the mode of quality, for it signifies it *ut inherentem*.

The term ‘*albedo*’, then, prescind in its signification from the notion of an individual subject, not including it even *ex consequenti*, for nothing but whiteness itself is conceived and signified by the term ‘*albedo*’. Therefore, the conception signified by the term ‘*albedo*’, insofar as it has an abstract mode of signification, excludes composition.

Similar remarks on the signification of some subject regard the terms ‘*ens*’ and ‘*esse*’. After having identified ‘*ens*’ as signified *in concreto* and ‘*esse*’ as signified *in abstracto*, Aquinas writes that ‘*esse*’ is not signified ‘as the subject of being’ (*sicut subiectum essendi*), in the way ‘*ens*’ or ‘*quod est*’ is signified:

[I]psum esse non significatur sicut ipsum subiectum essendi, sicut nec currere significatur sicut subiectum cursus. Vnde, sicut non possumus dicere quod ipsum currere currat, ita non possumus dicere quod ipsum esse sit; set id quod est significatur sicut subiectum essendi, uelud id quod currit significatur sicut subiectum currendi.⁷⁹

[B]eing (*esse*) itself is not signified as the subject of being (*essendi*), just as running (*currere*) is not signified as the subject of a run (*cursus*). Thus, just as we cannot say that running (*currere*) itself runs, we cannot say that being (*esse*) itself is. But ‘that which is’ is signified as the subject of being, just as ‘that which runs’ is signified as the subject of running.

⁷⁷ *In V Meta.*, lect. 5, n. 894, Marietti ed., p. 239. See also *ST I-II*, q. 53, a. 2, ad 3; *De unione verbi*, a. 3, ad 5.

⁷⁸ *De fallaciis*, c. 9, Leonine ed., vol. 43, p. 411, lines 55-58.

⁷⁹ *In De hebdom.*, lect. 2, Leonine ed., vol. 50, p. 271, lines 48-54.

Therefore, whereas the term ‘*ens*’ signifies the subject of *esse*, the term ‘*esse*’ signifies only *esse* or *actus essendi*.⁸⁰ Nothing but the very *actus essendi* is conceived when the reality of *esse* is understood in the abstract. The abstract conception of *esse* excludes every individuating principle that determines it to something else. Thus, when considered in the abstract, *esse* is conceived as simple. It follows, then, that the conception of *esse* signified by the abstract ‘*esse*’ excludes composition.

Another characteristic of the abstract counterpart of a concrete term is that it signifies its *res* ‘as that by which’ (*ut quo est*). Aquinas writes:

Unde intellectus noster, quidquid significat ut subsistens, significat in concretione: quod vero ut simplex, significat non ut *quod est*, sed ut *quo est*.⁸¹

When our intellect signifies something as subsistent, it signifies in the concrete; when it signifies something as simple, it signifies not as *quod est*, but as *quo est*.

[O]mnia nomina a nobis imposita ad significandum aliquid completum subsistens, significant in concretione, prout competit compositis; quae autem imponuntur ad significandas formas simplices, significant aliquid non ut subsistens, sed ut quo aliquid est.⁸²

[A]ll words imposed by us to signify a complete, subsistent thing signify in the concrete, as befits composite things. Words imposed to signify simple forms signify something not as subsistent, but as that whereby something is.

Aquinas identifies both ‘whiteness’ and ‘humanity’ as signifying *ut quo est*; ‘whiteness’ signifies that by which something is white, ‘humanity’ signifies that by which something is a man.⁸³ The reason abstract terms signify *ut quo est* is that they signify their *res* as

⁸⁰ See also *De ver.*, q. 1, a. 1, ad s.c. 3, Leonine ed., vol. 22/1-2, p. 7, lines 281-83: “Ad tertium dicendum quod cum dicitur ‘diversum est esse et quod est’ distinguitur actus essendi ab eo cui ille actus convenit.”

⁸¹ *SCG I*, c. 30, Leonine ed., vol. 13, p. 92, lines 8-11.

⁸² *ST I*, q. 13, a. 1, ad 2, Leonine ed., vol. 4, p. 140. See, also, *In I Sent.*, d. 33, q. 1, a. 2, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 770: “[Q]uod significatur concretive, significatur ut per se existens, ut homo vel album . . . quod significatur in abstracto, significatur per modum formae, cujus non est operari vel subsistere in se, sed in alio.”

⁸³ See *In De hebdom.*, lect. 2, Leonine ed., vol. 50, p. 272, lines 122-23: “[H]umanitas significatur ut quo aliquid est homo, et albedo quo aliquid est album;” *ST I*, q. 13, a. 1, ad 2, Leonine ed., vol. 4, p. 140: “[A]lbedo significat ut quo aliquid est album.”

simple, that is, with precision. The term ‘humanity’, for example, insofar as it signifies its *res* with precision, signifies only that which pertains to the nature of humanity. Now, humanity is that by which something is a man, for something is a man on account of having the nature of humanity, not on account of its accidents. It follows, then, that the abstract conception of humanity contains precisely what falls into the definition of a man, that is, what makes a man a man. In this sense, ‘humanity’ signifies that by which something is a man.⁸⁴

Once again we find that the terms ‘*ens*’ and ‘*esse*’ are analyzed in the same manner as other pairs of concrete and abstract terms. Just as *humanitas* is that by which something is a man, and *albedo* is that by which something is white, Aquinas writes that *esse* or *actus essendi* is that by which something is a being (*ens*):

Alio modo esse dicitur actus entis in quantum est ens, id est quo denominatur aliquid ens actu in rerum natura.⁸⁵

In another way, *esse* is said to be the act of a being inasmuch as it is a being, that is, that by which something is denominated ‘a being’ in act in reality.

Similarly, Aquinas tells us that *esse* is that by which something is, just as *currere* or *cursus* is that by which something runs.⁸⁶ As the abstract counterpart of the concrete ‘*ens*’, then, the abstract term ‘*esse*’ signifies the intellect’s conception of *esse* not only as

⁸⁴ See *ST*, I, q. 3, a. 3, Leonine ed., vol. 4, p. 40: “[S]icut *humanitas* comprehendit in se ea quae cadunt in definitione hominis: his enim homo est homo, et hoc significat *humanitas*, hoc scilicet quo homo est homo;” *De ente*, c. 2, Leonine ed., vol. 43, p. 373, lines 292-304: “Sed hoc nomen *humanitas* significat eam [essentiam hominis] ut partem, quia non continet in significatione sua nisi id quod est hominis in quantum est homo, et precipit omnem designationem.”

⁸⁵ *Quodl.* IX, q. 2, a. 2, Leonine ed., vol. 25/1, p. 94, lines 41-43. Compare, *SCG* IV, c. 81, Leonine ed., vol. 15, p. 253, lines 18-19: “[D]icitur enim *humanitas* secundum quam aliquid est homo;” *ST* I-II, q. 53, a. 2, ad 3, Leonine ed., vol. 6, p. 338: “[A]lbedo dicitur *qua aliquid est album*.”

⁸⁶ See *ST* I, q. 50, a. 2, ad 3, Leonine ed., vol. 5, p. 6: “[I]psum autem esse est *quo* substantia est, sicut *cursus* est quo currens currit;” *Q. D. de anima*, a. 6, Leonine ed., vol. 44/1, p. 51, lines 254-55: “Nam ipsum esse est quo aliquid est, sicut *cursus* est quo aliquid currit;” and *In De hebdom.*, lect. 2, Leonine ed., vol. 50, p. 271, lines 55-59: “[S]icut possumus dicere de eo quod currit siue de corrente quod currat in quantum subicitur cursui et participat ipsum, ita possumus dicere quod ens siue id quod est sit in quantum participat actum essendi.”

simple but as ‘that by which’ (*quo est*). That is why we can say that *esse* is that by which something is denominated ‘*ens*’ in act.⁸⁷ Regarding such as conception of *esse*, consider also the following passage where Aquinas speaks of the possibility of conceiving *esse* or *actus essendi* as ‘*quo est*’:

In compositis autem ex materia et forma quo est potest dici tripliciter. Potest enim dici quo est ipsa forma partis, quae dat esse materiae. Potest etiam dici quo est ipse actus essendi, scilicet esse, sicut quo curritur, est actus currendi. Potest etiam dici quo est ipsa natura quae relinquitur ex conjunctione formae cum materia, ut humanitas.⁸⁸

In composites of matter and form, ‘that by which it is’ can be said in three ways. For, the *forma partis*, which gives being to matter, can be called ‘that by which it is’. Also, the act of being, that is, *esse*, can be called ‘that by which it is’, just as that by which something runs is the act of running. Also, the very nature that results from the conjunction of form and matter, such as humanity, can also be said ‘that by which it is’.

It is hard to see how a conception of *esse* in the abstract may be constructed as a judgment or complex conception. In the first place, *esse* is conceived as simple. Thus, the conception of *esse* in the abstract mode excludes composition. Second, *esse* is conceived as ‘*quo est*’. Thus, nothing but that whereby something is, i.e., *esse* or *actus essendi*, is contained in the abstract conception of *esse*, which prescind from all other attributes. I can find no reason to suppose that the *conceptio* signified by the abstract term ‘*esse*’ differs from the *conceptio* signified by any other abstract term except with regard to the *res intellecta*, i.e., *esse* v. *currere*, e.g. By introducing the terms ‘*ens*’ and ‘*esse*’ as an example of a concrete term and its abstract counterpart, identifying ‘*esse*’ as signifying in the same mode as ‘*albedo*’ and ‘*currere*’, Aquinas has shown us that it is possible for the human intellect to conceive the reality of *esse* in a simple or non-composite way.

⁸⁷ See *Quodl.* IX, q. 2, a. 2 quoted above; also, *In IV Meta.*, lect. 2, n. 553, Marietti ed., p. 155: “[H]oc vero nomen Ens, imponitur ab actu essendi;” *SCG* I, c. 25, Leonine ed., vol. 13, p. 77, lines 13-14: “[N]omen autem rei a quidditate imponitur, sicut nomen *entis* ab esse;” and *SCG* II, c. 54: (Leonine ed., vol. 13, ln. 31A, p. 392): “[I]psum esse est quo substantia denominatur *ens*.”

⁸⁸ *In I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 5, a. 2, Mandonett ed., vol. 1, p. 229.

3.3 Aquinas on the Signification of the Verb ‘Est’

The term ‘*est*’ seems as likely to signify a complex conception as the term ‘*ens*’ does. They both signify in the concrete mode, thus they both signify composition insofar as they signify the conception of *esse* without precision. Given their concrete mode of signification, the conception that the terms ‘*ens*’ and ‘*est*’ signify includes not only *esse* but also the *subject* of *esse*. As a result, it appears as if they signify that something is. In fact, the case for ‘*est*’ as propositional is even clearer than in the case of ‘*ens*’. For, the linguistic expression ‘*est*’ may stand for the proposition ‘*aliquid est*’. To the question, “*estne* librum tuum?”, one may respond “*est*” (“it is”). When that is the case, the expression ‘*est*’ is not a term but a proposition; as such, it signifies a complex conception, the complex conception ‘something is’. But we are not concerned with the ‘*est*’ or ‘*aliquid est*’. Our interest lies in the signification of the term ‘*est*’, i.e., the verb ‘*esse*’ or ‘to be’, to the extent that, according to the theory of signification to which Aquinas subscribes, it signifies a simple conception of *esse*.

In his commentary on Aristotle’s *Perihermeneias* Aquinas discusses the possibility of both ‘*ens*’ and ‘*est*’ signifying that something is. Given that all verbs imply ‘*esse*’ or ‘to be’, it might appear that they signify that something is. However, no verb signifies the being or not being of a thing, that is, that a thing is or is not:

Nullum uerbum est *signum esse rei uel non esse*, id est quod res sit uel non sit; quamuis enim omne uerbum finitum implicet esse, quia ‘currere’ est ‘currentem esse’, et omne uerbum infinitum implicet non esse, quia ‘non currere’ est ‘non currentem esse’,

No verb signifies (*est signum*) the being or not being of a thing, that is, that a thing is or is not. For, although every finite verb implies being, since ‘to run’ is ‘to be running’, and every infinite verb implies non-being, for ‘to non-run’ is ‘to be non-

tamen nullum uerbum significat hoc totum, running', no verb signifies this whole, that
rem esse uel non esse.⁸⁹ a thing is or is not.

Indeed, not even the verb '*est*' and its participle '*ens*', which more than any other term appear to signify that something is, signify the being or not being of a thing. We have already discussed Aquinas' take on the signification of the participial noun '*ens*'. His treatment of the verb '*est*' is not much different from that of '*ens*'; the same arguments and considerations we discussed regarding '*ens*' apply to '*est*' as well. Specifically, if the verb '*est*' is to signify the complex conception 'something is', then it must signify the conception of the application of *esse* to some subject, that is, it must signify the sort of composition to which truth or falsity applies.

At the outset, Aquinas points out that the verb '*est*' appears to signify that something is to the extent that '*est*' signifies '*esse*' ('to be') and remarks that '*esse*' seems to signify the kind of composition to which truth or falsity applies.

[Q]uod enim nullum uerbum significet rem esse uel non esse, probat per hoc uerbum '*est*', quod secundum se dictum non significat aliquid esse, licet significet esse. Et, quia hoc ipsum '*esse*' uidetur compositio quedam, et ita hoc uerbum '*est*', quod significat esse, potest uideri significare compositionem in qua sit uerum uel falsum, ad hoc excludendum subdit quod ista compositio, quam significat hoc uerbum '*est*', non potest intelligi sine componentibus, quia dependet eius intellectus ex extremis, que si non apponantur, non est perfectus intellectus compositionis, ut possit in ea esse uerum uel falsum.⁹⁰

That no verb signifies a thing to be or not to be, he [Aristotle] proves through this verb '*est*', which said by itself does not signify that something is, although it signifies *esse*. And since this *esse* itself appears to be a certain composition, and thus this verb '*est*', which signifies *esse*, can appear to signify the composition in which there is truth or falsity, to exclude this [Aristotle] adds that the composition which the verb '*est*' signifies cannot be understood without [its] components. For, its [i.e., the composition's] understanding depends on the extremes, without whose affirmation the understanding of the composition is not complete such that truth or falsity can be in it.

⁸⁹ *In I Periher.*, lect. 5, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 29-30, lines 302-308. As Aquinas explains in the same context, infinite verbs are not the same as negative verbs: the former are taken as one word, the latter as two.

⁹⁰ *In I Periher.*, lect. 5, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 31, lines 378-91.

Immediately following the paragraph quoted above Aquinas explains that the verb ‘*est*’ consignifies composition, or signifies composition *ex consequenti*, because it signifies in the mode of a verb (*per modum verbi*).

[H]oc uerbum ‘est’ consignificat compositionem, quia non principaliter eam significat, set ex consequenti: significat enim id quod primo cadit in intellectu per modum actualitatis absolute; nam ‘est’ simpliciter dictum significat esse actu et ideo significat per modum uerbi.⁹¹

The verb ‘*est*’ consignifies composition because it does not signify composition principally, but as a consequence. For, it signifies that which first falls into the intellect in the mode of actuality absolutely, for, ‘*est*’ simply said signifies being in act, and thus it signifies in the mode of a verb.

We have mentioned before that the distinction between nouns and verbs does not correspond for Aquinas to a distinction in *res significata*, but rather to a distinction in *modus significandi*. It is true that all verbs signify action (or act), but it is not true that only verbs signify action. The same action may be signified by either a noun or a verb. Thus, when Aquinas speaks of a *modus verbi*, he is referring to the mode of signification that properly characterizes a verb. What the mode of signification of a verb entails we already know from our discussion on the equivocation of terms that have the form of verbs of the infinitive mode. The terms ‘*esse*’ and ‘*currere*’, for example, may be taken as signifying both in the abstract (in which case they function as nouns) and in the concrete (in which case they function as verbs). Now, Aquinas describes verbs as signifying action according to the following mode: “as proceeding from a substance and inhering in it as in a subject.”⁹² In other words, verbs signify their *res*, an action, *ut*

⁹¹ *In I Perher.*, lect. 5, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 31, lines 391-97.

⁹² See *In I Perher.*, lect. 5, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 26, lines 55-66: “[P]otest autem actio significari tripliciter: uno modo, per se in abstracto, uelut quedam res, et sic significatur per nomen, ut ‘actio’, ‘passio’, ‘ambulatio’, ‘cursus’, et similia; alio modo per modum actionis, ut scilicet est egrediens a substantia et inherens ei ut subiecto, et sic significatur per uerba aliorum modorum, que attribuuntur personis.” Also, *In I Sent.*, d. 32, q. 1, a. 1, ad 3, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 745: “[V]erbum significat actum ut egredientem ab agente.”

inherentem. Therefore, verbs consignify composition, or signify composition *ex consequenti*, insofar as they signify without precision and as proceeding from a substance. Indeed, actions are not found in the world as existing *per se*, but as existing in their subjects. The term ‘*est*’, then, insofar as it signifies in the mode of a verb, signifies composition *ex consequenti*. This is why it appears to signify a composition principally.

Since verbs signify without precision, they signify in the concrete mode, but not in the same manner a term such as ‘*homo*’ signifies, that is, ‘as a subject (with attributes)’, in the mode of a noun. Rather, a verb signifies action ‘as in a subject’, that is, in much the same manner as a term such as ‘*album*’ signifies, in the mode of an adjective. A verb principally (*principaliter*) signifies action, but given that it signifies action ‘as in a subject’, the notion of some subject is included in its signification as a consequence (*ex consequenti*). Therefore, the sort of conception signified by verbs includes both composition and the notion of some subject. More to the point, the conception signified by verbs is the conception of an act ‘as inhering as in a subject’. That is why the term ‘*est*’, insofar as it signifies *esse* or *actus essendi* in the mode of a verb, appears to signify that something is. Thus, the reason Aquinas holds that the ‘*esse*’ the verb ‘*est*’ signifies appears to be some composition, specifically the composition to which truth or falsity applies, is that the conception of *esse* signified by the verb ‘*est*’ is the conception of *esse* as inhering as in a subject.

However, although inherence as in a subject is contained in the conception signified by verbs, a verb does not signify *that* a certain action inheres in a subject, nor does ‘inhering in a subject’ belong to the *res significata* of the verb. Rather, a verb signifies *action* as inhering as in a subject in its mode of signifying. Accordingly,

although the verb ‘*est*’ signifies *esse* as inhering as in a subject, it does not signify that some subject is. I mentioned before that the linguistic expression ‘*est*’, when taken as a proposition, signifies a complex conception. That is, when ‘*est*’ is taken to stand for the proposition ‘*aliquid est*’, ‘*est*’ signifies that something is. However, when taken as a verb, i.e., as a term, not as a composition, ‘*est*’ signifies a simple conception, the simple conception of *esse* in the mode of a verb. Indeed, Aquinas, following Aristotle, observes that since a verb has signification (*est vox significatiua*), it produces in the mind of the one who listens (*generet aliquem intellectum in animo audientis*) an understanding which is equivalent to the understanding produced by the utterance of a noun and not to the sort of understanding produced by the utterance of a proposition. He writes:

Sed dicendum est quod duplex est operatio intellectus, ut supra habitum est; ille qui dicit nomen uel uerbum secundum se, constituit intellectum quantum ad primam operationem, que est conceptio alicuius . . . non autem constituit intellectum quantum ad secundam operationem, que est intellectus componentis et diuidentis.⁹³

It should be said that the operation of the intellect is twofold, as was said above; and he who speaks a noun or a verb by itself brings about an understanding with respect to the first operation, which is the conception of something . . . but [the verb or the noun said by itself] does not bring about an understanding with respect to the second operation, which belongs to the intellect composing and dividing.

The intellect’s *conceptio* signified by a verb is as simple in nature as the conception signified by a noun: thus, the verb said by itself brings about an understanding in the first, incomplex operation of the intellect. And so, although the *conceptio* of *esse* signified by the term ‘*est*’ implies inherence as in a subject, it is not itself a *conceptio complexa*, for it lacks the extremes of the composition. The *conceptio* of *esse* signified by the verb ‘*est*’ might appear at first glance to be some composition, but on close examination it emerges

⁹³ *In I Perihier.*, lect. 5, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 30, lines 277-86. See, also, *In I Perihier.*, lect. 6, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 32, lines 20-23: “[S]ignificatio orationis differt a significatione nominis uel uerbi, quia nomen uel uerbum significat simplicem intellectum, oratio autem significat intellectum compositum.”

that, although inherence belongs to its mode, so that a subject is implied, there is in fact no application of *esse* to some subject and thus no composition to which truth or falsity applies. Therefore, the verb '*est*' insofar as it is a term as opposed to a proposition does not signify the complex conception 'something is'.

Furthermore, so as to explain that the verb '*est*' does not signify composition principally (*principaliter*) but rather as a consequence (*ex consequenti*), Aquinas writes:

<p>[S]ignificat enim id quod primo cadit in intellectu per modum actualitatis absolute; nam '<i>est</i>' simpliciter dictum significat esse actu.⁹⁴</p>	<p>For ['<i>est</i>'] signifies that which first falls into the intellect in the mode of actuality absolutely, for '<i>est</i>' simply said signifies being in act.</p>
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Given that 'to be', simply speaking, is 'to be in act', the verb '*est*' signifies not just '*esse*' or 'to be' but '*esse actu*' or 'to be in act'. Thus, simply speaking, the verb '*est*' signifies '*esse actu*' or, as Aquinas writes, "that which first fall into the mind in the mode of actuality." Now, Aquinas further remarks that the verb '*est*' signifies '*esse actu*' absolutely (*absolute*). In other words, the verb '*est*' signifies '*esse actu*' principally (*principaliter*). Given its concrete mode of signification, the conception signified by a verb implies composition, but composition is not what a verb principally signifies. A verb principally signifies action, and to the extent that it signifies action as inhering as in a subject, it consignifies, or signifies only as a consequence, both the subject of that action and the inherence of that action. Accordingly, the verb '*est*' principally signifies '*esse*' and '*esse*' alone. That is to say, the term '*est*' signifies '*esse*' (in the mode of a verb) absolutely or *per se*, according to its proper notion, and not according as it is realized in this or that individual. In sum, the verb '*est*' does not signify 'something is in act'.

⁹⁴ *In I Perher.*, lect. 5, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 31, lines 394-96.

Aquinas has one more thing to say regarding the signification of the verb ‘*est*’.

The fact that the verb ‘*est*’ principally signifies ‘*esse actu*’ or ‘*actualitas*’ explains why the verb ‘*est*’ is used as an intermediary between subject and predicate within a proposition. Aquinas writes:

Quia uero actualitas, quam principaliter significat hoc uerbum ‘*est*’, est communiter actualitas omnis forme uel actus, substancialis uel accidentalis, inde est quod, cum uolumus significare quamcunque formam uel actum actualiter inesse alicui subiecto, significamus illud per hoc uerbum ‘*est*’ . . . ; et ideo ex consequenti hoc uerbum ‘*est*’ significat compositionem.⁹⁵

Since the actuality that is principally signified by the verb ‘*est*’ is, in common, the actuality of every form or act, whether substantial or accidental, it follows that when we wish to signify that some form or act is actually in some subject, we signify this by means of the verb ‘*est*’. . . . And, for this reason this verb ‘*est*’ signifies composition *ex consequenti*.

We have seen that ‘*est*’ can take on two different roles in a proposition, resulting in two different kinds of propositions. When we want to signify that some subject actually is in reality, ‘*est*’ is predicated *per se* as the principal predicate. That is the case of the proposition ‘*aliquid est*’ which signifies that something is. When we want to signify that some form is actually in some subject, as in ‘*Sortes est homo*’, ‘*est*’ is not predicated *per se* but as adjacent to the principal predicate.⁹⁶ The reason ‘*est*’ is used as adjacent to the principal predicate is twofold. On the one hand, as Aquinas maintains, the actuality signified by the verb ‘*est*’ is the actuality of all forms.⁹⁷ On the other hand, from a purely semantic perspective, there is the fact that the verb ‘*est*’ does not signify some determinate subject, for it signifies *esse* principally (*principaliter*) and the subject of *esse* only as a consequence (*ex consequenti*).

⁹⁵ *In I Perher.*, lect. 5, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 31, lines 397-403.

⁹⁶ See *In II Periher.*, lect. 2, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 88, lines 35-48.

⁹⁷ See, also, *ST I*, q. 3, a. 4, Leonine ed., vol. 4, p. 42: “[Q]uia esse est actualitas omnis formae vel naturae: non enim bonitas vel humanitas significatur in actu, nisi prout significamus eam *esse*.”

We have previously compared the mode of signification of a verb to the mode of signification of an adjective, to the extent that they both signify their *res* ‘as in a subject’.

Regarding the signification of ‘*album*’, Aquinas writes:

[I]n hoc nomine album intelligitur albedo, et subiectum albedinis; sed albedo determinate, subiectum autem albedinis indeterminate. Nam cum dicimus album, intelligimus aliquid albedine informatum; non autem determinatur quid sit illud, sicut determinatur forma.⁹⁸

In this name ‘white’ both whiteness and the subject of whiteness is understood; but, whiteness determinately, the subject of whiteness indeterminately. For when we say ‘white’, we understand something informed by whiteness; but what that is is not determined, just as the form *is* determined.

Similarly, then, the verb ‘*est*’ signifies both *esse* and the subject of *esse*, but the subject of *esse* only indeterminately. Thus, since the verb ‘*est*’ signifies *esse* ‘as in a subject’ leaving the subject undetermined, and *esse* is in fact the act of every form or nature, when we wish to signify that this or that form is actually in this or that subject, the verb ‘*est*’ is used as adjacent to the principal predicate of the proposition in question. Generally speaking, a proposition signifies the composition of *esse* and some subject. The term ‘*est*’, in contrast, principally signifies only ‘*esse*’.

Conclusion

In this chapter we reviewed Aquinas’ semantic analysis of the terms that have *esse* as their *res significata*, namely, the nouns ‘*ens*’ and ‘*esse*’ as well as the verb ‘*est*’. We concentrated on the modes of signification that Aquinas assigns to these terms, given that, for Aquinas, the modes of signification of terms follow from our intellect’s modes of understanding. Thus, by examining the modes of signification of the terms ‘*ens*’, ‘*esse*’, and ‘*est*’, we were able to determine the manner in which the intellect conceives *esse*. We

⁹⁸ *De unione verbi*, a. 3, ad 5, Marietti ed., p. 431.

found that, for Aquinas, these terms signify, not a ‘judgment’ of *esse*, but a ‘concept’ of *esse*; that is to say, they signify a ‘simple conception’ of their *res*, which is *esse*.

If any term appears to signify a judgment, it would be ‘*ens*’, since it signifies ‘*quod est*’ (‘what is’). But the term ‘*ens*’ does not signify the composition signified when one says ‘*aliquid est*’ (‘something is’), i.e., the kind of composition to which truth or falsity applies. Rather, the term ‘*ens*’, insofar as it signifies *esse* in the concrete mode, “consignifies” composition; for, it signifies ‘a thing having *esse*’, that is to say, it signifies ‘the subject of *esse*’, and so the compositeness of subject plus being (and hence the term must, in this respect, be denied of God). Furthermore, as we have seen, the kind of composition ‘*ens*’ consignifies is not the kind of composition the judgment ‘something is’ signifies, wherein a comparison is made between a thing and *esse*. The nature of propositions as involving such a comparison we shall explore further in Chapter IV.

In short, the term ‘*ens*’ signifies ‘*quod est*’, but unlike what is the case in the judgment ‘*aliquid est*’ (‘something is’), the ‘*est*’ in ‘*quod est*’ is not a predicate. By contrast, the abstract term ‘*esse*’ appears *least* to signify a judgment or ‘complex conception’. For, it signifies its *res* as ‘that by which’ and as simple; thus, it excludes in its signification all sorts of composition, from which it prescind.

The case of the verb ‘*est*’ is parallel to that of ‘*ens*’. Taken in itself, that is, as a verb and not as short-hand for the proposition ‘*aliquid est*’ (‘something is’), ‘*est*’ consignifies composition, for verbs signify their action as inherent in a subject. However, since no actual inherence is asserted, the conception signified has no truth value. Thus, like the noun ‘*ens*’, the verb ‘*est*’ consignifies composition insofar as it includes in its mode of signification the subject of *esse*. Nevertheless, neither the noun ‘*ens*’ nor the

verb ‘*est*’ signify *that* some subject is or exists, that is to say, the fact that *esse* actually inheres in some subject. Hence, neither term signifies a judgment.

Based on Aquinas’ analysis of the mode of signification of the terms ‘*ens*’, ‘*esse*’, and ‘*est*’, all of which have *esse* as their *res significata*, we conclude that, for Aquinas, a simple conception of *esse* is possible. As discussed in chapter I, Aquinas’ recognition of a simple conception of *esse*, as signified by the terms ‘*ens*’, ‘*esse*’, and ‘*est*’, represents a problem for the traditional interpretation of the commentaries on the *Sentences* and on the *De trinitate*, namely, that Aquinas, by correlating the second operation of the intellect and a thing’s *esse*, apparently denies the possibility of a simple conception of *esse*. As we saw in Chapter I, Gilson’s answer to the difficulty is that Aquinas’ analysis of the terms ‘*ens*’ and ‘*est*’ as signifying a simple conception of *esse* belongs to the logic, not of Aquinas, but of Aristotle. However, as we have shown in this chapter, Aquinas’ semantic analysis of the terms ‘*ens*’ and ‘*est*’ as signifying a simple conception of their *res* is consistent with the general semantic theory to which Aquinas himself personally subscribes, a theory we reviewed in Chapter II.

We saw in that chapter that, for Aquinas, a term immediately signifies a ‘concept’ or ‘conception’ in the mind, but it ultimately signifies the *res* that is the object of the mental conception. Thus, the *res significata* (usually an extra mental reality) is signified through the mediation of the intellect’s conception the term immediately signifies. Most of our terms signify a form or nature, such as humanity; but, the *res significata* of a term need not be an extra-mental form; it need not be something existing in reality. For Aquinas, anything we are able to conceive, we are able to name.⁹⁹ Regarding the

⁹⁹ See *ST I*, q. 13, a. 1, Leonine ed., vol. 4, p. 139: “[A]liquid a nobis intellectu cognosci potest, sic a nobis potest nominari.” A mental concept may or may not have a foundation in reality, but

conception signified by terms, we saw that at different places throughout his works Aquinas characterizes the conception signified by terms, nouns and verbs alike as simple or non-composite (*conceptio incomplexa*); in contrast, the conception signified by propositions is characterized by Aquinas as complex or composite (*conceptio complexa*). We also saw that on more than one occasion Aquinas specifically links the kind of conception that nouns and verbs signify with the first operation of the intellect, and the kind of conception that propositions signify with the second operation of the intellect.¹⁰⁰ According to the two operations of the intellect, two different kinds of conceptions are produced; each kind is signified by linguistic expressions of diverse nature. The complexity of the conception signified by propositions is associated by Aquinas with predication, and hence with its being the subject of truth value. Aquinas refers to the conception signified by terms as simple or non-composite because its content lacks the composition of a proposition. Thus, the conception signified by terms, insofar as it contains no predication, has no truth value *per se*. This is not to say that a simple conception lacks any sort of composition. As we saw in this chapter, terms signifying in the concrete mode consignify composition, for they signify a conception wherein the *res* is conceived ‘without precision’. The kind of conception concrete terms signify includes some composition, but not the the kind of composition to which truth or falsity applies. Such is the case, as we have seen in this chapter, of the concrete terms ‘*ens*’ and ‘*est*’, which, even as they consignify composition, do not signify the kind of composition to which truth or falsity applies.

in either case there surely is some identifiable *res intellecta*, i.e. the object of the mental concept the term signifies and which is the *res significata* of the term.

¹⁰⁰ For reference, see the discussion on Chapter II, section 2.2.1.

Aquinas' analysis of the signification of the terms '*ens*', '*esse*', and '*est*', as discussed above, shows that he regards these terms as having the same semantic structure as any other concrete or abstract term. Were this not the case, Aquinas would not have been able, as he does, to parallel the signification of the terms '*ens*', '*esse*', and '*est*' with the signification of terms such as the nouns '*albus*' and '*albedo*', and the verb and verbal noun '*currit*' and '*currens*'. The terms '*ens*', '*esse*', and '*est*' signify a simple or non-composite conception of their *res*, the sort of conception produced by the first operation of the intellect. Aquinas identifies these terms as having *esse* (as contrasted with essence) as their *res significata*. And, since, as we have said, corresponding to the simple, non-composite content signified by these terms is a simple, non-composite conception, produced by a simple act of the mind, we conclude that, for Aquinas, the intellect is able to conceive *esse* as act in a simple conception through its first operation.

In the next and final chapter, I return to the problem of the human intellect's apprehension of *esse* in Aquinas. My answer to the difficulty consists on a reinterpretation of Aquinas' remarks in the commentaries on the *Sentences* and on the *De trinitate* on the human intellect's apprehension of a thing's *esse*. According to my interpretation of the texts, in setting up the correlation, Aquinas does not rule out the possibility of a simple conception of *esse*.

CHAPTER IV

REREADING *IN I SENT.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3: EXPLAINING DIVINE KNOWLEDGE WITH A DISTINCTIVE PROPOSITION THEORY

In this final chapter, I return to the problem, laid out in Chapter I, of the apparent inconsistency between, on the one hand, the semantic theory of the commentary on the *Peri hermeneias*, where Aquinas recognizes a simple conception of *esse*, and, on the other hand, Aquinas' association of the second operation of the intellect with a thing's *esse* in the commentaries on the *Sentences* and on Boethius' *De trinitate*. This association appears to exclude the possibility of a simple conception of *esse*.

This chapter addresses the inconsistency created by the early texts on the judgment of *esse* by offering a reinterpretation of the key text, *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, in light of the theory of propositions and their objects that serves as its background (*enuntiabile* theory). In the process, I show that Aquinas' association of the intellect's second operation with a thing's *esse* is a consequence of his distinctive view on the objects of propositions. Aquinas' affirmations on the second operation of the intellect cannot be understood independently of the medieval problem of divine knowledge of *enuntiabilia*: can God with his simple understanding know propositions and their objects, which are complex, and if so, how? After presenting the theoretical background of Aquinas' discussion, I show that Aquinas's remarks on the second operation of the intellect and 'the *esse* of a thing' or '*esse rei*' are not directed at the intellect's apprehension of *esse* as a simple, but rather at the intellect's apprehension of the composite unit that is 'the *esse* of a subject', which composite *enuntiabilia* signify. Thus,

contrary to the standard reading of the passage, Aquinas' correlation between the second operation of the intellect and 'the *esse* of a thing' or '*esse rei*' does not rule out the possibility of a simple conception of *esse*. The same association of the second operation of the intellect with the apprehension of a complex '*esse rei*' can be found in Aquinas' other early texts, and he refers to the same solution to the problem of God's knowledge of *enuntiabilia* in the mature *Summa theologiae*.

Before I introduce my solution to the difficulty (in 4.2), though, in the first part of the chapter, after restating the problem of the human intellect's apprehension of *esse* in Aquinas in light of our findings in Chapters II and III on Aquinas' semantic theory and the signification of the terms that signify *esse* (4.1.1), I examine two attempts to dissolve the apparent inconsistency between texts. First (4.1.2), I consider Régis' interpretation of the texts from the *Sentences* and *De trinitate* commentaries as directed at the intellect's apprehension, not of *esse* as act (which the intellect conceives in 'simple apprehension'), but of *esse* as a mode of existing (which the intellect conceives in 'judgment'). Such an interpretation, however, cannot be made consistent with the texts, and it fails properly to account for existential judgments. Second (4.1.3), I take up the possibility of a developmental solution: does the late date of the commentary on the *Peri hermeneias* allow for the possibility that Aquinas changed his mind on the subject of the intellect's apprehension of *esse*, and so eventually admitting the possibility of a simple conception of *esse*? In response, the fourth section (4.1.4) shows that Aquinas recognizes a simple conception of *esse* in the early works precisely while he maintains the view that the *esse* of a thing is apprehended only through the second operation (as especially in *In I Sent.*, d.

38, q. 1, a. 3). So, although objections need to be considered (4.1.5), a solution other than the developmental one will be required to explain this fact (4.1.6).

4.1 Eliminating Two Solutions

4.1.1 Restating the Problem: Two Conflicting Sets of Texts on the Intellect's Apprehension of *Esse*

In the preceding chapters we have seen that as part of his semantic theory Aquinas recognizes a simple or non-composite conception of *esse*. Chapter II shows that Aquinas subscribes to the standard semantic theory of the mid-thirteenth century Latin west, terminist logic, according to which the signification of terms, nouns and verbs alike, is constituted primarily by their “signing relation” with a simple or non-composite (*incomplexa*) conception of some *res*. We saw that at different places throughout his works Aquinas characterizes the conception signified by terms as simple (*incomplexa*), and on more than one occasion he specifically links the kind of conception that nouns and verbs signify to the first operation of the intellect.¹ Under this semantic framework, the noun ‘*ens*’ and the verb ‘*est*’, which have *esse* as their *res significata*, must signify a simple conception of *esse*. Indeed, Chapter III shows that in his commentary on Aristotle’s *Peri hermeneias* (c. 1270-71), Aquinas argues that, despite appearances to the contrary, the conception the terms ‘*ens*’ and ‘*est*’ signify is not the sort of conception produced by the second operation of the intellect, a complex conception, but rather the sort of conception that belongs to the first operation, a simple conception.

¹ See *In III Sent.*, d. 23 q. 2 a. 2 qc. 1; *De pot.*, q. 9, a. 5; *De ver.* q. 4, a. 2 and q. 14, a. 1; *SCG I*, c. 59; *Quodl.* V, q. 5 a. 2; *In VI Meta.*, lect. 4, n. 1223-1224; *In I Periher.*, lect. 5, lines 277-86 and lect. 6, lines 20-23, 35-39. See also the discussion on Chapter II, section 2.2.1.

A review of Aquinas' theory of signification and his account of the signification of the terms 'ens' and 'esse' reveals that, for Aquinas, the human intellect is able to form a simple conception of *esse*. We are faced, however, with the following difficulty. While in his commentary on Aristotle's *Peri hermeneias* Aquinas recognizes a simple conception of *esse*, elsewhere he appears to deny the very possibility of such a conception. In his early *Scriptum on the Sentences* (c. 1251-52) Aquinas makes the following remarks regarding the intellect's apprehension of a thing's essence and *esse*:

Cum in re duo sint, quidditas rei, et esse ejus, his duobus respondet duplex operatio intellectus. Una quae dicitur a philosophis formatio, qua apprehendit quidditates rerum, quae etiam a Philosopho, in III *De anima*, dicitur indivisibilium intelligentia. Alia autem comprehendit esse rei, componendo affirmationem, quia etiam esse rei ex materia et forma compositae, a qua cognitionem accipit, consistit in quadam compositione formae ad materiam, vel accidentis ad subjectum.²

Since there are two [components] in a thing, the quiddity of the thing and its *esse*, a twofold operation of the intellect corresponds to these two. One is called "formation" by philosophers, by which the intellect apprehends the quiddities of things, which is also called by the Philosopher, in *De anima III*, the "understanding of indivisibles." But the other comprehends the *esse* of a thing by composing an affirmation, because also the *esse* of a thing composed of matter and form, from which the intellect receives cognition, consists in a certain composition of form with matter or of accident with subject.

Later in the same article, in the response to the second objection, contrasting the divine and the human intellect's apprehension of a thing's *esse*, Aquinas writes:

Sed intellectus noster, cujus cognitio a rebus oritur, quae esse compositum habent, non apprehendit illud esse nisi componendo et dividendo.³

But our intellect, whose cognition arises from things that have composite *esse*, apprehends this *esse* only by composing and dividing.

According to the mainstream interpretation of these passages, in setting up a correlation between the two operations of the intellect and the two principles in a thing, essence and

² *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 903.

³ *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, ad 2, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 904.

esse, Aquinas establishes a radical separation in the way the human intellect apprehends each principle. Only of an essence is the human intellect able to form a simple conception, for only essence is the object of the first operation of the intellect. *Esse*, on the other hand, may be apprehended by the human intellect only through its second operation, that is, in a complex conception. In other words, a simple conception of *esse* is not possible.

If the mainstream reading of Aquinas' correlation in the commentary on the *Sentences* between the two operations of the intellect and a thing's essence and *esse* is accurate, then we are faced with two conflicting sets of texts on the subject of the human intellect's apprehension of *esse*. On the one hand, we have Aquinas' discussion of the signification of the term '*ens*' and '*est*' in his commentary on Aristotle's *Peri hermeneias*, where Aquinas, following on the semantic theory to which he subscribes, recognizes a simple conception of *esse* as signified by these terms. On the other hand, we have Aquinas' early remarks on the human cognition of *esse* as contrasted with essence in his commentary on the *Sentences*, which remarks suggest the impossibility of a simple conception of *esse*.

Should Aquinas' early remarks on the human cognition of *esse* in the commentary on the *Sentences* be dismissed as inconsistent with his finished semantics of the *Peri hermeneias*?

Before addressing the issue myself, in the following pages, I examine two alternative ways to dissolve the apparent inconsistency between texts. The first one, exposed by Louis-Marie Régis, interprets the expression "*esse rei*" in the commentaries on the *Sentences* and *De trinitate* to refer, not to a thing's *act of existing*, but to a thing's

mode of existing.⁴ The second resolution argues that in between the writing of the commentaries on the *Sentences* and on the *Peri hermeneias*, Aquinas changed his mind on the subject of the intellect's apprehension of *esse*, eventually allowing for the possibility of a simple conception of *esse*. In short, do the texts on *esse* as grasped only in judgment report an eccentric, early view? We shall see that neither alternative offers a suitable solution to the difficulty.

4.1.2 Solution I: Judgment Regards *Esse*, not as *Act of Existing*, but as *Mode of Existing*

According to Régis, the texts on the judgment of *esse* in the *Sentences* and *De trinitate* commentaries speak of “*esse rei*” or “the *esse* of a thing” as the ultimate object of judgment, not in the sense of a thing's *act of existing*, but in the sense of a thing's *mode of existing*. Régis begins by arguing that the first object of judgment is not the existence of things, but rather “the composition or synthesis of concepts with which simple apprehension has already enriched the intellect.”⁵ Régis denies that *esse as act* plays for judgment the role *quiddity* plays for simple apprehension. *Esse* is the first object of judgment only when taken to signify the composition of the intellect, that is to say, the synthesis of simple concepts in an enunciation or proposition. This is not to say, Régis cautions, that judgment has no contact with extra-mental reality. The first function of judgment, he explains, is “to reassemble concepts so that they may more faithfully reproduce the thing's extra-mental mode of existing.”⁶ It is true that judgment regards the *esse* of things, but it does not regard the *act of existing* of things, which is grasped instead

⁴ Louis-Marie Régis, *Epistemology*, trans. Imelda Byrne (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 322-31.

⁵ Régis, *Epistemology*, 323.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 328.

through simple apprehension. “Judgment,” Régis writes, “is modeled after the *mode of existing* of things, and not after that act of existing perceived as the perfection of quiddity.”⁷

In support of his interpretation of “*esse rei*” as apprehended in judgment, Régis highlights the one remark by Aquinas at *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, where the *esse* of a thing is described as consisting in a certain *composition of form with matter or of accident with subject*:

Alia autem [operatio] comprehendit esse rei, componendo affirmationem, quia etiam esse rei ex materia et forma compositae, a qua cognitionem accipit, consistit in quadam compositione formae ad materiam, vel accidentis ad subjectum.⁸

But the other [operation] comprehends the *esse* of a thing by composing an affirmation, because also the *esse* of a thing composed of matter and form, from which the intellect receives cognition, consists in a certain composition of form with matter or of accident with subject.

How can Aquinas say that *esse* consists in a certain composition of form with matter or of accident with subject, if *esse* here is taken to stand for the *act of existence*? It must rather be the case, Régis concludes, that “the *esse* in question is the whole being of the thing, its essence and its existence, and not only the substantial but also the accidental mode of existence.”⁹ Régis’ interpretation of “*esse rei*” finds further support in a parallel text from the commentary on *De trinitate*, where a thing’s *esse*, which the intellect apprehends in judgment, is said to result from the congregation of the principles of the thing:

Secunda uero operatio respicit ipsum esse rei; quod quidem resultat ex congregatione principiorum rei in compositis, uel ipsam simplicem naturam rei concomitatur, ut in substantiis simplicibus.¹⁰

The second operation regards the *esse* itself of a thing, which results from the congregation of the principles of a thing in composite substances, or accompanies the simple nature of a thing, as in simple substances.

⁷ Régis, *Epistemology*, 331.

⁸ *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 903.

⁹ Régis, *Epistemology*, 330.

¹⁰ *De trin.*, q. 5, a. 3, Leonine ed., vol. 50, p. 147, lines 101-105.

In following paragraphs, I raise three difficulties with Régis' solution. Notice first that the final part of this passage (“ . . . uel ipsam simplicem naturam rei concomitatur, ut in substantiis simplicibus”) is translated by Régis as: “. . . or *coincides* with the simplicity of nature in spiritual substances.”¹¹ Régis' rendering of ‘*concomitatur*’ as “coincides” is misleading, though. A more adequate translation of ‘*concomitatur*’ is “accompanies”, for it better conveys the literal sense of the Latin verb. The rendering of ‘*concomitatur*’ for “accompanies” makes it evident that ‘*esse*’ here is taken to stand for something other than the simple nature, and hence, as the act of existence.¹² Furthermore, Régis' appeal to Aquinas' characterization of a thing's *esse*, in the texts from the commentaries on the *Sentences* and *De trinitate*, as consisting in or resulting from the principles of the things, is easily answered by appealing to other texts where Aquinas has *esse* in the sense of *actus essendi* as resulting from the principles of a thing.¹³

The text from *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3 also offers some difficulties for Régis' interpretation of “*esse rei*” as standing exclusively for a thing's *mode of existing*. There, Aquinas introduces the claim of a correlation between the two operations of the intellect and a thing's essence and *esse*, by remarking on the real composition (and thus distinction) between the essence or quiddity of a thing and its *esse*:

Cum in re duo sint, quidditas rei, et esse ejus, his duobus respondet duplex operatio intellectus.¹⁴

Since there are two [components] in a thing, the quiddity of the thing and its *esse*, a twofold operation of the intellect corresponds to these two.

¹¹ Régis, *Epistemology*, 328; my italics.

¹² See, John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 29n23.

¹³ See *In III Sent.*, d. 6, q. 2, a. 2; *In IV Meta.*, lect. 2, n. 559.

¹⁴ *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 903.

Furthermore, immediately following the passage in question, Aquinas observes that one may also consider in God his nature and his *esse*. God's essence is cause and exemplar of all nature, just as his *esse* is cause and exemplar of the *esse* of each thing; thus, knowing his essence God knows every other thing, and knowing his *esse* God knows the *esse* of each thing. But, Aquinas further observes, since God's *esse* is not other than his *esse*, nor is the result a composite, God knows the *esse* of each thing simply, without diversity or composition.¹⁵ Thus, since Aquinas contrasts the nature and the *esse* of created things with that of God, he must have in mind a thing's *esse* in the sense of a thing's *act of existing*.¹⁶

A final problem for Régis' reading of the texts is that it fails to provide a sufficient account of existential judgments. According to Régis, the judgment 'Socrates is' expresses, not the *act of existing* of a thing, but a *substantial mode of existing*, for 'is' is a *substantial* predicate expressing the *ipsum esse* of Socrates.¹⁷ In support of his interpretation, Régis refers us to a passage from the commentary on the *Metaphysics*, where Aquinas says that 'is' in 'Socrates is' is a substantial predicate (*de praedicato substantiali*), if understood in its first sense, i.e., as signifying something existing in *rerum natura*.¹⁸ When commenting earlier on this passage, Régis has acknowledged that 'is', when taken in its first sense, "expresses the act of the substance it perfects and from

¹⁵ See, *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 903-904: ". Similiter etiam in ipso Deo est considerare naturam ipsius, et esse ejus; et sicut natura sua est causa et exemplar omnis naturae, ita etiam esse suum est causa et exemplar omnis esse. Unde sicut cognoscendo essentiam suam, cognoscit omnem rem; ita cognoscendo esse suum, cognoscit esse cujuslibet rei; et sic cognoscit omnia enuntiabilia, quibus esse significatur; non tamen diversa operatione nec compositione, sed simpliciter; quia esse suum non est aliud ab essentia, nec est compositum consequens."

¹⁶ See, Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 29-30.

¹⁷ Régis, *Epistemology*, 331: ". . . in the judgment 'Socrates is,' the *is* is a *substantial* predicate; i.e., it expresses the *ipsum esse* of Socrates and therefore a *substantial mode of existing*."

¹⁸ See *In V Meta.*, lect. 9, n. 896.

which it is distinguished.”¹⁹ But, he denies that the act of judgment regards a thing’s *esse* in this sense. Rather, judgment regards a thing’s *esse* taken in its second sense, that is, as signifying the composition of a proposition; such composition, Régis later adds, even in the case of the existential proposition ‘Socrates is’, expresses, not the *act of existing* of a thing, but its *mode of existing*. However, as Aquinas notes in the passage from the commentary on the *Metaphysics* referred to by Régis, when taken as a substantial predicate, the verb ‘is’ in the proposition ‘Socrates is’, is predicated of Socrates according to the first sense of *esse*. As a result, as Aquinas observes elsewhere, ‘Socrates is’ signifies that Socrates exists *in rerum natura*:

[H]oc uerbum ‘est’ quandoque in enunciatione predicatur secundum se, ut cum dicitur: «Sortes est», per quod nichil aliud intendimus significare quam quod Sortes sit in rerum natura.²⁰

The verb ‘is’ in a proposition is sometimes predicated in itself, as when one says ‘Socrates is’, by which we intend to signify nothing else than that Socrates exists in the nature of things.

Thus, in the judgment ‘Socrates is’ (whenever the verb ‘is’ is taken to signify *esse* as act, i.e., as the *actus essendi* by which something is or exists *in rerum natura*), the intellect asserts the *act of existing* of Socrates.

In sum, Régis’ position fails to be compelling for two reasons: (i) it offers no convincing alternative account of the early texts on judgment of *esse*; and (ii) the account of these texts it offered focuses on a proposition as predicating form of a subject, ignoring non-quidditative *esse* as act or reducing it to *esse* in the sense of the truth of a proposition, or ‘propositional *esse*’.

In the next section, I examine an alternative approach to the apparent inconsistency between, on the one hand, Aquinas’ correlation of the second operation of

¹⁹ Régis, *Epistemology*, 324.

²⁰ *In II Periher.*, lect. 2, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 88, lines 36-40.

the intellect with a thing's *esse* in the commentary on the *Sentences* and, on the other hand, the semantics of the commentary on the *Peri hermeneias*. This alternative approach seeks to preserve the traditional interpretation of *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, as ruling out a simple conception of *esse*, while at the same time acknowledging a simple conception of *esse* in the *Peri hermeneias*.

4.1.3 Solution II: Only in the Later Writings Does Aquinas Recognize a Simple Conception of *Esse*

It may be argued, as a way to solve the apparent inconsistency between texts, that Aquinas' commentary on Aristotle's *Peri hermeneias* is dated late enough (c. 1270-71) to allow for the possibility that at some point during the years after his writing of the commentary on the *Sentences*, Aquinas changed his mind on the subject of the human intellect's apprehension of *esse*. Such a scenario may find support in the fact that it is only in his early writings, namely, the commentaries on the *Sentences* and on Boethius' *De trinitate* (1257-59), that Aquinas correlates the two operations of the intellect with a thing's essence and *esse*.²¹ In later writings, the correlation has disappeared. Thus, Aquinas' remarks in his late commentary on Aristotle's *Peri hermeneias* regarding the signification of the terms '*ens*' and '*est*' as signifying a simple conception of *esse* would attest only to the fact that in later years Aquinas reassessed his initial position on the matter, eventually allowing for the possibility of a simple conception of *esse*. One might even conjecture, with considerable plausibility, that all Aquinas had in mind in the early

²¹ Other than *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, there is another passage in the *Sentences* commentary where the correlation is mentioned. See *In I Sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 1, ad 7, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 489: "[P]rima operatio respicit quidditatem rei; secunda respicit esse ipsius." In the commentary on Boethius' *De trinitate* the correlation is mentioned only once, see *De trin.*, q. 5, a. 3, Leonine ed., vol. 50, p. 147, lines 96-101: "Prima quidem operatio respicit ipsam natura rei . . . Secunda vero operatio respicit ipsum esse rei."

works, in fact, is “being in the sense of what is signified by the truth of propositions,” as Régis suggests; so, when Thomas comes to realize that he had confused this being with being as *actus essendi*, that is, had confused propositional with ontological being, he drops the correlation of judgment and *esse* as *actus essendi* in the mature works.

The main problem with the proposed solution to the difficulty is that Aquinas recognizes a simple conception of *esse* precisely while maintaining that the *esse* of a thing is apprehended only through the second operation of the intellect. Aquinas considers the semantic structure of terms that signify *esse* at different times in his commentary on the *Sentences* as well as in two other works dated around the same period as his commentary on Boethius’ *De trinitate*, namely, in his *De veritate* and in his commentary on Boethius’ *De hebdomadibus* (assuming it is an early work).²² As we are about to see, Aquinas’ analysis of the signification of the terms ‘*ens*’ and ‘*esse*’ in these early works remains in line with the tradition of terminist logic, giving no indication that, for Aquinas, the semantic structure of the terms ‘*ens*’ and ‘*esse*’ differs from that of any other term. Moreover, there is every indication that, for Aquinas, the terms ‘*ens*’ and ‘*esse*’ signify a simple conception of their *res*. In both the commentary on the *Sentences*

²² Aquinas’ *Quaestiones disputatae De veritate* is dated from 1256 to 1259. See Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas: The Person and His Work*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 334. There is disagreement on the dating of Aquinas’ commentary on Boethius’ *De hebdomadibus*. James Weisheipl dates it around the same time as the commentary on the *De trinitate* (i.e. between 1256 and 1259). See, James Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d’ Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Work* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1983), 382. Torrell does not provide a specific date for the commentary on Boethius’ *De hebdomadibus*, but he thinks it was composed at a later date than Weisheipl suggests (Aquinas, 345). On the subject, see also Louis Bataillon and Carlo Grassi, preface to *Santi Thomae de Aquino, Expositio libri Boetii de hebdomadibus*, Leonine ed., vol. 50 (Rome, 1992), 264. I follow Weisheipl here and assume that Aquinas worked on the commentary on the *De hebdomadibus* around the same time he worked on the commentary on the *De trinitate*. However, a later date for Aquinas’ commentary on Boethius’ *De hebdomadibus* does not affect the conclusion of the present argumentation.

and the *De veritate*, Aquinas explicitly associates the conception signified by ‘*ens*’ with the first operation of the intellect and refers to such a conception as simple.

In the next section, then, I review Aquinas’ analysis of the signification of the terms ‘*ens*’ and ‘*esse*’ in the commentary on the *Sentences*, the *De veritate*, and in the commentary *De hebdomadibus*. As we shall see, Aquinas recognizes a simple conception of *esse* precisely while (presumably) maintaining the view that *esse* is apprehended only through the intellect’s second operation.

4.1.4 The Simple Conception of *Esse* in the Early Writings

A. Aquinas’ Early Account of the Semantic Structure of ‘*Ens*’ and ‘*Esse*’

In the *Sentences* commentary and in *De veritate* Aquinas associates the term ‘*ens*’ with *esse* as opposed to essence.²³ In addition, as he contrasts the terms ‘*ens*’ and ‘*res*’ in the same texts, Aquinas points out at different occasions that each term is imposed from one of the two components in a thing: whereas ‘*res*’ is imposed from essence, ‘*ens*’ is imposed from *esse* or *actus essendi*. This tells us that, for Aquinas, the *res significata* of ‘*ens*’ is *esse*, not essence.²⁴ In the commentary on the *Sentences*, for instance, Aquinas writes:

²³ See, e.g., *In I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 4, a. 2, ad 2, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 223: “Ens autem non dicit quidditatem, sed solum actum essendi,” *De ver.*, q. 1, a. 1 ad s.c. 3, Leonine ed., vol. 22, 1/2, p. 7, lines 282-85: “Ad tertium dicendum quod cum dicitur ‘diversum est esse et quod est’ distinguitur actus essendi ab eo cui ille actus convenit; nomen autem entis ab actu essendi sumitur, non ab eo cui convenit actus essendi.”

²⁴ The *res significata* of a term is that from which, as from a “form” in a thing, a term is imposed for the sake of signification. See e.g. *In III Sent.*, d. 6, q. 1, a. 3, Mandonnet ed., vol. 3, p. 232: “Et nomen, proprie loquendo, dicitur *significare* formam sive qualitatem, a qua imponitur nomen.” On this issue, see the discussion in Chapter II, section 2.2.1.

[H]oc nomen «ens» et «res» differunt secundum quod est duo considerare in re, scilicet quidditatem et rationem ejus, et esse ipsius; et a quidditate sumitur hoc nomen «res». . . . Sed nomen entis sumitur ab esse rei.²⁵

The terms ‘*ens*’ and ‘*res*’ differ according as two principles can be considered in a thing, namely its ratio or quiddity and its *esse*. And, the term ‘*res*’ is taken from quiddity. . . . But the term ‘*ens*’ is taken from the *esse* of the thing.

The parallel texts make explicit that Aquinas takes this Avicennian doctrine to involve *esse* in the sense of act or the *actus essendi*.

[C]um in omni quod est sit considerare quidditatem suam, per quam subsistit in natura determinata, et esse suum, per quod dicitur de eo quod est in actu, hoc nomen «res» imponitur rei a quidditate sua, secundum Avicennam, tract. II *Metaph.*, cap. I, hoc nomen «qui est» vel «ens» imponitur ab ipso actu essendi. Cum autem ita sit quod in qualibet re creata essentia sua differat a suo esse, res illa proprie denominatur a quidditate sua, et non ab actu essendi, sicut homo ab humanitate.²⁶

Since in everything that is it is possible to consider its quiddity, by which it subsists in a determinate nature, and its *esse*, by which it is said about it that it exists in act, this term ‘*res*’ is imposed upon a thing from its quiddity, according to Avicenna in *Metaph.*, 2.1, and this term ‘*qui est*’ or ‘*ens*’ is imposed [upon a thing] from its *actus essendi*. Thus, since in each created thing its essence differs from its *esse*, that is properly denominatd a ‘thing’ from its quiddity, and not from its *actus essendi*, just as a human [is denominatd] from humanity.

[E]ns sumitur ab actu essendi sed nomen rei exprimit quidditatem vel essentiam entis.²⁷

‘*Ens*’ is taken from the *actus essendi*, but the noun ‘*res*’ expresses the quiddity or essence of a being (*ens*).

If at this time Aquinas presumably holds the view that *esse* is apprehended only through the second operation of the intellect, one would expect some indication that, for Aquinas, given that ‘*ens*’ signifies *esse* and ‘*res*’ signifies essence, the term ‘*ens*’ signifies a complex conception whereas the term ‘*res*’ signifies a simple conception. Yet, in none of the occasions in which ‘*ens*’ is contrasted with ‘*res*’ in the commentary on the *Sentences*

²⁵ *In I Sent.*, d. 25, q. 1, a. 4, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 611-12.

²⁶ *In I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 1, a. 1, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 195. See also *In II Sent.*, d. 37 q. 1, a. 1.

²⁷ *De ver.*, q. 1, a. 1, Leonine ed., vol. 22, 1/2, p. 5, lines 137-39. For the same doctrine in later texts, see *In IV Meta.*, lect. 2, n. 553, Marietti ed., p. 155: “Sciendum est enim quod hoc nomen Homo, imponitur a quidditate, sive a natura hominis; et hoc nomen Res imponitur a quidditate tantum; hoc vero nomen Ens, imponitur ab actu essendi;” also *SCG*, I, c. 25, Leonine ed., vol. 13, p. 77, lines 13-14: “[N]omen autem rei a quidditate imponitur, sicut nomen entis ab esse.”

and *De veritate* does Aquinas provide any indication that he considers the terms ‘*ens*’ and ‘*res*’ to differ in anything other than their *res significata*.

In his commentary on Boethius’ *De hebdomadibus*, Aquinas addresses the mode of signification of the terms ‘*esse*’ and ‘*ens*’. In a passage we have encountered before, Aquinas identifies the terms ‘*esse*’ and ‘*ens*’ as signifying in the abstract and concrete mode respectively, paralleling the modes of signification of the pair ‘*esse*’ and ‘*ens*’ to that of the pair ‘*albedo*’ and ‘*albus*’ as well as the pair ‘*currere*’ and ‘*currens*’:

Aliud autem significamus per hoc quod dicimus esse et aliud per id quod dicimus id quod est, sicut et aliud significamus cum dicimus currere et aliud per hoc quod dicitur currens. Nam currere et esse significantur in abstracto sicut et albedo; sed quod est, id est ens et currens, significantur sicut in concreto, uelut album.²⁸

We signify one thing by saying ‘*esse*’ and another by saying ‘*id quod est*’, just as also we signify one thing when we say ‘*currere*’ and another when ‘*currens*’ is said. For, ‘*currere*’ and ‘*esse*’ are signified in the abstract, as is ‘whiteness’; but ‘*quod est*’, namely ‘*ens*’, and ‘*currens*’ are signified in the concrete, as is ‘white’.

There is nothing in Aquinas’ subsequent analysis of the modes of signification of the pair ‘*esse*’ and ‘*ens*’ and the pair ‘*currere*’ and ‘*currens*’ that would indicate that they differ from one another in any other way than with respect to their *res significata*. Nothing would indicate, in other words, that, unlike ‘*currere*’ and ‘*currens*’, the terms ‘*ens*’ and ‘*esse*’ signify a complex conception. Aquinas writes:

[I]psum esse non significatur sicut ipsum subiectum essendi, sicut nec currere significatur sicut subiectum cursus. Vnde, sicut non possumus dicere quod ipsum currere currat, ita non possumus dicere quod ipsum esse sit; sed id quod est significatur sicut subiectum essendi, uelut id quod currit significatur sicut subiectum currendi; et ideo sicut possumus dicere de eo quod currit siue de corrente quod currat in quantum subicitur cursui et participat

‘*Esse*’ itself is not signified as the subject of being, just as ‘*currens*’ is not signified as the subject of running. Thus, just as we cannot say that running (*currens*) itself runs, we cannot say that being (*esse*) itself is. But ‘*id quod est*’ is signified as the subject of being, just as ‘that which runs’ is signified as the subject of running. Thus, just as we can say of ‘that which runs’ or of ‘a runner’ that it runs inasmuch as it is the subject of running and participates in it, we

²⁸ *In De hebdom.*, lect. 2, Leonine ed., vol. 50, p. 270-71, lines 39-45.

ipsum; ita possumus dicere quod ens siue id quod est sit in quantum participat actum essendi. ²⁹	can say that ‘ <i>ens</i> ’ or ‘ <i>id quod est</i> ’ is inasmuch as it participates in the act of being.
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Undoubtedly, a discussion on the modes of signification of two terms that signify *esse* would have been the perfect occasion for Aquinas to take note of the fact that if *esse* is apprehended only through the second operation of the intellect, then the terms that have *esse* as their *res significata* cannot signify the same sort of conception that other terms signify; for, they would have to signify a complex conception of their *res*, i.e., of *esse*. The fact, however, that Aquinas parallels the modes of signification of the terms ‘*esse*’ and ‘*ens*’ with those of the terms ‘*currere*’ and ‘*currens*’ implies that, for Aquinas, the terms ‘*esse*’ and ‘*ens*’ signify a simple conception of their *res*, that is, of *esse*.

Aquinas’ handling of the signification of the terms that signify *esse* in his early writings indicates the same simple conception of *esse* found in the mature works. That this conception corresponds to a simple product of the mind (the concept or *verbum*) and to a simple act of the intellect follows from the same reasoning that we saw at the end of Chapter III: the content signified by simple terms is the same as the content of the non-composite concept through which, as through a form, the simple act of intellection takes place. In the following section, I build a further argument for the claim that the conception of ‘*ens*’ is simple in nature, appealing to two major texts. If Aquinas had meant literally that there is no apprehension of *esse* as the *actus essendi* prior to or outside of the act of judgment, then the simple conception of ‘*ens*’ could not include in any way *esse* as the *actus essendi*.

²⁹ *In De hebdom.*, lect. 2, Leonine ed., vol. 50, p. 271, lines 48-59.

B. The Simple Conception of ‘*Ens*’ in the Commentary on the *Sentences* and in the *De veritate*

Text 1: The Commentary on the *Sentences*

Addressing the issue of why ‘*qui est*’ or ‘*ens*’ is the most proper name of God, Aquinas explains that the term ‘*ens*’ is prior to the terms ‘*bonum*’, ‘*unum*’, and ‘*verum*’.

The reason is the following:

[E]ns includitur in intellectu eorum, et non e converso. Primum enim quod cadit in imaginatione intellectus, est ens, sine quod nihil potest apprehendi ab intellectu; sicut primum quod cadit in credulitate intellectus, sunt dignitates.³⁰

Ens is included in the understanding of the other [concepts], and not the opposite. For that which first falls into the intellect’s *imaginatio* is *ens*, without which nothing can be apprehended by the intellect; just as that which first falls into the intellect’s *credulitas* are the first principles.

Since in the passage above Aquinas is speaking of that which first falls into the intellect, “*ens*” must stand not for the linguistic expression (i.e., for the term ‘*ens*’), but for the understanding or conception that the linguistic expression signifies (i.e. the conception ‘*ens*’).³¹ Given that in both the commentary on the *Sentences* and *De veritate* Aquinas identifies *esse*, as opposed to essence, as the *res significata* of the term ‘*ens*’, we are confident that, for Aquinas, the object of the conception ‘*ens*’ is *esse*.³² Thus, in the passage quoted above Aquinas is speaking of a conception of *esse*. What is quite remarkable about this passage is that Aquinas associates the intellect’s conception of *esse* signified by the term ‘*ens*’ with what he calls in the intellect ‘*imaginatio*’, which is

³⁰ *In I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 1, a. 3, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 200.

³¹ Although he does not do so in the passage just quoted, elsewhere Aquinas refers to both the first principles (*dignitates*) and the intellect’s primary notions (‘*ens*’, ‘*unum*’, etc.) as conceptions. See, *De ver.*, q. 11, a. 1; *De trin.*, q. 6, a. 4; and *Quodl.* VIII, q. 2, a. 2 (disputed probably during the Advent of 1257).

³² The *res significata* of a term is the object of the conception signified by the term. See *ST I*, q. 13, a. 4, Leonine ed., vol. 4, p. 144: “Ratio enim quam significat nomen, est conceptio intellectus de re significata per nomen.”

another expression for Aristotle's 'understanding of indivisibles', that is, for the first operation of the intellect.

The use of '*imaginatio*' to refer to the first operation of the intellect has its origins on twelfth-century Latin translations of the logical works of Avicenna and Al-Ghazali (especially by Gundissalinus), where the Arabic terms '*tasawwur*' and '*tasdiq*', used in reference to the Aristotelian distinction in *De Anima* between 'understanding of indivisibles' and 'composition and division,' are translated as '*imaginatio*' and '*credulitas*' respectively.³³ The Latin translation of Averroes' commentary on *De Anima* adopts the terms '*formatio*' and '*fides*' for the Arabic expressions '*tasawwur*' and '*tasdiq*'. In the commentary on the *Sentences*, Aquinas uses both sets of "Arabic" terms.³⁴ A good example of such use is found in the following passage where, incidentally, the correlation between the two operations of the intellect and a thing's essence and *esse* is mentioned:

[C]um sit duplex operatio intellectus: una quarum dicitur a quibusdam imaginatio intellectus, quam Philosophus, III *De anima*, text. 21, nominat intelligentiam indivisibilium, quae consistit in apprehensione quidditatis simplicis, quae alio etiam nomine formatio dicitur; alia est quam dicunt fidem, quae consistit in compositione vel divisione propositionis:

The intellect has two operations: one called '*imaginatio intellectus*' by some, and 'understanding of indivisibles' by the Philosopher in *De anima* III, which consists in the apprehension of a simple quiddity, and which is also called '*formatio*' by another name; the other operation is called '*fides*', which consists in the composition and division of

³³ See Benoît Garceau, *Judicium: vocabulaire, sources, doctrine de Saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Vrin, 1968), 104-12. On the terms '*tasawwur*' and '*tasdiq*' and their Latin equivalents, see also Harry A. Wolfson, "The Terms *tasawwur* and *tasdiq* in Arabic Philosophy and their Greek, Latin and Hebrew Equivalents," *The Moslem World* 33 (1943). For the Arabic, and Greek, origins of the terms '*formatio*' and '*imaginatio*', see also Joseph Owens, "Judgment and Truth in Aquinas," in *St. Thomas Aquinas on the Existence of God: Collected Papers of Joseph Owens*, ed. John R. Catan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1980), 242n21.

³⁴ See *In I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 1, a. 3; d. 19, q. 5, a. 1, ad 7; d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, *In III Sent.*, d. 23, q. 2, a. 2, qa 1; d. 24, q. 1, a. 1, qa 2.

prima operatio respicit quidditatem rei;
secunda respicit esse ipsius.³⁵

propositions. The first operation regards
the quiddity of a thing; the second regards
its *esse*.

If in this passage Aquinas means literally that quiddity alone, not *esse*, may be conceived in “*imaginatio intellectus*,” then, contrary to what Aquinas explicitly says early in the same commentary, the conception of ‘*ens*’ cannot be the first thing that falls into the mind (whether this is a first in time or in nature): “*primum quod cadit in imaginatione intellectus*.”³⁶

Text 2: The *De veritate*

In addition to the passage from the *Sentences* commentary where Aquinas associates the conception signified by the term ‘*ens*’ with the first operation of the intellect, there is a passage from the *De veritate* where Aquinas refers to the sort of conception signified by the term ‘*ens*’ as simple. Aquinas writes:

[P]raeexistunt in nobis quaedam scientiarum semina, scilicet primae conceptiones intellectus quae statim lumine intellectus agentis cognoscuntur per species a sensibilibus abstractas, sive sint complexa sicut dignitates, sive incomplexa sicut ratio entis et unius, et huiusmodi quae statim intellectus apprehendit.³⁷

There pre-exist in us certain seeds of the ‘sciences’, namely the first conceptions of the intellect, which are known immediately by the light of the agent intellect through the species abstracted from sensible things, and these [first conceptions] are either complex as are axioms, or simple as are the notions of ‘*ens*’, ‘*unum*’, and the like, which the intellect apprehends immediately.

In this passage, speaking again of the primary conceptions of the intellect, Aquinas distinguishes between those conceptions that are complex (*complexa*), like the principle

³⁵ *In I Sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 1, ad 7, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 489. See also *De ver.*, q. 14, a. 1, Leonine ed., vol. 22, 2/2, p. 430, lines 78-82: “[U]nde etiam et apud Arabes prima intellectus operatio vocatur imaginatio intellectus, secunda autem vocatur fides, ut patet ex verbis Commentatoris in III De anima.”

³⁶ See text from note 30.

³⁷ *De ver.*, q. 11, a. 1, Leonine ed., vol. 22, 2/1, p. 350, lines 264-72.

of non-contradiction, and those conceptions that are simple or non-composite (*incomplexa*), like the conceptions of ‘*ens*’ and ‘*unum*’. We have, then, in this passage an explicit reference on the part of Aquinas to the intellect’s conception of ‘*ens*’ as simple (*incomplexa*), which should be in no way surprising given Aquinas’ association in the commentary on the *Sentences* of the conception signified by the term ‘*ens*’ with the first operation of the intellect.

4.1.5 Response to an Objection to a Simple Conception of ‘*Ens*’ in the Early Writings

Against the evidence presented above for Aquinas’ early recognition of the simple conception of *esse*, it might be argued that the conception of ‘*ens*’ Aquinas refers to in the passages from the commentary on the *Sentences* and from the *De veritate* quoted above is not a conception of *esse* but a conception of essence. After all, for Aquinas, the term ‘*ens*’ also signifies essence:

[E]sse dicitur dupliciter: uno modo secundum quod ens significat essentiam rerum prout dividitur per decem genera; alio modo secundum quod esse significat compositionem quam anima facit; et istud ens Philosophus [. . .] appellat verum.³⁸

Esse is said in two ways. In one way according as *ens* signifies the essence of things as divided by the ten genera. In another way according as *esse* signifies the composition formed by the soul; and this *ens* the Philosopher calls the true.

I answer that ‘*ens*’ is said to signify essence inasmuch as it signifies *esse*. The term ‘*ens*’ signifies its *res significata*, i.e., *esse*, in the concrete mode; as such, it signifies the conception ‘what has *esse*’ or ‘the subject of *esse*’ (*subiectum essendi*). Thus, inasmuch

³⁸ *In I Sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 1, ad 1, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 488 [the ellipses are for the reference to Aristotle, added by the editors]. Aquinas somewhat obscurely refers here to “being” in the sense of the truth of a proposition, Aristotle’s third sense in *Metaphysics* 5.7. See also *In II Sent.*, d. 37, q. 1, a. 2, ad 3; *SCG* II, c. 8; *De pot.*, q. 7, a. 2 ad 1.

as ‘the subject of *esse*’ is essence, ‘*ens*’ signifies essence.³⁹ As Aquinas notes in the following parallel text, the conception of ‘*ens*’ is first and foremost that of “something existing in nature” (*aliquid in natura existens*):

[E]ns multipliciter dicitur. Uno enim modo dicitur ens quod per decem genera dividitur: et sic ens significat aliquid in natura existens; sive sit substantia, ut homo; sive accidens, ut color. Alio modo dicitur ens, quod significat veritatem propositionis; prout dicitur quod affirmatio est vera, quando significat esse de eo quod est; et negatio, quando significat non esse de eo quod non est; et hoc ens compositionem significat, quam intellectus componens et dividens adinvenit. Quaecumque ergo dicuntur entia quantum ad primum modum, sunt entia quantum ad secundum modum: quia omne quod habet naturale esse in rebus, potest significari per propositionem affirmativam esse, ut cum dicitur: color est vel homo est.⁴⁰

Ens is said in many ways. For in one way *ens* is said as it is divided by the ten genera. And in this way *ens* signifies something existing in nature, whether it is a substance, like a man, or an accident, like a color. *Ens* is said in another way [to be] what signifies the truth of a proposition; as when it is said that an affirmation is true when it signifies ‘to be’ of what is, and a negation [is true] when it signifies ‘not to be’ of what is not; and this *ens* signifies the composition that the intellect forms when it composes and divides. Thus, whatever is said to be ‘a being’ (*ens*) according to the first way, is also ‘a being’ in the second way because everything that has ‘physical’ being (*esse*) in things can be signified to be by an affirmative proposition, as when we say ‘a color is’ or ‘a man is’.

When Aquinas says that ‘*ens*’ signifies essence, he does not mean that essence is the *res significata* of ‘*ens*’. The *res significata* of ‘*ens*’ is *esse*, not essence. ‘*Ens*’ signifies essence because it signifies *esse* in the concrete mode and thus it signifies the conception ‘what has *esse*’ or ‘*habens esse*’. Since essence is ‘what has *esse*’, Aquinas says that ‘*ens*’ signifies essence. Therefore, the conception of ‘*ens*’ Aquinas associates in the *Sentences* with the first operation of the intellect or *imaginatio* and later in *De veritate* describes as simple or *incomplexa* is indeed a conception of *esse* as *actus essendi*.

³⁹ See, e.g., *Quodl.* II, q. 1, a. 1, Leonine ed., vol. 25/2, p. 214: “Set uerum est quod hoc nomen ens, secundum quod importat rem cui competit huiusmodi esse, sic significat essenciam rei, et diuiditur per decem genera.”

⁴⁰ *In II Sent.*, d. 34, q. 1, a. 1, Mandonnet ed., vol. 2, p. 872. ‘Physical’ being here means, not corporeal, but extra-mental, unlike privations.

4.1.6 Two Corollaries

From the discussion above we conclude that Aquinas recognizes the simple conception of *esse* even when he maintains a correlation between the two operations of the intellect and the two principles of reality, essence and the *esse* of a thing. Two things may be deduced from this finding.

First, the apparent inconsistency between Aquinas' commentary on the *Sentences* and his commentary on Aristotle's *Peri hermeneias* on the possibility of a simple conception of *esse* may not be resolved by attending to the dating of the texts in question. The fact that in the *Sentences* commentary and in *De veritate* Aquinas recognizes that the term '*ens*' signifies a simple conception of *esse* rules out the possibility that in between the writing of his commentaries on the *Sentences* and on Aristotle's *Peri hermeneias*, Aquinas changed his mind on the subject of the human intellect's apprehension of *esse*. Aquinas' remarks of the signification of the terms '*ens*' and '*esse*' in the *Peri hermeneias* do not represent a new doctrine, they are in fact consistent with Aquinas' early remarks on the matter.

We are back where we started, then, with a set of conflicting texts on the subject of the human intellect's apprehension of *esse*. On the one hand, we have Aquinas' correlation between the two operations of the intellect and a thing's essence and *esse* in the commentaries on the *Sentences* and on the *De trinitate*, which suggests the impossibility of a simple conception of *esse*. On the other hand, we have Aquinas' remarks on the intellect's conception of *esse* signified by the term '*ens*' in the *Sentences* commentary and the *De veritate*, which reveal that Aquinas acknowledges a simple conception of *esse*.

Second, the fact that Aquinas recognizes a simple conception of *esse* while maintaining a correlation between the two operations of the intellect and a thing's essence and *esse* opens up the possibility that in setting up the correlation Aquinas did not intend to restrict the apprehension of each principle, i.e., of essence and *esse*, to one operation alone.

With the latter idea in mind, and in order to address the apparent inconsistency between texts, in the next part of the chapter I propose an alternative interpretation to *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, one that leaves open the possibility of a simple conception of *esse*.⁴¹ The alternative reading explains Aquinas' correlation between the second operation of the intellect and a thing's *esse* in light of the immediate textual and theoretical context of the passage. In the following pages, it will be shown that despite the affirmation in the commentary on the *Sentences* of a real distinction between a thing's *esse* and its essence, together with different ways the human intellect apprehends each, it does not follow that the human intellect cannot conceive *esse*, just as it conceives essences, in a simple conception.

4.2 *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3: *Utrum scientia Dei sit enuntiabilem*

We begin by identifying and examining the theoretical context of the discussion at *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3: the propositional theory that supplies the topic of the article.

⁴¹ I have elected to concentrate on the text from *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3 since this is where, to my estimation, Aquinas works out the correlation to the greatest extent. This is not to say, however, that we will not consider as well the other two texts where the correlation is mentioned, namely, *In I Sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 1, ad 7; and *De trin.*, q. 5, a. 3.

4.2.1 Theoretical Context: *Enuntiabile* Theory

The issue Aquinas addresses at *I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3 is whether God knows *enuntiabilia* (*Utrum scientia Dei sit enuntiabilium*). Now, the term ‘*enuntiabile*’ is a technical term used from the mid-twelfth century forward to designate the propositional complex that is the immediate object of the intellect’s act of composition and division.⁴² The theory of the *enuntiabile* developed originally as a theory of signification for propositions, but as is often the case in medieval semantics, we find that the logical notion of the *enuntiabile* carried important implications in the areas of epistemology and ontology.⁴³

In treatises of logic from the mid-twelfth to mid-thirteenth century the term ‘*enuntiabile*’ is used to designate that which is signified by a *propositio* or *enuntiatio*. It should be noted that in this particular context, the terms ‘*enuntiatio*’ and ‘*propositio*’ stand only derivatively for the written or spoken proposition and primarily for their mental counterpart, that is, for the “mental proposition” which the written or spoken

⁴² For the theory of the *enuntiabile* I rely especially on Gabriel Nuchelmans, *Theories of the Proposition. Ancient and Medieval Conceptions of the Bearers of Truth and Falsity* (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1973), 165-94. Also, Gabriel Nuchelmans, “The Semantics of Propositions,” in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny, and Jan Pinborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 195-203; Yukio Iwakuma, “Enuntiabilia in Twelfth-Century Logic and Theology,” in *Vestigia, Imagines, Verba: Semiotics and Logic in Medieval Theological Texts*, ed. Constantino Marmo et al. (Belgium: Brepols, 1997); and Norman Kretzmann, “Medieval Logicians on the Meaning of the *Propositio*,” *Journal of Philosophy* 67 (1970).

⁴³ The introduction of the term ‘*enuntiabilie*’ in the context of discussions regarding the signification of propositions is attributed to Adam of Balsham, in his *Ars Disserendi*, a logical tract written around 1132. See Nuchelmans, *Theories of the Proposition*, 169; Iwakuma, “Enuntiabilia,” 19. Treatises of logic dating from the end of the twelfth century (1180-1200) contain a full-fledged theory of *enuntiabilia*. Logicians of the thirteenth century uphold the theory, but added very little to it. It was to be the theologians who in the thirteenth century continued the theoretical discussion of *enuntiabilia*, particularly in connection to questions regarding God’s knowledge and the object of faith. See Nuchelmans, *Theories of the Proposition*, 177; Kretzmann, “Meaning of the *Propositio*,” 782-83.

proposition signifies.⁴⁴ The *enuntiabile*, then, is that which is immediately signified by a mental proposition. Now, although medieval logicians were aware of a distinction between the acts of mere predication and assertion, for many purposes the term ‘*enuntiatio*’, in all its senses, was used in such a way that it holds both predicative value and assertoric force.⁴⁵ Thus, a mental proposition consists not only of an act of combining the predicate with the subject in an affirmative or negative way, but also of an act of judging that what is thereby conceived is so in reality.⁴⁶ The term ‘*enuntiabile*’, then, designates the significate of a mental proposition in the sense of that which is asserted or judged to be the case by a mental proposition. But, there is one more precision to make. The term ‘*enuntiabile*’, by its very form, contains a nuance of potentiality which was not lost on medieval logicians. In accordance with its form, then, the term ‘*enuntiabile*’ designates not only what is in fact asserted, but what is capable of being asserted.⁴⁷ Thus, the *enuntiabile* is that which is asserted or judged to be the case by a mental proposition in the sense of that which “can be” asserted or judged to be the case by a mental proposition.

Setting aside the semantic terminology, we may identify the *enuntiabile* with the immediate object of the intellect’s act of composition and division, that is to say, with the propositional complex or *complexum* effected in and by the intellect when it composes an affirmation or negation. On the other hand, given that the intellect’s act of composition and division is understood as carrying not only predicative value but also assertoric force,

⁴⁴ Nuchelmans, “Semantics of Propositions,” 198.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 197-98. For Aquinas’ distinction between predication and assertion, see *In I Sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 3, ad 5 and d. 41, q. 1, a. 5; *De ver.*, q. 1, a. 6, a. 2; q. 10, a. 10, ad 8; and q. 10, a. 12, ad 7; also *ST I*, q. 16, a. 8, ad 3.

⁴⁶ Nuchelmans, “Semantics of Propositions,” 199.

⁴⁷ Nuchelmans, *Theories of the Proposition*, 169.

perhaps a better characterization of the *enuntiabile* would be that of the immediate object of our individual judgments, wherein the term ‘judgment’ denotes an act of both predication and assertion.

In order to differentiate the *enuntiatio* (judgment or mental proposition) from its object, the *enuntiabile*, logicians often phrased *enuntiabilia* using accusative-plus-infinitive constructions in Latin (‘that-clauses’ in English); for instance, the *enuntiatio* ‘*Socrates currit*’ is said to assert the *enuntiabile* ‘*Socratem currere*’ (‘that Socrates runs’).⁴⁸ But, the distinction between the *enuntiatio* and the *enuntiabile* was not always as straightforward as that. In the first place, given that the *enuntiabile* is a propositional complex, consisting of the composition of subject and predicate, it has predicative value. To that extent, the *enuntiabile* is itself also an *enuntiatio* (although it lacks assertoric force). To further complicate matters, the *enuntiabile* is a significant expression, for it signs or signifies a state of affairs in reality. The perceived similarities between the *enuntiabile* and the *enuntiatio* led to a tendency among scholars, including Aquinas, to use the term ‘*enuntiatio*’ for the term ‘*enuntiabile*’.⁴⁹ Under such circumstances, it would not be difficult for contemporary readers unfamiliar with the theory to mistake the *enuntiabile* with the mental act of which it is an object. The observation is of particular importance in the face of some interpretations regarding what the issue under discussion is at *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3. The subject under discussion is not, as it has been

⁴⁸ Nuchelmans, *Theories of the Proposition*, 174-76.

⁴⁹ On this issue, see Nuchelmans, *Theories of the Proposition*, 188. Nuchelmans refers to Bonaventure, Albert, and Aquinas for instances of the practice. Robert Schmidt has noted that in Aquinas whenever the term ‘*enuntiatio*’ is used for the term ‘*enuntiabile*’ the objective meaning of ‘*enuntiatio*’ is emphasized. See, Robert Schmidt, *The Domain of Logic According to Saint Thomas Aquinas* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1966), 223n84.

suggested, “whether God knows our individual judgments,”⁵⁰ but rather whether God knows *enuntiabilia*, that is, whether God knows that which the human intellect knows in judgment. Aquinas’ remarks at *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3 regarding the second operation of the intellect and its object are thus directly framed by the theory of the *enuntiabile*, a fact that has not infrequently been overlooked by contemporary commentators.

There are several other things we need to know about *enuntiabilia* before we are ready to approach the discussion at *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3: (A) the ontological status of *enuntiabilia*; (B) the doctrine of *enuntiabilia* as bearers of truth value; and (C) the role of *enuntiabilia* as immediate objects of knowledge and belief.

A. The Ontological Status of *Enuntiabilia*

Logicians thought of *enuntiabilia* as having their own category of being, one that is set apart from the ten categories distinguished by Aristotle.⁵¹ Not much, however, is said positively about their particular ontological status. For the most part, *enuntiabilia* are described more in terms of what they are not than in terms of what they are. A passage from the anonymous *Ars Meliduna*, a logical tract written around 1180, lists and rejects three basic opinions on the nature of *enuntiabilia*: (i) they are acts of human thought and as such properties or accidents of the intellect; (ii) they are compositions or divisions of things outside the mind; and (iii) they are nothing properly speaking, just manners of speaking.⁵² Among the positive characterizations of *enuntiabilia* found in the *Ars*

⁵⁰ John F. Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 29.

⁵¹ Nuchelmans, “The Semantics of Propositions,” 201.

⁵² For a close study on this section of the *Ars Meliduna*, see Nuchelmans, *Theories of the Proposition*, 170-72; and Iwakuma, “Enuntiabilia,” 19-22. On the dating of the *Ars Meliduna*, see De Rijk, *Logica Modernorum: A Contribution to the History of Early Terminist Logic* (Assen: Van Gordum, 1967) 2:280-81.

Meliduna and similar logical tracts, we may include the idea that *enuntiabilia* are something in between the acts of the intellect and the outside world, accessible only to the intellect and not to the senses.⁵³ Gyula Klima is on the right track, I believe, when he identifies the mode of being of *enuntiabilia* as described by logicians with Aquinas' conception of *entia rationis*. According to Klima, *enuntiabilia* should be understood as objects of thought formed in and by the activity of the intellect although having a foundation in reality; as such, *enuntiabilia* exist objectively in the intellect as a sort of complex *ens rationis* or mental entity.⁵⁴

Given the conception of *enuntiabilia* as entities having their own category of being, logicians further identified the *enuntiabile* as the 'thing' ('*res*') referred to by Aristotle in his formula: 'it is because the thing is or is not that a proposition is said to be true or false' (*Categories* 4b8, 14b21). Accordingly, *enuntiabilia* are taken to be the primary bearers of truth values.⁵⁵ The anonymous author of the *Ars Burana*, dated to around 1200, summarizes the doctrine as follows:

Note that whether we speak about the dictum of a proposition or of the significate of a proposition or of an *enuntiabile* it is the same. For an *enuntiabile* is what is signified by a proposition. For example: 'a man is an animal', this proposition is true, because what it signifies is true; and that true thing that you in this way understand is the *enuntiabile*, whatever it is. Similarly, when I say: 'Socrates is an ass', this proposition is false, because what it signifies is false, and the false thing that you conceive in this way is the *enuntiabile*. And this cannot be seen, nor heard or sensed, but it is only perceivable by the intellect. If you ask in which category of things it belongs, whether it is a substance or an accident, of the *enuntiabile* we have to say that it is neither a substance nor an accident nor does it belong to any of the categories. For it has its own peculiar mode of existence. And it is said to be extrapredicamental, not because it does not belong to any category, but because it does not belong to any of the categories distinguished by Aristotle.

⁵³ Nuchelmans, "The Semantics of Propositions," 201.

⁵⁴ Gyula Klima, "The Changing Role of *Entia Rationis* in Mediaeval Semantics and Ontology: A Comparative Study with a Reconstruction," *Synthese* 96 no.1 (1993): 31-34.

⁵⁵ See Nuchelmans, *Theories of the Proposition*, 172-173 and "The Semantics of Propositions," 199. Also, Klima, "*Entia Rationis*," 34.

Therefore it belongs to some category that can be called the category of *enuntiabilia*.⁵⁶

B. *Enuntiabilia* as Bearers of Truth Value

The doctrine of *enuntiabilia* as bearers of truth values is vast and complex, and far exceeds our present concerns. This much, however, is important for us to understand in view of our subsequent discussion: A judgment or mental proposition has truth value only in a derivative sense; it has truth value insofar as it is a sign of truth, that is, insofar as it asserts the truth of an *enuntiabile*.⁵⁷ Now, the truth value of an *enuntiabile* in the case of extra-mental objects depends on whether the state of affairs it signifies actually obtains in reality. In this case, according to the inherence theory of predication upheld among others also by Aquinas, an *enuntiabile* would obtain in reality if and only if the property signified by the predicate actually inheres (or not) in the thing denoted by the subject.⁵⁸ Thus, the truth value of a judgment or mental proposition depends immediately on the truth value of the *enuntiabile* it signifies, but ultimately also on the way real things are.

⁵⁶ Quoted in the above English translation in Klima, “*Entia Rationis*,” 31. On the origin and dating of the *Ars Burana*, see De Rijk, *Logica Modernorum*, 2:397-98.

⁵⁷ The doctrine is expressed in the formula: “Truth and falsity are in the *enuntiabile* as in their subject and in the *propositio* as in a sign.” See Nuchelmans, *Theories of the Proposition*, 172. Aquinas need not propose a new category of being for the *enuntiabilia*, since they fall under one of the analogous senses of being, being in the sense of the truth of a proposition; all such beings are *entia rationis*.

⁵⁸ In other words: ‘that a man is white’ is verified if and only if whiteness (the property signified by the predicate-term) actually inheres in the individual man who is denoted by the subject-term. On the inherence theory of predication, see De Rijk, *Logica Modernorum*, 1:37-38; also John Malcolm, “A Reconsideration of the Identity and Inherence Theories of the Copula,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 17 (1979). For Aquinas, see Herman Weidemann, “The Logic of Being in Thomas Aquinas,” in *The Logic of Being*, ed. Simo Knuuttila and Jaakko Hintikka (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1986).

According to Klima, the above would be the sense of the definition of truth as consisting in what Aquinas calls *adaequatio intellectus et rei*.⁵⁹ The point is important for our purposes. The doctrine of *enuntiabilia* as primary bearers of truth values is an integral part of the theoretical background on which Aquinas' conception of truth rests.

According to Aquinas, the notion of truth as *adaequatio intellectus et rei* requires, not that the act of judging be equated to the thing known, but that what the intellect says or knows in judgment be equated to the thing.⁶⁰ Hence, the primary bearer of truth value is the immediate object of the intellect's act of judging or asserting, that is to say, an *enuntiabile*. Truth is found primarily in the *enuntiabile* or propositional composition effected by the intellect, for this alone conforms immediately to reality.⁶¹ But, truth is found also in a derivative sense in the act of judging, for a judgment or mental proposition says or asserts truth – i.e., the truth of its immediate object, the *enuntiabile*.⁶² This is what Aquinas has in mind when he distinguishes between “being true” and “saying or knowing truth.”⁶³ Hence, when Aquinas says that the intellect judges when it says ‘to be’ of the thing that ‘is’ or ‘not to be’ of the thing that ‘is not’, the thing that is or

⁵⁹ Klima, “*Entia Rationis*,” 35-36.

⁶⁰ See *SCG I*, c. 59, Leonine ed., vol. 13, p. 167: “Cum enim veritas intellectus sit *adaequatio intellectus et rei*, secundum quod intellectus dicit esse quod est vel non esse quod non est, ad illud in intellectu veritas pertinet quod intellectus dicit, non ad operationem qua illud dicit. Non enim ad veritatem intellectus exigitur ut ipsum intelligere rei aequetur, cum res interdum sit materialis, intelligere vero immateriale: sed illud quod intellectus intelligendo dicit et cognoscit, oportet esse rei aequatum, ut scilicet ita sit in re sicut intellectus dicit.”

⁶¹ How this is so will become clearer once we discuss in more detail Aquinas' inherence theory of predication later in this section.

⁶² Truth is found in the external thing as well in so far as it is the cause of truth in the intellect. See, *In I Sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 1, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 486: “[V]erum per prius dicitur de veritate intellectus, et de enuntiatione dicitur in quantum est signum illius veritatis: de re autem dicitur, in quantum est causa;” and *In I Perih.*, lect. 7, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 36, lines: “Dicitur autem in enuntiatione esse verum vel falsum sicut in signo intellectus veri vel falsi; set sicut in subiecto est verum vel falsum in mente . . . in re autem sicut in causa.”

⁶³ *In I Perih.*, lect. 3, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 15, lines 99-102: “[U]eritas in aliquo inuenitur dupliciter: uno modo sicut in eo quod est verum; alio modo sicut in dicente vel cognoscente verum;” also *In I Perih.*, lect. 3, lines 149-80; *ST I*, q. 16, a. 2; and *De ver.*, q. 1, a. 9.

is not is not a real thing but an *enuntiabile* and the sense of ‘to be’ or ‘is’ is not that of real being but of truth.⁶⁴

We should also notice that although the *enuntiabile* is what immediately conforms to reality and what is true in a primary sense, the notion or *ratio* of truth as *adaequatio intellectus et rei* is fully realized not in the *enuntiabile* as such but in the act of judging, that is, in judgment (the judgment that ‘that *x* is’ is true). The reason is that equation implies comparison of two items and it is only when the intellect says or knows its conformity to reality that the equation between intellect and thing is completed.⁶⁵ Perhaps the best way to make sense of these last remarks is to remember that the intellect’s act of judging is both an act of predication and assertion. It is through one and the same act that the *enuntiabile* is effected in and asserted to be the case by the intellect. Thus, through one and the same act of composition and assertion (i.e. through judgment) the intellect

⁶⁴ See, *In II Sent.*, d. 34, q. 1, a. 1, Mandonnet ed., vol. 2, p. 872: “Alio modo dicitur ens, quod significat veritatem propositionis; prout dicitur quod affirmatio est vera, quando significat esse de eo quod est; et negatio, quando significat non esse de eo quod non est; et hoc ens compositionem significat, quam intellectus componens et dividens adinvenit;” and *In V Meta.*, lect. 9, n. 895, Marietti ed., p. 239: “*Ponit* [Aristotle] *alium modum entis*, secundum quod esse et est, significant compositionem propositionis, quam facit intellectus componens et dividens. Unde dicit, quod esse significat veritatem rei. Velut sicut alia translatio melius habet «quod esse significat» quia aliquod dictum est verum. Unde veritas propositionis potest dici veritas rei per causam. Nam ex eo quod res est vel non est, oratio vera vel falsa est. Cum enim dicimus aliquid esse, significamus propositionem esse veram. Et cum dicimus non esse, significamus non esse veram.” Notice that this doctrine could give rise to the objection that all that Aquinas ever means by ‘*esse rei*’ in his theory of the proposition is “propositional being”, as Régis suggests; see also the texts at notes 38, 40 and 90. The inadequacy of this (initially compelling) objection will emerge in Aquinas’ texts throughout the rest of this chapter.

⁶⁵ At different places, Aquinas notes that under the definition of truth in terms of conformity to reality, truth is present in both sense perception and the first operation of the intellect, for there is a likeness to reality in both the sense and the intellect in its first operation. But neither sense nor the intellect in its first operation knows its conformity to reality. The latter is possible only in judgment; it is something that belongs only to the second operation of the intellect and its act. See *De ver.* q. 1, a. 2 and a. 9; *ST I*, q. 16, a. 2; and *In I Periher.*, lect. 3, lines 149-80.

both brings about and knows its own conformity to reality in the completed judgment of truth.⁶⁶

C. *Enuntiabilia* as Objects of Knowledge and Belief

The last thing we need to know about the theory of the *enuntiabile* concerns the role of *enuntiabilia* as immediate objects of knowledge and belief. It was generally recognized in medieval logic and grammar that epistemic verbs, such as ‘to know’ (*scire*) and ‘to believe’ (*credere*), could not have as their immediate objects single terms but require an *oratio infinitiva* (i.e. a ‘that-clause’ in English) as their complement. The reason behind such requirement was thought to be the fact that acts of knowing and believing are accompanied by assent. We know and believe something to be true or false. To that extent, acts of knowing and believing were identified as acts of judgment. From there it was only a small step to identify the immediate object of acts of believing and knowing, i.e. what is known or believed (the *creditum* or the *scitum*), with an *enuntiabile*.⁶⁷

Throughout the twelfth and thirteenth century, theologians made ample use of the notion of *enuntiabilia* (also referred to as *complexa*) as objects of acts of believing and knowing, particularly in the context of certain difficulties regarding God’s knowledge

⁶⁶ See, *In VI Meta.*, lect. 4, n. 1236, Marietti ed., p. 311: “[I]n hac sola secunda operatione intellectus est veritas et falsitas, secundum quam non solum intellectus habet similitudinem rei intellectae, sed etiam super ipsam similitudinem reflectitur, cognoscendo et diiudicando ipsam.” That only one act is involved is suggested also in the following text, *In I Perih.*, lect. 3, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 17, lines 170-72: “[I]ntellectus non cognoscit ueritatem nisi componendo uel diuidendo per suum iudicium.”

⁶⁷ See Nuchelmans, *Theories of the Proposition*, 179, 184. Also, Kretzmann, “Meaning of the *Propositio*,” 779-80.

and the articles of faith.⁶⁸ Aquinas, for example, when dealing with the specific issue of the identity or unity of the object of faith in the third book of the commentary on the *Sentences*, identifies the object of faith with an *enuntiabile* or *complexum*.⁶⁹ Following on Augustine's definition of faith as thinking with assent (*credere est cum assensione cogitare*), Aquinas concludes that the object of faith is a *verum complexum*.⁷⁰ He remarks that such is the case is further evidenced by the fact that "some philosophers" called the act of the intellect by which it composes and divides '*fides*'.⁷¹ As we mentioned before, in Latin translations of Avicenna and Averroes, the terms '*credulitas*' and '*fides*' were used to translate the Arabic '*tasdiq*', which was the term used by Arabic philosophers to refer to the intellect's act of composition and division as distinguished by Aristotle in *De Anima*. Aquinas' association between *enuntiabilia* and '*fides*' provides evidence that Aquinas adheres to the standard notion of *enuntiabilia* as immediate objects

⁶⁸ For a summary of the difficulties and a survey of the main positions held by twelfth and thirteenth-century theologians on the issues, see Nuchelmans, *Theories of the Proposition*, 177-89.

⁶⁹ See the discussion at *In III Sent.*, d. 24, a. 1, qc. 1 and qc. 2. The issue Aquinas addresses here relates to the problem of how to maintain the identity of the object of faith in the face of the different ways in which the same event (e.g. the nativity of Christ) is linguistically expressed by believers through the passing of time. Abraham, who believed 'that Christ will be born', and later Christians who believe 'that Christ was born' do not appear to share the same object of faith. Aquinas' answer to the difficulty in the *Sentence* is that although Abraham and later Christians believe diverse *enuntiabilia*, they nonetheless share the same object of faith for they believe the same truth. The proper object of faith, Aquinas argues, concerns not the "matter" of the *enuntiabile* but the "form" of the *enuntiabile* which is truth (*In III Sent.*, d. 24, a. 1, qc. 1, sol. and ad 3).

⁷⁰ See *In III Sent.*, d. 24, a. 1, qc. 2, sol., Mandonnet ed., vol. 3, p. 763: "[S]icut Augustinus dicit, (*De Praedest. Sancto.*, c. 2, n. 5; L. 44, 963) *credere est cum assensione cogitare*. Assentire autem non potest aliquid nisi ei quod verum est. Veritas autem non consistit nisi in complexione vel intellectu vel vocum. Et ideo fidei objectum oportet quod sit verum complexum;" also the ad 3 (Mandonnet ed., vol. 3, p. 764): "Objectum autem fidei est verum, quod completur per operationem anime. Et quia compositio et divisio quae est in enuntiabilibus, non est nisi per animam; ideo complexum est objectum fidei." For the twelfth-century background, see William Courtenay, *Ockham and Ockhamism: Studies in the Dissemination and Impact of His Thought* (Brill, 2008) 24-26, 39-80.

⁷¹ See *In III Sent.*, d. 24, a. 1, qc. 2, sol., Mandonnet ed., vol. 3, p. 763: "Et hoc patet per hoc quod quidam philosophi illam operationem intellectum qua componit et dividi, appellaverunt *fidem*."

of the intellect's act of composition and division, that is, as immediate objects of judgments. In addition, we should observe that Aquinas refers to the *enuntiabile* as 'complexum' and as 'verum complexum', a practice that is consistent with the traditional interpretation of *enuntiabilia*.

We are ready now to turn our attention to the discussion at *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a.

3. As we indicated earlier, the issue Aquinas addresses here is whether God knows *enuntiabilia*, or, better yet, whether *enuntiabilia* are objects of God's knowledge. I begin by reviewing Aquinas' answer to the question of the article, that is, God's knowledge of *enuntiabilia*. Next, I consider what the discussion at *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3 tells us about human being's knowledge of *enuntiabilia*.

4.2.2 God's Knowledge of *Enuntiabilia*: An Exegesis of *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3

The problem with making *enuntiabilia* objects of God's knowledge rests on the fact that the notion of *enuntiabilia* seems to entail a manner of cognition that does not belong to God. *Enuntiabilia* are the complex objects of the human intellect's act of composition and division; as such, they entail a manner of cognition that is essentially complex. Unlike the human intellect, the divine intellect is ontologically simple and does not admit any sort of extra-mental composition. It would appear, then, that *enuntiabilia* cannot be objects of God's knowledge. Yet, as Aquinas notes in the *sed contra*, one cannot deny God's knowledge of *enuntiabilia* without admitting to an impossible deficiency in God's knowledge with respect to ours: God would not know what we know. The challenge, then, is how to maintain God's knowledge of *enuntiabilia* without at the same time compromising God's simple manner of cognition.

Let's see, then, how Aquinas answers the challenge of explaining how it is possible for God to know *enuntiabilia* in a simple understanding. In the corpus of the article, Aquinas writes:

Cum in re duo sint, quidditas rei, et esse ejus, his duobus respondet duplex operatio intellectus. Una quae dicitur a philosophis formatio, qua apprehendit quidditates rerum, quae etiam a Philosopho, in III *De anima*, dicitur indivisibilium intelligentia. Alia autem comprehendit esse rei, componendo affirmationem, quia etiam esse rei ex materia et forma compositae, a qua cognitionem accipit, consistit in quadam compositione formae ad materiam, vel accidentis ad subjectum. Similiter etiam in ipso Deo est considerare naturam ipsius, et esse ejus; et sicut natura sua est causa et exemplar omnis naturae, ita etiam esse suum est causa et exemplar omnis esse. Unde sicut cognoscendo essentiam suam, cognoscit omnem rem; ita cognoscendo esse suum, cognoscit esse cujuslibet rei; et sic cognoscit omnia enuntiabilia, quibus esse significatur; non tamen diversa operatione nec compositione, sed simpliciter; quia esse suum non est aliud ab essentia, nec est compositum consequens.⁷²

Since there are two [components] in a thing, the quiddity of the thing and its *esse*, a twofold operation of the intellect corresponds to these two. One is called “formation” by philosophers, by which the intellect apprehends the quiddities of things, which is also called by the Philosopher, in *De anima III*, the “understanding of indivisibles.” But the other comprehends the *esse* of a thing by composing an affirmation, because also the *esse* of a thing composed of matter and form, from which the intellect receives cognition, subsists (*consistit*)⁷³ in a certain composition of form with matter or of accident with subject. Similarly, in God himself it is possible to consider his nature and his *esse*; and just as his nature is cause and exemplar of every nature, so also his *esse* is cause and exemplar of every *esse*. Thus, just as by knowing his own essence God knows each thing (*res*), so also by knowing his own *esse*, he knows the *esse* of each thing; and thus he knows all *enuntiabilia* by which *esse* is signified; although without diversity of operation or composition, but simply, because his *esse* is not other than his essence, nor is it the result a composite.

As we examine this passage, I want to call attention to the theme of simplicity and complexity running through it.

⁷² *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 903-904.

⁷³ In presenting Régis, I translated ‘*consistit*’ as ‘consists’, as fits his position, and as is frequently a suitable translation, including in the *Sentences* commentary (see at notes 35 and 84). Nevertheless, as *Lewis and Short* amply attests, ‘*consistit*’ commonly is synonymous with ‘subsists’, which I prefer to ‘stands together in’. That this must be the case here is clear if *esse* signifies, as it does, the *actus essendi*. We shall find confirmation for this in parallel texts throughout Section 4.2.

Aquinas begins by appealing to the ontological composition of essence and *esse* within a thing.⁷⁴ He then observes that a twofold operation of the intellect corresponds to these two components. In a first operation, which Aquinas observes is called by Aristotle in *De Anima* III “understanding of indivisibles” (*indivisibilium intelligentia*), the intellect “apprehends (*apprehendit*) the quiddities of things (*quidditates rerum*).” The first operation of the intellect, then, regards something “indivisible,” that is, something simple or non-composite, as the quiddities of things are. Now, in a second operation, the intellect “comprehends (*comprehendit*) the *esse* of a thing (*esse rei*, not the indivisible term ‘*esse*’) by *composing* an affirmation.” There are two things to observe here. First, the use of “*comprehendit*” for the second operation of the intellect, in contrast to the use of “*apprehendit*” for the first operation, conveys the complexity of understanding of the second operation, which is not to be found in the first operation. Second, the complexity of the second operation is propositional: the intellect comprehends the *esse* of a thing (*esse rei*) by composing an affirmation. In the subsequent lines, Aquinas remarks on the *composite* character of the object of the second operation of the intellect. He observes that the thing whose *esse* the intellect *comprehends* by *composing* an affirmation is “composed of matter and form” (*ex materia et forma compositae*), and that the *esse* itself of the composite thing “subsists (*consistit*) in a certain composition of form with matter or of accident with subject.” Again, the verbs with the ‘*con-*’ prefix highlight composition, which is found ontologically in creatures, epistemologically in humans’ composite comprehension of creature, and semantically in the composite expression of truth.

⁷⁴ For an earlier affirmation of the essence-*esse* composition, see *In I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 5, a. 1 and a. 2.

The above remarks on human cognition are preparatory for Aquinas' final answer to the question of the article: whether *enuntiabilia* are objects of God's knowledge.

Aquinas begins by remarking that in God, too, one may consider his nature and his *esse*. He observes that, God's nature is "cause and exemplar" of every nature; thus, knowing his essence, God knows each thing or *res* (just as we know essences in our simple 'understanding of indivisibles'). Likewise, God's *esse* is "cause and exemplar" of every *esse*; thus, knowing his *esse*, God knows "the *esse* of each thing" (*esse cujuslibet rei*). In this manner, then, Aquinas concludes, God knows "all *enuntiabilia* by which *esse* is signified" although not by means of composition, but simply, because God's *esse*, which is not other than his essence, is simple. Notice that the implication here is that *enuntiabilia* signify "*esse cujuslibet rei*," and that earlier in the text Aquinas has identified "*esse rei*" as that which the human intellect apprehends in its second operation by means of composition, i.e., by composing an affirmation. Hence, whereas God knows "*esse rei*" simply, the human intellect knows "*esse rei*" by means of composition.

The response to the second objection, which explicitly remarks on the composite understanding implied in the conception of *enuntiabilia*,⁷⁵ contains a condensed version of the argument in the corpus. Aquinas writes:

Ad secundum dicendum, quod ipsum esse divinum quod est simplex, est exemplar omnis esse compositi quod in creatura est; et ideo per esse suum simplex cognoscit sine compositione intellectuum vel divisione omne esse vel non esse quod rei convenit. Sed intellectus noster, cujus cognitio a rebus oritur, quae esse

[T]he divine *esse* itself, which is simple, is the exemplar of every composite *esse* that is in the creature; and for this reason through his own simple *esse* [God] knows without composition or division of intellections every *esse* or *non esse* that belongs to a thing. But our intellect, whose cognition arises from things that have

⁷⁵ See *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, arg. 2, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 902: "Praeterea ut dicitur in III *De anima*, text. 21, quando intellectus intelligit affirmationem et negationem, fit quaedam compositio intellectuum. Sed in divino intellectus nulla est compositio. Ergo *enuntiabilia* non cognoscit."

compositum habent, non apprehendit illud esse nisi componendo et dividendo.⁷⁶ composite *esse*, apprehends this *esse* only by composing and dividing.

Once again, I call attention to the recurrent theme of simplicity and complexity. God's *esse* is simple (*simplex*), and since God's *esse* is exemplar of "all composite *esse* (*omnis esse compositi*) that is in the creature," it follows that knowing his simple *esse*, God knows without composition or division "every *esse* or *non esse* that belongs to a thing."⁷⁷ As we may see, up to now Aquinas used *esse rei* to refer to the object of affirmative enunciations (compositions) known by God. But now, in case we had any doubt, he includes as well enunciations about non-*esse* (negations or 'divisions'). God, no less than humans through an ontologically complex judgment (the second act of the intellect), knows also negative *complexa* or *enuntiabilia*, through God's *esse* as their exemplar cause.⁷⁸

Finally, Aquinas ends the response with some remarks on the human cognition, which are a reminiscent of what he said in the corpus of the article. He observes that, unlike what is the case in God, who is simple, our cognition arises from things that have "composite *esse*" (*esse compositum*), and thus we can only apprehend such composite *esse* by composing and dividing. Notice the theme: our composite mode of knowing

⁷⁶ *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, ad 2, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 904.

⁷⁷ Here, "*esse*" and "*non esse*" is not real being and non-being. Aquinas has in mind either composition and division, or truth and falsity. See *In II Sent.*, d. 34, q. 1, a. 1, Mandonnet ed., vol. 2, p. 873: "Alio modo dicitur ens, quod significat veritatem propositionis; prout dicitur, quod affirmatio est vera, quando significat esse de eo quod est; et negatio, quando significat non esse de eo quod non est; et hoc ens compositionem significat, quam intellectus componens et dividens adinvenit." Given the context of the discussion, though, I would argue that Aquinas has in mind, not truth, but the propositional composition of the intellect, hence, *enuntiabilia* in general. Thus, when Aquinas says that God knows "every *esse* or *non esse* that belongs to a thing," he means that God knows "every *enuntiabilia*." Negative *enuntiabilia* are verified through affirmative, and hence through *esse rei*.

⁷⁸ Note that the use of *non esse* might make one think that Aquinas has in mind *esse rei* as a being of reason or as signifying the 'truth of a proposition'; but '*esse*' both in creatures and God refers to the *actus essendi* as opposed to their essence.

composite *esse rei* corresponds to the composite, creaturely mode of being, whereas God's simple mode of knowing composite *esse rei* corresponds to his simple mode of being. Modes of signifying or predicating composites correspond to modes of knowing and being, which latter modes are diverse in God and creatures. Aquinas' answer to the question of the possibility of God's knowledge of *enuntiabilia* in the two passages quoted above may be summarized as follows: God's *esse*, which is simple, is cause and exemplar of all composite *esse*. Therefore, knowing his own simple *esse*, God knows without composition or division, but simply, "the *esse* of each thing;" thus, God knows "all *enuntiabilia* by which *esse* is signified" in a simple understanding.⁷⁹ God knows *enuntiabilia*, and that which *enuntiabilia* signify (*esse rei*), in a *simple* act, by knowing his simple *esse* that is their cause. For a full understanding of the doctrine, we would have to recall that just as all creaturely essences are limited participations in God's essence, so the complex *enuntiabilia* (and the complex *esse rei*) that concern those essences are effects and likenesses of the divine *esse*.⁸⁰ Notice, however, that although the divine essence accounts for God's knowledge of simple essence, Aquinas does not regard the divine essence as sufficient to account for the God's knowledge of complexes. To account for the latter, he appeals to the divine *esse* (although it is identical in *reality* to, even if conceptually distinct from, the divine essence). The *esse Dei*, as the (conceptually distinct) act by which the divine essence exists, is the exemplar cause of the *esse rei*, the object of *enuntiabilia*. This account would not be necessary if *esse* were taken as simple (versus the composite *esse rei*) and therefore as explained in the same way as God knows

⁷⁹ See *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 903: "[. . .] cognoscendo esse suum, cognoscit esse cujuslibet rei; et sic cognoscit omnia enuntiabilia, quibus esse significatur."

⁸⁰ On divine ideas, see, for example, Vivian Boland, *Ideas in God according to Saint Thomas Aquinas: Sources and Synthesis* (Leiden: Brill, 1996); Gregory Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2008).

all simples, through his simple essence. And, the account of complex *enuntiabilia* would not succeed were Aquinas affirming that only simple *esse* is known in judgment, not *esse rei*.

In sum, we can draw some initial conclusions for how to read *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, given Aquinas' theory of *enuntiabilia*. Whatever “*esse rei*” means in the crucial text, it cannot be the *simple esse* or *actus essendi*, as if that *by itself* is only grasped in the second operation of the intellect. It must mean something at least as complex as a proposition and its immediate object, the *enuntiabile*, is complex. Notice, however, that we cannot yet rule out the possibility that what Aquinas has in mind, though he misexpresses himself (and so, later drops the doctrine), is merely propositional being, as Régis suggests. Let us explore what positively Aquinas may mean by examining human knowledge of *enuntiabilia*.

4.2.3 Human Knowledge of *Enuntiabilia*

As we indicated earlier, Aquinas identifies that which *enuntiabilia* signify as the *esse* of each thing or *esse rei*. This is consistent with Aquinas' correlation in the commentary on the *Sentences* between *esse rei* and the second operation of the intellect.⁸¹ Now, we have seen that *enuntiabilia* are identified as the immediate objects of the intellect's act of composition and division.⁸² Since, according to Aquinas, *enuntiabilia* signify the *esse* of a thing, it follows that by means of *enuntiabilia* the human intellect

⁸¹ See *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 903: “Alia [i.e. *operatio secunda*] autem comprehendit esse rei, componendo affirmationem;” *In I Sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 1, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 486: “[E]t in ipsa operatione intellectus accipientis esse rei sicut est per quamdam simulationem ad ipsum;” and the ad 7 (Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 489): “[P]rima operatio respicit quidditatem rei; secunda respicit esse ipsius.”

⁸² See the discussion in section 4.2.1 above.

knows in its second operation the *esse* of a thing or *esse rei*. We should also notice that later in the commentary on the *Sentences* Aquinas identifies the *esse* of a thing or *esse rei* as the cause of truth of *enuntiabilia*: “[V]eritas enuntiabilis causetur ab esse rei.”⁸³

Furthermore, twice in the *Sentences* commentary Aquinas identifies *esse rei* as the foundation and cause of truth in the intellect:

Cum autem in re sit quidditas ejus et suum esse, veritas fundatur in esse rei magis quam in quidditate, sicut et nomen entis ab esse imponitur; et in ipsa operatione intellectus accipientis esse rei sicut est per quamdam similationem ad ipsum, completur relatio adaequationis, in qua consistit ratio veritatis. Unde dico, quod ipsum esse rei est causa veritatis, secundum quod est in cognitione intellectus.⁸⁴

Since in a thing there is its essence and its *esse*, truth is founded on the *esse* of a thing more than on its essence, just as the term ‘*ens*’ is imposed from *esse* [more than essence]. And in the operation of the intellect that receives the *esse* of a thing just as it is through a certain likeness to itself, the relation of adaequation is completed, in which relation the notion of truth consists. Thus I say that the *esse* of a thing is the cause of truth according as it is in the cognition of the intellect.

Alio modo dicitur esse ipse actus essentiae; sicut vivere, quod est esse viventibus, est animae actus; non actus secundus, qui est operatio, sed actus primus. Tertio modo dicitur esse quod significat veritatem compositionis in propositionibus, secundum quod «est» dicitur copula: et secundum hoc est in intellectu componente et dividente quantum ad sui complementum; sed fundatur in esse rei, quod est actus essentiae, sicut supra de veritate dictum est.⁸⁵

In another way, *esse* is said to be the very act of an essence; as ‘to live’, which is ‘to be alive’, is the act of the soul, not its second act or operation, but its first act. In a third way, *esse* is said to signify the truth of the composition in propositions, according to which ‘*est*’ is said the copula. And in this sense, [*esse*] is in the intellect composing and dividing as its complement, but it is founded in the *esse* of a thing, which is the act of an essence, just as truth was said to be earlier.

How are we to understand the expression “*esse rei*” as Aquinas uses it in this context?

What does the expression “*esse rei*” stand for in reality when used to designate that which *enuntiabilia* signify?

⁸³ *In I Sent.*, d. 41, q. 1, a. 5, ad 2, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 976.

⁸⁴ *In I Sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 1, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 486.

⁸⁵ *In I Sent.*, d. 33, q.1, a.1 ad 1, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 766.

The Standard Interpretation. The mainstream interpretation of the expression “*esse rei*” focuses on *esse* alone. The reference to a thing (“*rei*”) would be incidental: in reality all *esse* is found as received and limited by the essence it actualizes and, in this sense, as pertaining to ‘a thing’. But the real composition of *esse* and essence within a thing would not be what Aquinas has in mind as the ultimate object of the second operation. That which we know in a composite understanding by means of *enuntiabilia* is *esse* taken by itself and, as it were, as “abstracted” or “separated” from the essence it actualizes and with which it enters into composition. Aquinas’ reference to the real distinction between essence and *esse* within creatures coupled with the subsequent correlation of essence with the first operation of the intellect, arguably give credit to the claim in the standard interpretation that the expression “*esse rei*” as signified by *enuntiabilia* stands for *esse* taken apart from any composition in reality, notably, apart from the composition with essence. In other words, according to the standard interpretation of “*esse rei*” in *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, nothing but *esse* is grasped in the second operation of the intellect. Since *esse* considered in itself constitutes one absolute object, it follows that that which *enuntiabilia* signify in reality is a simple or non-composite object, i.e. an *incomplexum*.

Response to the Standard Interpretation. The problem with the interpretation of the expression “*esse rei*” as referring to *esse* considered in itself is that it disregards the relevant theoretical context of the discussion, namely, the theory of *enuntiabilia*. As we are about to see, although that which the human intellect knows in its second operation by means of *enuntiabilia* constitutes one single object, such single object is by no means simple (*unum simplex*). For, how could something which is intrinsically composed, i.e.,

an *enuntiabile*, be ‘equated to’ something which lacks composition, the simple *actus essendi*? *Enuntiabilia*, we might recall, are the primary bearers of truth values. If Aquinas’ conception of truth as *adaequatio intellectus et rei* is to be legitimate, that which corresponds *ex parte rei* to the composition of *enuntiabilia* must be something equally complex or composed (*unum complexum*). Thus, if “*esse rei*” is that which *enuntiabilia* signify in reality, then the expression “*esse rei*” cannot stand for simple or non-composite *esse* by itself, that is, *esse* considered apart from any subject in reality, of which it is affirmed in a way that yields a truth value. What is it, then, that *enuntiabilia* signify in reality? What does the human intellect know by means of *enuntiabilia* in its second operation?

An Alternative Interpretation. Notice that Régis raises for us an alternative to what has become the standard interpretation: ‘*esse rei*’ signifies propositional being, being in the sense of the truth of the proposition. But in the texts I have translated immediately above,⁸⁶ one can already see the inadequacy of this alternative interpretation: there, propositional being is clearly said to be other than and founded on *esse rei*. Still, this is a puzzling doctrine: are all propositions about the *existence* of things, that is to say, are all propositions existential? Existential propositions, if anything, seem to be less paradigmatic than propositions that affirm accident of subject, or form of matter, which latter are mentioned in *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3 itself and in other parallels in the early works and throughout the corpus. What, then, can Aquinas mean by this doctrine of *esse rei* and what, if any, is its justification?

The answer to these questions rests on Aquinas’ theory of predication. Before we can determine what the expression “*esse rei*” stands for when used to designate that

⁸⁶ See at note 95 below, in addition to at notes 84-85 above.

which *enuntiabilia* signify, we need to determine first what it is that, for Aquinas, the intellect conceives in the composition of *enuntiabilia*, that is to say, in the composition of subject and predicate. In the following sections, then, I review the main tenants of Aquinas' theory of predication. Next, I answer the question, what does “*esse rei*” as signified by *enuntiabilia* stand for in reality? Finally, I return to *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3 and address the apparent inconsistency between, on the one hand, the semantics of the commentary on the *Peri hermeneias*, where Aquinas explicitly recognizes a simple conception of *esse*, and, on the other hand, the correlation in the commentaries on the *Sentences* and on Boethius' *De trinitate* between the second operation of the intellect and ‘the *esse* of a thing’ or ‘*esse rei*’, which correlation has traditionally suggested the impossibility of a simple conception of *esse*.

4.2.4 The Inherence Theory of Predication in Aquinas

A. Copulative Propositions

According to the inherence theory of predication upheld by Aquinas,⁸⁷ the composition of subject and predicate produced in and by the intellect is a sign of the

⁸⁷ See *In III Sent.*, d. 5, q. 3, a. 3 expositio, Mandonnet ed., vol. 3, p. 210: “Et dicendum, quod differentia est inter nomina substantiva et adjectiva. *Substantiva* enim significant non tantum formam, sed etiam suppositum formae, unde possunt praedicari ratione utriusque. Et quando praedicantur *ratione suppositi*, dicitur praedicatio per identitatem. Quando autem *ratione formae*, dicitur per denominationem, sive informationem. Et haec est magis propria praedicatio, quia termini in praedicato tenentur formaliter. *Adjectiva* autem tantum significant formam. Et ideo non possunt praedicari, nisi per informationem;” and *ST I*, q. 13, a. 12, Leonine ed., vol. 4, p. 164: “[I]n qualibet propositione affirmativa vera, oportet quod praedicatum et subiectum significant idem secundum rem aliquo modo, et diversum secundum rationem. Et hoc patet tam in propositionibus quae sunt de praedicato accidentali, quam in illis quae sunt de praedicato substantiali. Manifestum est enim quod homo et albus sunt idem subiecto, et differunt ratione, alia enim est ratio hominis, et alia ratio albi. Et similiter cum dico *homo est animal*, illud enim ipsum quod est homo, vere animal est; in eodem enim supposito est et natura sensibilis, a qua dicitur animal, et rationalis, a qua dicitur homo. Unde hic etiam praedicatum et subiectum sunt

inherence (*inesse*) of the predicate in the subject.⁸⁸ More precisely, at least in the paradigm case,⁸⁹ an *enuntiabile* signifies or is a sign of the inherence in reality of the “form” signified by the predicate-term in the “thing” denoted by the subject-term.⁹⁰ As

Aquinas writes:

[I]n omni propositione [intellectus noster] aliquam formam significatam per praedicatum, vel applicat [intellectus] alicui rei significatae per subiectum, vel removet ab ea.⁹¹

[I]n every proposition [our intellect] either applies a form signified by the predicate to a thing signified by the subject, or it removes it from it.

idem supposito, sed diversa ratione. Sed et in propositionibus in quibus idem praedicatur de seipso, hoc aliquo modo invenitur; in quantum intellectus id quod ponit ex parte subiecti, trahit ad partem suppositi, quod vero ponit ex parte praedicati, trahit ad naturam formae in supposito existentis, secundum quod dicitur quod *praedicata tenentur formaliter, et subiecta materialiter*. Huic vero diversitati quae est secundum rationem, respondet pluralitas praedicati et subiecti, identitatem vero rei significat intellectus per ipsam compositionem.”

⁸⁸ See e.g. *In VI Meta.*, lect. 4, n. 1223, Marietti ed., p. 309: “Dicitur autem hic affirmatio compositio, quia significat praedicatum inesse subiecto;” and *In I Perih.*, lect. 5, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 27, lines 108-13): [Q]uia subiectum enunciationis significatur ut cui inheret aliquid, cum uerbum significet actionem per modum actionis, de cuius ratione est ut inhereat, semper ponitur ex parte praedicati, nunquam autem ex parte subiecti, nisi sumatur in ui nominis.”

⁸⁹ Medieval scholars make use of “paradigm cases” to convey a general doctrine; secondary cases do not fit the paradigm perfectly, but may be understood in light of it. One does not find in logical treatises, for instance, a set of “semantic rules” that apply absolutely and unequivocally to all cases, as in Carnap, although such rules can be formulated. See Gyula Klima, “The Semantic Principles Underlying Saint Thomas Aquinas’ Metaphysics of Being,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 5 (1996): 87-88.

⁹⁰ Since for Aquinas “*negatio reducitur ad genus affirmationis*” (*In I Sent.*, d. 26, q. 2, a. 3; *ST I*, q. 33, a. 4, ad 3), in the following pages I will concentrate on Aquinas’ analysis of affirmative propositions. Negations or affirmations of privation can be understood mutatis mutandis against affirmative paradigm cases. See also, in addition to the text at note 40, *In II Sent.*, d. 37, q.1, a. 2, ad 3, Mandonnet ed., vol. 2, p. 947: “[D]icendum, quod, ut supra dictum est, ens dicitur dupliciter. Uno modo quod significat essentiam rei extra animam existentis; et hoc modo non potest dici ens deformitas peccati, quae privatio quaedam est: privationes enim essentiam non habent in rerum natura. Alio modo secundum quod significat veritatem propositionis; et sic deformitas dicitur esse, non propter hoc quod in re esse habeat, sed quia intellectus componit privationem cum subjecto, sicut formam quamdam. Unde sicut ex compositione formae ad subjectum vel ad materiam, relinquitur quoddam esse substantiale vel accidentale; ita etiam intellectus compositionem privationis cum subjecto per quoddam esse significat. Sed hoc esse non est nisi esse rationis, cum in re potius sit non esse; et secundum hoc quod in ratione esse habet, constat quod a Deo est.” Notice that according to this text, God, as cause of all *esse*, is also the cause of *esse rationis* of privations.

⁹¹ *ST I*, q. 16, a. 2, Leonine ed., vol. 4, p. 208. See also *SCG II*, c. 96, Leonine ed., vol. 13, p. 572, lines 31-37B), where Aquinas writes of the intellect: “Intelligit enim *quod quid est* abstrahendo

For Aquinas, the logical composition of subject and predicate does not consist of the synthesis of two concepts, as if the proposition ‘a man is white’ were to be equal to the phrase ‘a white man’.⁹² The intellect’s composition of subject and predicate must be interpreted instead as consisting of the application or attribution of a “concept” to an individual thing, that is to say, of the attribution of the intelligible content signified by the predicate-term to the thing denoted by the subject-term. Accordingly, under the framework of the inherence theory of predication, the subject and predicate terms have very different roles. A term placed in the subject position represents what it “stands for,” that is, the subject it supposits for. Properly speaking, then, the subject-term does not signify (*significat*) but supposits (*supposit*). A term placed in the predicate position, on the other hand, represents what it signifies, that is, a form or act as conceived by the intellect in a concept or simple conception.⁹³ This is what Aquinas has in mind when he states that, in a proposition, the subject-term is taken “materially” whereas the predicate-term is taken “formally.”⁹⁴

From above, it follows that in the composition of *enuntiabilia* the intellect conceives and asserts to be the case the inherence (*inesse*) of some form or act in a subject or supposit. Now, the inherence of a form or act in a subject or supposit is nothing

intelligibilia a sensibilibus . . . Componit autem aut dividit applicando intelligibilia prius abstracta ad res.”

⁹² For an example of an interpretation of the immediate object of judgment as a composition or synthesis of concepts, see Louis-Marie Régis, *Epistemology*, 312-313, 322-331.

⁹³ See e.g. *ST* III, q. 16, a. 9, ad 3, Leonine ed., vol. 11, p. 213: “[N]omen . . . secundum quod ponitur in subiecto, tenetur pro supposito, secundum autem quod ponitur in praedicato refertur ad naturam.” On the role of the subject and predicate terms in Aquinas, see Ambrose McNicholl, “On Judging Existence,” *The Thomist* 43 (1979): 530-42. For a more general discussion, see Peter Geach, *Reference and Generality* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), 22-44.

⁹⁴ See *In I Sent.*, d. 4, q. 2, a. 2; *In III Sent.*, d. 1, q. 2, a. 5, ad 5; d. 6, q. 1, a. 3, ad 3 and q. 2, a. 1, ad 7; d. 11, q. 1, a. 2, ad 3; *ST* I, q. 13, a. 12; q. 31, a. 3, ad 2; *ST* III, q. 16, a. 7, ad 4; q. 16, a. 9 co. and ad 3, q. 17, a. 1, ad 3; *In IX Meta.*, lect. 11, n. 1898.

but the actuality or actual existence of that form or act in the subject. This is why Aquinas remarks that when we wish to signify the inherence of some form or act, whether substantial or accidental, in a subject, we do so by means of the verb ‘is’ which signifies ‘being in act’ (*esse actu*):

[H]oc uerbum ‘est’ . . . significat enim id quod primo cadit in intellectu per modum actualitatis absolute; nam ‘est’ simpliciter dictum significat esse actu, et ideo significat per modum uerbi. Quia uero actualitas, quam principaliter significat hoc uerbum ‘est’, est communiter actualitas omnis forme uel actus, substancialis uel accidentalis, inde est quod, cum uolumus significare quamcumque formam uel actum actualiter inesse alicui subiecto, significamus illud per hoc uerbum ‘est’.⁹⁵

[T]he verb ‘is’ . . . signifies that which first falls into the intellect in the mode of actuality absolutely; for ‘is’ simply said signifies being in act, and thus it signifies in the mode of a verb. But because the actuality that is principally signified by the verb ‘is’ is, in common, the actuality of every form or act, whether substantial or accidental, it follows that when we wish to signify that some form or act is actually in some subject, we signify this by means of the verb ‘is’.

For Aquinas, then, the role of the verb ‘is’ as copula is not merely that of joining together the subject and predicate terms. The verbal copula is adjacent to the predicate-term, so that it is in fact part of the predicate.⁹⁶ The copulative role of the verb ‘is’ as adjacent to the predicate-term is to signify the actuality of the form or act signified by the predicate-term, so that by means of the verb ‘is’ the form or act signified by the predicate-term is attributed to the subject as inherent. This is why, properly speaking, in a proposition such as ‘a man is white’, what is attributed on the side of the predicate to the individual man the subject-term ‘a man’ supposits for is not whiteness as such, i.e. the form signified by the predicate-term ‘white’, but ‘the actuality of whiteness’, ‘the inherence of whiteness’

⁹⁵ *In I Periher.*, lect. 5, lns. 391-403, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 31. See also *ST I*, q. 3, a. 4, Leonine ed., vol. 4, p. 42: “Secundo, quia esse est actualitas omnis formae vel naturae: non enim bonitas vel humanitas significatur in actu, nisi prout significamus eam *esse*,” *De pot.*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 9, Pession ed., p. 192: “Qualibet autem forma signata non intelligitur in actu nisi per hoc quod esse ponitur . . . Unde patet quod hoc quod dico *esse* est actualitas omnium actuum, et propter hoc est perfectio omnium perfectionum.”

⁹⁶ See *In II Periher.*, lect. 2, lines 36-52.

or, simply said, ‘being white’. Therefore, that which the intellect conceives and asserts to be the case in the *enuntiabile* ‘that a man is white’ is the actuality (or inherence) of the accidental form whiteness in an individual man. In other words, the *enuntiabile* ‘that a man is white’ signifies ‘the being white of a man’. Aquinas writes:

<p>[O]mne esse a forma aliqua inhaerente est, sicut esse album ab albedine [N]on potest intelligi quod paries sit albus sine albedine inhaerente.⁹⁷</p>	<p>[A]ll <i>esse</i> comes from some inhering form, as being white comes from whiteness It cannot be understood that a wall is white without the inherence of whiteness.</p>
<p>“[. . .] ut esse album attribuitur Sorti cum dicimus: Sortes est albus.”⁹⁸</p>	<p>[. . .] as being white is attributed to Socrates when we say: Socrates is white.</p>

Likewise, we would say that the *enuntiabile* ‘that Socrates is a man’ signifies ‘the being human of Socrates’, for that which is attributed to Socrates on the side of the predicate in the proposition ‘Socrates is a man’ is ‘being human’, that is to say, ‘the actuality of humanity’ or ‘the inherence of humanity’. Hence, that which the intellect conceives and asserts to be the case in the *enuntiabile* ‘that Socrates is a man’ is the actuality (or inherence) of the essence humanity in Socrates or, better yet, as we shall see later, the actuality of the essence humanity in the individual matter by which Socrates is this man.

One of the consequences of the theory of predication depicted above (at least for the type of propositions we have been discussing thus far where the verb ‘is’ functions as copula) is that neither the existence of the thing denoted by the subject-term nor its

⁹⁷ *In I Sent.*, d. 17, q. 1, a. 1, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 393.

⁹⁸ *Quodl.* IX, q. 2, a. 2, Leonine ed., vol. 25/1, p. 95, lines 65-66. Note in the last two texts the use of the term ‘white’ (*albus*) not ‘whiteness’ (*albedo*) in the predicate position. We do not say ‘a man is whiteness’ (*ST I*, q. 85, a. 5, ad 3); only a concrete term (noun or verb) may be placed in the predicate position (see e.g. *In I Sent.*, d. 25, q. 1, a. 1, ad 3; and *In I Perihier.*, lect. 5, lines 108-13). The reason is that the conception signified by a concrete term does not abstract or prescind from the quality’s inherence in a subject, which is signified therefore by the term in the predicate position: ‘white’ signifies the form of whiteness as in a subject; ‘runs’ signifies the act of running as in a subject. On the signification of concrete terms see *De ente*, c. 2; *In I Sent.*, d. 23, q. 1, a. 1; *Quodl.* II, q. 2, a. 2 *in contr.*; *Quodl.* IX, q. 2, a. 1, ad 1; *SCG IV*, c. 81; *ST I*, q. 3, a. 3; q. 13, a. 1, ad 2; *In De hebdom.*, lect. 2; *In VII Meta.*, lect. 5, n. 1378-1380.

identity with the thing denoted by the predicate-term matters for verification, for none of the above is asserted to be the case by the intellect in this type of judgment.⁹⁹

Accordingly, explaining Aristotle's formula 'it is because the thing is or is not that a proposition is said to be true or false', Aquinas remarks that the thing that is or is not (i.e. the *enuntiabile*) should not be understood as referring

[. . .] ad solam existenciam vel non existenciam subiecti, set ad hoc quod res significata per predicatum insit vel non insit rei significate per subiectum. ¹⁰⁰	[. . .] to the existence or not existence of the subject alone, but to the fact that the thing signified by the predicate does or does not inhere in the thing signified by the subject.
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What truly matters for verification, that which must obtain in reality for a judgment to be true, is the actuality (or inherence) of the form or act signified by the predicate-term in the individual subject or supposit denoted by the subject-term.

On the issue of verification we mentioned earlier that Aquinas' conception of truth as *adaequatio intellectus et rei* requires that that which correspond *ex parte rei* to the composition of *enuntiabilia*, as both the foundation and cause of truth, must be something equally complex or composed. On the matter, Aquinas writes:

Oportet enim veritatem et falsitatem quae est in oratione vel opinione, reduci ad dispositionem rei sicut ad causam. Cum autem intellectus compositionem format, accipit duo, quorum unum se habet ut	Truth and falsity that is in speech or opinion must be reduced to the disposition of the thing as to their cause. When the intellect forms a composition, it regards two [components], one of which stands as
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⁹⁹ The actual existence of the thing denoted by the subject-term as well as its identity with the thing denoted by the predicate-term is implied but not asserted. The identity of reference implied in affirmative predication is what Aquinas has in mind when he states that the predicate and subject terms signify the same in reality, or that they are the same in supposit, but differ conceptually (See *ST I*, q. 13, a. 12; q. 85, a. 5, ad 3; *In VI Meta.*, lect. 4, n. 1241). Indeed, if whiteness actually inheres in an individual man, then the term 'a man' and the term 'white' in the proposition 'a man is white' must denote the same thing. Weidemann, "The Logic of Being," 188, 196n16.

¹⁰⁰ *In I Perihier.*, lect. 9, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 47, lines 63-70. See also *In II Perihier.*, lect. 2, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 88, lines 43-46: "[C]um dicitur: «Sortes est albus»: non enim est intentio loquentis ut asserat Sortem esse in rerum natura, set ut attribuat ei albedinem mediante hoc uerbo 'est'."

formale respectu alterius: unde accipit id ut in alio existens, propter quod praedicata tenentur formaliter. Et ideo, si talis operatio intellectus ad rem debeat reduci sicut ad causam, oportet quod in compositis substantiis ipsa compositio formae ad materiam, aut eius quod se habet per modum formae et materiae, vel etiam compositio accidentis ad subiectum, respondeat quasi fundamentum et causa veritatis, compositioni, quam intellectus interior format et exprimit voce. Sicut cum dico, Socrates est homo, veritas huius enunciationis causatur ex compositione formae humanae ad materiam individualement, per quam Socrates est hic homo: et cum dico, homo est albus, causa veritatis est compositio albedinis ad subiectum: et similiter est in aliis. Et idem patet in divisione.¹⁰¹

formal in relation to the other; hence [the intellect] takes it as existent in the other, because predicates are taken formally. Therefore, if such an operation of the intellect must be reduced to a thing as to its cause, then in composite substances the very composition of form with matter, or of what is related in the way of form and matter, and also the composition of accident with subject, must correspond, as the quasi-foundation and cause of truth, to the composition which the intellect forms interiorly and expresses in words. For example, when I say, ‘Socrates is a man’, the truth of this enunciation is caused by the composition of the form humanity with the individual matter by which Socrates is this man; and when I say, ‘a man is white’, the cause of truth is the composition of whiteness with a subject; and similarly in other cases. And the same is clear in division [i.e., negation].

According to Aquinas in the passage above, the real composition found within composite substances is “quasi fundamentum et causa veritatis” of the logical composition effected by the intellect in its second operation. This means that, in the paradigm case, what corresponds in reality to the logical composition of *enuntiabilia*, that is to say, what verifies an *enuntiabile*, is the real composition of composite substances.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ *In IX Meta.*, lect. 11, n. 1898, Marietti ed., p. 456. See also *ST I*, q. 85, a. 5, ad 3, Leonine ed., vol. 5, p. 341: “Unde compositioni et divisioni intellectus respondet quidem aliquid ex parte rei . . . Invenitur autem duplex compositio in re materiali. Prima quidem, formae ad materiam, et huic respondet compositio intellectus qua totum universale de sua parte praedicatur; nam genus sumitur a materia communi, differentia vero completiva speciei a forma, particulare vero a materia individuali. Secunda vero compositio est accidentis ad subiectum, et huic reali compositioni respondet compositio intellectus secundum quam praedicatur accidens de subiecto, ut cum dicitur, *homo est albus*.”

¹⁰² In the passage we just quoted, Aquinas speaks of a third composition apart from the one of form with matter and of accident with subject, namely the composition “of what is related in the way of form and matter.” There are different opinions concerning what Aquinas has in mind here. Ludger Oeing-Hanhoff suggests the composition of *esse* and essence. Joseph Owens identifies it as the composition of genus and species. See Ludger Oeing-Hanhoff, “Die Methoden der Metaphysik im Mittelalter,” in *Die Metaphysik im Mittelalter: ihr Ursprung und ihre Bedeutung*,

How does the inherence theory of predication relate to Aquinas' correlation between logical and real composition above? Let us consider the two paradigm cases we have been studying. According to the inherence theory of predication, what needs to obtain in reality paradigmatically for the proposition 'a man is white' to be true is the actuality (or inherence) of whiteness in a man. It is not difficult to see how the real composition of the accidental form whiteness and an individual man accounts for the actuality of the accidental form whiteness in the latter; so that the real composition of the accidental form whiteness and an individual man is identified as the cause of truth of the *enuntiabile* 'that a man is white' which is signified by the proposition 'a man is white'. The case of the proposition 'Socrates is a man', which according to Aquinas has as the cause of its truth the composition of the essence humanity and the individual matter by which Socrates is this man, is perhaps not as obvious. What we need to keep in mind, though, is that in the proposition 'Socrates is a man', the intellect conceives and asserts the actuality (or inherence) of humanity in an individual subject (a subject that happens to be named 'Socrates'). What is at stake is the inherence of humanity in this rather than that individual subject. Now, in the case of a material entity, whose essence is composed of common matter and form, its essence accounts for the fact that it belongs to a given species, but it is the composition of its essence and the individual matter by which the material entity is this individual rather than another that accounts for the fact that this individual entity enjoys the mode of being proper to the species. The reason is that

ed. Paul Wilpert (Berlin: Gruyter, 1963), 87; and Joseph Owens, "Judgment and Truth in Aquinas," 45. I am inclined to agree with Oeing-Hanhoff, for Aquinas is speaking of the composition found in composite substances and the composition of genus and species is regarded by Aquinas as a logical composition – although certainly dependent on the real composition of form with matter. See *De ente*, c. 2; *In I Sent.*, d. 25, q. 1, a. 2, ad 2; *De ver.*, q. 3, a. 2, ad 3; and *ST I*, q. 85, a. 5, ad 3.

individual matter limits the essence it receives to an individual subject.¹⁰³ Hence, what accounts for the actuality of humanity in an individual subject is the real composition within the subject of the essence humanity and the individual matter by which the subject is this individual human rather than another.

B. Existential Propositions

Up to this point, we have considered only one type of proposition, the type where the verb ‘is’ functions as copula. But Aquinas recognizes another type of proposition, one where the verb ‘is’ is predicated not as adjacent to some term but in itself. Aquinas writes:

[H]oc uerbum ‘est’ quandoque in enunciatione predicatur secundum se, ut cum dicitur: «Sortes est», per quod nichil aliud intendimus significare quam quod Sortes sit in rerum natura; quandoque uero non predicatur per se, quasi principale predicatum, set quasi coniunctum principali predicato ad connectendum ipsum subiecto, sicut cum dicitur : «Sortes est albus» : non enim est intentio loquentis ut asserat Sortem esse in rerum natura, set ut attribuat ei albedinem mediante hoc uerbo ‘est’; et ideo in talibus ‘est’ predicatur ut adiacens principali predicato, et dicitur esse tertium non quia sit tertium predicatum, set quia est tertia dictio posita in enunciatione, que simul cum nomine predicato facit unum predicatum, ut sic enunciatio diuidatur in duas partes, non in tres.¹⁰⁴

The verb ‘is’ is sometimes predicated in a proposition in itself, as when one says ‘Socrates is’, by which we do not intend to signify anything other than that Socrates exists in reality. But sometimes the verb ‘is’ is not predicated in itself, as if [it were] the principal predicate, but, as it were, conjoined to the principal predicate in order to connect it to the subject, as when one says ‘Socrates is white’. For, it is not the intention of the speaker to assert that Socrates exists in reality, but to attribute to him whiteness by means of the verb ‘is’; and for this reason, ‘is’ in such cases is predicated as adjacent to the principal predicate, and it is said to be ‘third’, not because it is a third predicate, but because it is a third expression placed in the proposition, which together with the noun predicated makes one predicate, and thus the proposition has two parts, not three.

¹⁰³ See *De spirt. creat.*, a. 1, ad 2, Leonine ed., vol. 24/2, p. 14, lines 431-33: “[F]orma speciei limitatur ad indiuiduum: et talis limitatio forme est per materiam;” also *In De hebdom.*, lect. 2, lines 77-80.

¹⁰⁴ *In II Periher.*, lect. 2, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 88, lines 36-52.

One thing to take note regarding the two types of propositions Aquinas mentions above is that the structure of a proposition of the form ‘Socrates is’ does not differ greatly from the structure of a proposition of the form ‘Socrates is white’. They both contain two components, namely, a subject and a predicate. The difference between them is that in the proposition ‘Socrates is white’, the predicate is composed of the verb ‘is’ and the term ‘white’, whereas in the proposition ‘Socrates is’ the verb ‘is’ alone constitutes the predicate. Aquinas’ distinction between the two types of propositions is thus based on the content of the predicate. Such a discerning principle is consistent with Aquinas’ view of the predicate as the principal part of a proposition.¹⁰⁵

Let us now turn our attention to Aquinas’ analysis of those propositions where the verb ‘is’ alone constitutes the predicate. What is it that the intellect conceives and asserts to be the case when it judges, for instance, ‘Socrates is’? As we indicated above, in the case of the proposition ‘Socrates is’ the verb ‘is’ is predicated in itself and not as adjacent to some term signifying a form or act. Now, the verb ‘is’, when taken in itself, signifies actuality (*actualitas*) or being (*esse*) in the mode of a verb, that is, it signifies ‘being in act’ (*esse actu*).¹⁰⁶ In the words of Aquinas:

[H]oc uerbum ‘est’ . . . significat enim id quod primo cadit in intellectu per modum actualitatis absolute; nam ‘est’ simpliciter dictum significat esse actu, et ideo significat per modum uerbi.¹⁰⁷

[The] verb ‘is’ . . . signifies that which first falls into the intellect in the mode of actuality absolutely; for, ‘is’ simply said signifies being in act, and thus it signifies in the mode of a verb.

¹⁰⁵ See *In I Perihier.*, lect. 8, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 41, lines 108-13): “[P]redicatum autem est principalior pars enunciationis, eo quod est pars formalis et completiua ipsius.”

¹⁰⁶ Aquinas often associates *esse* with actuality. See e.g. *ST I*, q. 4, a. 1, ad 3, Leonine ed., vol. 4, p. 50: “Nihil enim habet actualitatem, nisi in quantum est;” *ST I*, q. 54, a. 1, Leonine ed., vol. 5, p. 39: “[E]sse est actualitas substantiae vel essentiae;” *De spirt. creat.*, a. 11, Leonine ed., vol. 24/2, p. 118, lines 205-206): “Sicut autem ipsum esse est actualitas quedam essentiae;” and *De pot.*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 9, Pession ed., p. 192: “Unde patet quod hoc quod dico *esse* est actualitas omnium actuum, et propter hoc est perfectio omnium perfectionum.”

¹⁰⁷ *In I Perihier.*, lect. 5, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 31, lines 391-97.

Accordingly, that which is attributed to Socrates in the proposition ‘Socrates is’ is ‘being in act’ or ‘to be in act’ (*esse actu*). Now, elsewhere, Aquinas states that the proposition ‘Socrates is’ signifies that Socrates is or exists in the nature of things:

[H]oc uerbum ‘est’ quandoque in enunciatione predicatur secundum se, ut cum dicitur: «Sortes est», per quod nihil aliud intendimus significare quam quod Sortes sit in rerum natura.¹⁰⁸

The verb ‘is’ in a proposition is sometimes predicated in itself, as when one says ‘Socrates is’, by which we intend to signify nothing else than that Socrates exists in the nature of things.

Aquinas often explains that a thing (*res*) or a being (*ens*) is or exists because it has *esse*, it is in act, or it participates in the act of being (*actus essendi*).¹⁰⁹ Thus, what is attributed to Socrates in the proposition ‘Socrates is’ is *esse* as signifying existence or the act of being, that is, *esse* taken in its primary sense.

According to Aquinas, when taken in its primary sense, *esse* may be attributed to anything which is or exists in the nature of things, whether a substance or an accident, so that we may say both ‘a man is’ and ‘a color is’.¹¹⁰ However, in its primary sense, *esse* is attributed most properly and truly only to that which subsists in itself, that is to say, only to a substance:

Alio modo *esse* dicitur actus entis in quantum est ens, idest quo denominatur aliquid ens actu in rerum natura; et sic *esse* non attribuitur nisi rebus ipsis quae in decem generibus continentur, unde ens a tali esse dictum per decem genera dividitur.

In another way, *esse* is said to be the act of a being insofar as it is a being, that is, that by which something is denominated ‘a being’ in act in the nature of things; and in this sense *esse* is attributed only to those things that are counted in the ten genera, so

¹⁰⁸ *In II Perihier.*, lect. 2, Leonine ed., vol. 1*/1, p. 88, lines 36-40.

¹⁰⁹ See e.g. *In De hebdom.*, lect. 2, Leonine ed., vol. 50, p. 271, lines 57-59: “[. . .] ita possumus dicere quod ens, sive id quod est, sit, in quantum participat actum essendi;” *SCG I*, c. 22, Leonine ed., vol. 13, p. 68, lines 29-31B and 48-49B: “*Esse* actum quendam nominat: non enim dicitur esse aliquid ex hoc quod est in potentia, sed ex eo quod est in actu [. . .] Amplius. Omnis res est per hoc quod habet esse;” and *ST I-II*, q. 26, a. 4, Leonine ed., vol. 6, p. 190: “[E]ns simpliciter est quod habet esse.”

¹¹⁰ See *In II Sent.*, d. 34, q. 1, a. 1, Mandonnet ed., vol. 2, p. 872: “[O]mne quod habet naturale esse in rebus potest significari per propositionem affirmativam esse, ut cum dicitur: color est vel homo est.”

Sed hoc esse attribuitur alicui rei dupliciter. Uno modo, sicut ei quod proprie et vere habet esse vel est; et sic attribuitur soli substantiae per se subsistenti.¹¹¹

that ‘a being’ said from this *esse* is divided by the ten genera. But this *esse* is attributed to a thing in two ways. In one way, as to that which properly and truly has *esse* or is; and in this way *esse* is attributed only to a substance that subsists per se.

Thus, only a substance may properly and truly be said ‘to be in act’ in an affirmative proposition, as when we say ‘Socrates is’, by which we signify that the substance for which the subject-term ‘Socrates’ supposit is or exists in the nature of things.

Given that what is attributed to Socrates in the proposition ‘Socrates is’ is *esse* as signifying existence or the act of being (*actus essendi*), it follows that that which the intellect conceives and asserts to be the case in the *enuntiabile* ‘that Socrates is’ is ‘the existence of Socrates’ or ‘the act of being of Socrates’. Now, for a substance to exist, its essence must be actualized by its corresponding *esse*. This means that the real composition of essence and *esse* within a substance accounts for the existence of the substance. Accordingly, that which verifies the paradigmatic *enuntiabile* ‘that Socrates is’ is the real composition of *esse* and supposit within Socrates. Therefore, that which *ex parte rei* corresponds to the logical composition effected in and by the intellect when it composes an affirmation such as ‘Socrates is’ is the real composition of *esse* and supposit.

4.2.5 The *Esse* of Things as Signified by *Enuntiabilia*

We are ready to offer an answer to our previous question regarding *enuntiabilia* and the *esse* of a thing. We wanted to know what the expression “*esse rei*,” when used to designate that which *enuntiabilia* signify, stands for in reality. As the preceding

¹¹¹ *Quodl.* IX, q. 2 a. 2, Leonine ed., vol. 25/1, p. 94, lines 41-50.

discussion has shown, both existential and copulative propositions involve the predication of *esse*, that is to say, the attribution to a subject of *esse* taken either in the sense of existence or in the sense of a particular mode of being (as in ‘being white’ or ‘*esse album*’).¹¹² In fact, even in those cases where the verb ‘is’ is not explicitly contained in the predicate, as in the proposition ‘Socrates runs’, *esse* is attributed to some subject, for every verb can be restated with ‘is’.¹¹³ Therefore, *enuntiabilia* are said by Aquinas to signify “the *esse* of a thing” or “*esse rei*” because *enuntiabilia* involve the conception of ‘the *esse* of a subject’. But *enuntiabilia* signify ‘the *esse* of a subject’ in two ways. An *enuntiabile* may signify ‘the existence of a subject’, as in the *enuntiabile* ‘that Socrates is’, or it may signify ‘the being-so-and-so of a subject’, as in the *enuntiabile* ‘that Socrates is human’ or ‘that Socrates is white’ or ‘that human is risible’. We conclude, then, that the expression “*esse rei*,” when used by Aquinas to indicate that which *enuntiabilia* signify, stands for the composed unit in the nature of things that is, as is especially clear in the paradigm case, a subject or supposit and its *esse*. In other words, that which the human intellect knows by means of *enuntiabilia* in its second operation is, paradigmatically, *esse* taken as “inherent” in a subject or supposit. This means that the ultimate object of the intellect’s act of composition and division is not *esse* considered in itself apart from any composition in reality, but rather ‘the *esse* of a thing’, that is, the *esse* which belongs to an individual subject.

The interpretation of the expression “*esse rei*” as signified by *enuntiabilia* in terms of the notion of *esse* as “inherent” in a subject is consistent with Aquinas’

¹¹² On this latter sense, see e.g. *In I Sent.*, d. 17, q. 1, a. 1, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 393: “[O]mne esse a forma aliqua inhaerente est, sicut esse album ab albedine ... Sicut igitur non potest intelligi quod paries sit albus sine albedine inhaerente.”

¹¹³ See *In V Meta.*, lect. 9, n. 893, Marietti ed., p. 239: “Verbum enim quodlibet resolvitur in hoc verbum Est, et participium;” also *In I Periher.*, lect. 5, lines 304-307.

conception of truth as *adaequatio intellectus et rei*. As we indicated earlier, *enuntiabilia* are the primary bearers of truth value. Thus, given the complex or composed character of *enuntiabilia*, that which *ex parte rei* corresponds to the composition of *enuntiabilia* must be something equally complex or composed (*unum complexum*). In other words, if Aquinas conception of truth is to be valid, that which *enuntiabilia* signify cannot be something simple.¹¹⁴ It is true that *enuntiabilia* signify one thing, that is to say, it is true that only one thing is understood in the conception of an *enuntiabile*. But, *enuntiabilia* signify one thing by means of composition, the composition of subject and predicate. Hence, that which *enuntiabilia* signify in reality, and which serves as the cause and foundation of its truth, is a composed unit wherein some form or act inheres in a subject. Again, notice that *esse rei*, which all *enuntiabilia* can be said to signify, cannot be something simple, such as the simple *actus essendi*. ‘That *actus essendi*’ or ‘that actually exists’ are not *enuntiabilia*: they are too simple. At the same time, although in the paradigm case, ‘that Socrates exists’, the *esse rei* is composite, not only notionally, but also in reality, not all *enuntiabilia* signify an *esse rei* that is *ontologically* composite, as is clear in the *enuntiabile* ‘that God exists’.

The reference to inherence in relation to *esse* might seem problematic from an ontological standpoint, since the notion of inherence brings to mind the inherence of an accident, and *esse* is not an accident of the subject it actualizes and perfects. It would thus be a mistake to consider it as such. However, the notion of *esse* as inherent in a subject in the paradigm case should be understood in the same way Aquinas concedes that *esse*,

¹¹⁴ Even the *enuntiabile* ‘that God exists’ is complex, although the *esse Dei* is, of course, in God simple. And so, this *enuntiabile* must be understood *mutatis mutandis* against the paradigm case ‘that Socrates exists’. ‘That God has simple *esse*’ is a complex, and even God understands the notional complexity in this *enuntiabile* (through his simple *esse*, not through his simple essence alone, according to the teaching of *In I Sent.*, d. 38).

insofar as it is the actuality of some substance, is a quasi-accident.¹¹⁵ Hence, taken as the actuality of a substance, or as the actuality of some form or act, we may speak of *esse* as “inherent” in order to convey the understanding of *esse* as it belongs to a subject.

Accordingly, Aquinas himself speaks of the human intellect’s understanding of *esse* in this way:

<p>Intellectus autem noster hoc modo intelligit esse quo modo invenitur in rebus inferioribus a quibus scientiam capit, in quibus esse non est subsistens, sed inhaerens.¹¹⁶</p>	<p>Our intellect understands <i>esse</i> in the way it is found in things herebelow, from which it receives knowledge, in which <i>esse</i> is not subsistent but inherent.</p>
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Thus, since *esse* is found in things as inherent, if the intellect is to comprehend ‘the *esse* of a thing’ with truth, it must do so by means of the composition of subject and predicate, that is, by means of *enuntiabilia*.

In the next and final section of the chapter, I examine, in light of our findings on *enuntiabilia* and the *esse* of things, Aquinas’ correlation at *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3 between the second operation of the intellect and ‘the *esse* of a thing’ or ‘*esse rei*’. I show that, in setting up the correlation, Aquinas does not restrict the apprehension of *esse* to the second operation of the intellect; thus, all remaining appearance of inconsistency between the commentaries on the *Sentences* and the *Peri hermeneias* on the subject of the human intellect’s apprehension of *esse* is removed.

¹¹⁵ See *Quodl.* II, q. 2, a. 1, ad 2, Leonine ed., vol. 25/2, p. 215, lines 88-90: “[E]sse est accidens, non quasi per accidens se habens, sed quasi actualitas cuiuslibet substantiae.”

¹¹⁶ *De pot.*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 7, Pession ed., p. 192.

4.2.6 Returning to *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3: *Esse Rei* as the Correlate of Human Judgment

At *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, Aquinas observes that, in an operation other than the one in which it apprehends “the quiddities of things,” the human intellect comprehends “the *esse* of a thing” or “*esse rei*” by composing an affirmation:

Cum in re duo sint, quidditas rei, et esse ejus, his duobus respondet duplex operatio intellectus. Una quae dicitur a philosophis formatio, qua apprehendit quidditates rerum, quae etiam a Philosopho, in III *De anima*, dicitur indivisibilium intelligentia. Alia autem comprehendit esse rei, componendo affirmationem, quia etiam esse rei ex materia et forma compositae, a qua cognitionem accipit, consistit in quadam compositione formae ad materiam, vel accidentis ad subjectum.¹¹⁷

Since there are two [components] in a thing, the quiddity of the thing and its *esse*, a twofold operation of the intellect corresponds to these two. One is called “formation” by philosophers, by which the intellect apprehends the quiddities of things, which is also called by the Philosopher, in *De anima III*, the “understanding of indivisibles.” But the other comprehends the *esse* of a thing by composing an affirmation, because also the *esse* of a thing composed of matter and form, from which the intellect receives cognition, subsists (*consistit*) in a certain composition of form with matter or of accident with subject.

Given that Aquinas’ remarks on the second operation of the intellect and ‘the *esse* of a thing’ or ‘*esse rei*’ are preparatory to his final answer to the question of the article, i.e., whether *enuntiabilia* are objects of God’s knowledge, they cannot be understood independently of the theory of *enuntiabilia*.

We have seen that *enuntiabilia* are the direct objects of the intellect’s act of composition and division, that which the intellect conceives when it composes and divides. We also saw that, according to the theory of propositions to which Aquinas subscribes, in the composition of subject and predicate, the intellect attributes *esse* to some subject. In the composition of *enuntiabilia*, then, the intellect comprehends ‘the

¹¹⁷ *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 903.

esse of a thing’ or ‘*esse rei*’. This is why Aquinas affirms at *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3 that the human intellect comprehends ‘the *esse* of a thing’ or ‘*esse rei*’ by composing an affirmation. For instance, in the proposition ‘Socrates is’, the intellect comprehends ‘the existence (*esse* or *actus essendi*) of Socrates’; and, in the proposition ‘Socrates is white’, the intellect comprehends ‘the being-white (*esse album*) of Socrates’.

We also saw that Aquinas identifies ‘*esse rei*’ or ‘the *esse* of a thing’ as that which *enuntiabilia* signify, that is to say, as that which the intellect knows by means of *enuntiabilia*. Now, the expression ‘*esse rei*’, as signified by *enuntiabilia*, stands for, not something simple, but for something composite. Indeed, as we have seen, the expression ‘*esse rei*’ stands for, in the paradigm case, the composed unit in the nature of things that is a subject or supposit and its *esse*. In the composition of *enuntiabilia*, the intellect comprehends, not ‘*esse*’ as a simple, but ‘the *esse* of a thing’ or ‘*esse rei*’. At *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, Aquinas consistently characterizes ‘*esse rei*’ in terms of composition. In the *corpus* of the article, Aquinas observes that the thing in question is a matter-form composite, and that its *esse* subsists (*consistit*) in a certain composition of form with matter or of accident with subject:

Alia [operatio] autem comprehendit esse rei, componendo affirmationem, quia etiam esse rei ex materia et forma compositae, a qua cognitionem accipit, consistit in quadam compositione formae ad materiam, vel accidentis ad subjectum.¹¹⁸

But the other [operation] comprehends the *esse* of a thing by composing an affirmation, because also the *esse* of a thing composed of matter and form, from which the intellect receives cognition, subsists (*consistit*) in a certain composition of form with matter or of accident with subject.

Later, in the response to the second objection, Aquinas further refers to the *esse* of a thing, which the intellect apprehends in its second operation, as composite:

¹¹⁸ *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 903.

Sed intellectus noster, cujus cognitio a rebus oritur, quae esse compositum habent, non apprehendit illud esse nisi componendo et dividendo.¹¹⁹

But our intellect, whose cognition arises from things that have composite *esse*, apprehends this *esse* only by composing and dividing.

Aquinas' characterization of the *esse* of a thing, not only as composite, but also as subsisting (*consistit*) in a certain composition of form with matter or of accident with subject might appear rather puzzling at first glance. How is it possible that a thing's *esse*, as contrasted with essence, be described in terms of the composition of form with matter and accident with subject? A similar characterization of *esse rei*, as apprehended by the second operation of the intellect, is made by Aquinas in his commentary on Boethius' *De trinitate*:

Secunda uero operatio respicit ipsum esse rei; quod quidem resultat ex congregatione principiorum rei in compositis, uel ipsam simplicem naturam rei concomitatur, ut in substantiis simplicibus.¹²⁰

The second operation regards the *esse* itself of a thing, which results from the congregation of the principles of a thing in composite substances, or accompanies the simple nature of a thing, as in simple substances.

Here, Aquinas describes the *esse* of a composite substance, i.e., of a thing composed of matter and form, as resulting from the congregation or composition of the principles of the thing. In addition, there are two other occasions where Aquinas refers to the *esse* of a thing or *esse rei*, as contrasted with its essence, as resulting from the essential principles of the thing:

Alio modo dicitur esse, quod pertinet ad naturam rei, secundum quod dividitur secundum decem genera; et hoc quidem esse est in re, et est actus entis resultans ex principiis rei, sicut lucere est actus lucentis.¹²¹

In another way, *esse* is said to be that which pertains to the nature of a thing, according to which it is divided by the ten genera; and this *esse* is in a thing, and it is the act of a being resulting from the principles of the thing, as to shine is the act of a shining thing.

¹¹⁹ *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, ad 2, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 904.

¹²⁰ *De trin.*, q. 5, a. 3, Leonine ed., vol. 50, p. 147, lines 101-105.

¹²¹ *In III Sent.*, d. 6, q. 2, a. 2, Mandonnet ed., vol. 3, p. 238.

Esse enim rei quamvis sit aliud ab eius essentia, non tamen est intelligendum quod sit aliquod superadditum ad modum accidentis, sed quasi constituitur per principia essentiae.¹²²

Although the *esse* of a thing is different from its essence, it should not be understood to be something added in the mode of an accident, but rather as quasi-constituted by the principles of the essence.

Such remarks by Aquinas are often explained by appealing to a characteristic of the relation between essence and *esse* within things to which we made allusion earlier, namely, the fact that the *esse* or *actus essendi* by which something is or exists in the nature of things is limited and specified by the very essence it actualizes and enters into composition with. Thus, considered as limited and specified by its essence, the *esse* or *actus essendi* of a thing may be said to subsist (*consistit*) in, or to result from, the congregation of the essential principles of a thing, that is, from the union or composition of form and matter.¹²³

This does not explain, however, Aquinas' characterization at *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3 of a thing's *esse* in terms of the composition of accident with subject. Especially when considered as specified by its essence, that is to say, as resulting from the composition of matter and form, the *esse* or *actus essendi* of a thing is identified by Aquinas as the thing's substantial *esse*. Such *esse* is in turn distinguished by Aquinas as really distinct from a thing's accidental *esse*, which results from the composition of accident with subject.¹²⁴ Now, the composition of accident with subject does not result in

¹²² *In IV Meta.*, lect. 2, n. 559, Marietti ed., p. 155.

¹²³ See Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 30-31; also Joseph Owens, "Aquinas on Knowing Existence," in *St. Thomas Aquinas on the Existence of God: Collected Papers of Joseph Owens*, ed. John R. Catan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1980), 28.

¹²⁴ See *In II Sent.*, d. 37, q. 1, a. 2, ad 3, Mandonnet ed., vol. 2, p. 947: "[E]x compositione formae ad subjectum vel ad materiam, relinquitur quoddam esse substantiale vel accidentale;" *De ente*, c. 6, Leonine ed., vol. 43, p. 380, lines 10-13: "[S]icut ex forma et materia relinquitur esse substantiale quando componuntur, ita ex accidente et subiecto relinquitur esse accidentale quando accidens subiecto aduenit;" *De principiis naturae*, c. 1, Leonine ed., vol. 43, p. 39, lines 4-8):

any way in the existence of the latter, for the subject of an accident already pre-exists in act.¹²⁵ How is it possible, then, that a thing's *esse* be described by Aquinas as 'consisting' in a certain composition of accident with subject?

We can make sense of Aquinas' remarks by considering them in their proper theoretical context, namely, the *enuntiabile* theory. Let us examine the passage in question in more detail. Aquinas writes:

Alia [operatio] autem comprehendit esse rei, componendo affirmationem, quia etiam esse rei ex materia et forma compositae, a qua cognitionem accipit, consistit in quadam compositione formae ad materiam, vel accidentis ad subjectum.¹²⁶

But the other [operation] comprehends the *esse* of a thing by composing an affirmation, because also the *esse* of a thing composed of matter and form, from which the intellect receives cognition, subsists (*consistit*) in a certain composition of form with matter or of accident with subject.

Clearly, Aquinas is offering an explanation, but its purpose is not as clear as it might seem. The '*etiam*' after '*quia*' indicates that something new will be added to that which has already been said. Unfortunately, it is easily missed or, alternatively, misinterpreted so that Aquinas' remarks on the *esse* of a thing composed of matter and form as subsisting (*consistit*) in the composition of form with matter or of accident with subject are taken as an explanation, or as an additional explanation, for why the intellect

"Sed duplex est esse, scilicet esse essenziale rei sive substantiale, ut hominem esse, et hoc est esse simpliciter; est autem aliud esse accidentale, ut hominem esse album, et hoc est esse aliquid."

¹²⁵ See *ST I*, q. 5, a. 1, ad 1, Leonine ed., vol. 4, p. 56: "Nam cum ens dicat aliquid proprie esse in actu; actus autem proprie ordinem habeat ad potentiam; secundum hoc simpliciter aliquid dicitur ens, secundum quod primo discernitur ab eo quod est in potentia tantum. Hoc autem est esse substantiale rei uniuscuiusque; unde per suum esse substantiale dicitur unumquodque ens simpliciter. Per actus autem superadditos, dicitur aliquid esse *secundum quid*, sicut esse album significat esse secundum quid: non enim esse album aufert esse in potentia simpliciter, cum adveniat rei iam praexistenti in actu." Also, *De ver.*, q. 21, a. 5, Leonine ed., vol. 22, 3/1, p. 605, lines 87-89: "[A]liquid dicitur esse ens absolute propter suum esse substantiale, sed propter esse accidentale non dicitur esse absolute;" and *ST I*, q. 77, a. 6, Leonine ed., vol. 5, p. 246: "Forma autem accidentalis non facit esse simpliciter; sed esse tale, aut tantum, aut aliquo modo se habens: subiectum enim eius est ens in actu."

¹²⁶ *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 903.

comprehends the *esse* or existence of a thing by composing an affirmation. However, as we shall see next, they are intended to explain something slightly different.

When discussing the interpretation of the expression “*esse rei*” as signified by *enuntiabilia*, we saw that the intellect composes an affirmation to comprehend ‘the *esse* of a thing’ in more than one sense. Although every proposition signifies ‘the *esse* of a thing’, not every proposition signifies or asserts the existence of the thing denoted by its subject-term. Such is the case of the propositions ‘Socrates is a man’ and ‘Socrates is white’, by which the intellect comprehends, not ‘the existence of Socrates’, but ‘the being human of Socrates’ and ‘the being white of Socrates’ respectively. Given that, for Aquinas, the truth of the intellect arises from its conformity to reality, in order to comprehend truthfully ‘the *esse* of a thing’, taken in the sense of ‘the being so-and-so of a thing’, the intellect composes an affirmation, because a thing’s *esse*, taken in this sense, involves some composition or, as Aquinas has written earlier in the *Sentences*, is from the inherence of some form in a subject:

<p>[O]mne esse a forma aliqua inhaerente est, sicut esse album ab albedine. . . . [N]on potest intelligi quod paries sit albus sine albedine inhaerente.¹²⁷</p>	<p>All being (<i>esse</i>) is from some inhering form, as being white is from whiteness. . . . It cannot be understood that a wall is white without an inhering whiteness.</p>
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Hence, in keeping with the current paradigmatic examples, in order to comprehend ‘the being white of Socrates’, the intellect composes the affirmation ‘Socrates is white’, in which whiteness is attributed to ‘Socrates’ as inherent, because ‘the being white of Socrates’ results from (*relinquitur*; cf. note 124) or subsists (*consistit*) in (to use the language of *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3) the real composition of the accidental form whiteness with the subject ‘Socrates’, that is to say, results from the inherence of

¹²⁷ *In I Sent.*, d. 17, q. 1, a. 1, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 393.

whiteness in Socrates. Likewise, in order to comprehend ‘the being human of Socrates’, the intellect composes the affirmation ‘Socrates is a man’, because ‘the being human of Socrates’ results from (or subsists in) the real composition of the essence humanity with the individual matter by which ‘Socrates’ is this man, that is to say, from the inherence of humanity in Socrates.

Aquinas’ remarks at *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3 on ‘the *esse* of a thing’ or ‘*esse rei*’ as subsisting (*consistit*) in the composition of form with matter and of accident with subject are thus not an explanation for why the intellect composes an affirmation to comprehend ‘the *esse* of a thing’ in the sense of ‘the existence of a thing’. Rather, they are an explanation for why the intellect composes an affirmation to comprehend ‘the *esse* of a thing’ in the sense of ‘the being-so-and-so of a thing’. In sum, when Aquinas characterizes the *esse* of a thing or *esse rei* in terms of the composition of form with matter or of accident with subject, the expression “*esse rei*” should not be taken in the sense of ‘the existence of a thing’, but rather in the sense of ‘the being-so-and-so of a thing’. Notice, however, that Aquinas’ reference at *In I Sent.* d. 38, q. 1, a. 3 to ‘the *esse* of a thing’ or ‘*esse rei*’ as the ultimate object of the second operation of the intellect encompasses *all* of the senses in which the expression ‘*esse rei*’ may be taken under the paradigmatic case of the ‘existential *enuntiabile*’ ‘that Socrates exists’. Aquinas has introduced the discussion by remarking on the real distinction (and hence composition) of essence and *esse* within things. Thus, when Aquinas writes that the human intellect, in its second operation, comprehends ‘the *esse* of a thing’ by composing an affirmation, he has in mind first and foremost ‘the existence of a thing’ (which, too, may be said to subsist (*consistit*) in a certain composition, the composition of essence and *esse* within the thing).

On the other hand, once again, ‘*esse rei*’ cannot signify the act of being in ‘existential *enuntiabilia*’ alone; otherwise, such *enuntiabilia* would exclude compositions of “form and matter” and “subject and accident” in which “being-so-and-so” is predicated, and the corpus of *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3 would defend only the claim that God knows ‘existential *enuntiabilia*’.

For Aquinas to use ‘*esse rei*’ to capture the object of propositions that are both existential and predicamental fits his theory of truth as a reflection of the composite human mode of knowing creaturely composites according to their mode of being. As Aquinas writes in the response to the second objection *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, our cognition arises from things that have a “composite *esse*” (*esse compositum*):

Sed intellectus noster, cujus cognitio a rebus oritur, quae esse compositum habent, non apprehendit illud esse nisi componendo et dividendo.¹²⁸

But our intellect, whose cognition arises from things that have composite *esse*, apprehends this *esse* only by composing and dividing.

Given the composite character of creatures (which are the proper object of our cognition), the human intellect cannot apprehend ‘the *esse* of a thing’ unless by means of composition; for, truth in the intellect arises from the intellect’s conformity to reality in seeing and affirming that form or *esse* belongs to some subject. This doctrine is reflected in Aquinas’ remarks earlier in the *Sentences* on ‘the *esse* of a thing’ or ‘*esse rei*’ as the cause of truth in the intellect:

Cum autem in re sit quidditas ejus et suum esse, veritas fundatur in esse rei magis quam in quidditate, sicut et nomen entis ab esse imponitur; et in ipsa operatione intellectus accipientis esse rei sicut est per quamdam similationem ad ipsum, completur relatio adaequationis, in qua consistit ratio veritatis. Unde dico, quod

Since in a thing there is its essence and its *esse*, truth is founded on the *esse* of a thing more than on its essence, just as the term ‘*ens*’ is imposed from *esse* [more than from essence]. And the relation of adequation, in which [relation] the notion of truth consists, is completed in the operation of the intellect that, through a certain likeness

¹²⁸ *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, ad 2, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 904.

ipsum esse rei est causa veritatis, secundum quod est in cognitione intellectus.¹²⁹

to [the *esse* of a thing] takes the *esse* of a thing just as it is. Hence, I say that the *esse* of a thing is the cause of truth according as it is in the cognition of the [human] intellect.

The text fits Aquinas' doctrine in the later *Summa theologiae* I, q. 16, a. 2 that knowing truth involves seeing the form (or *esse*) in some subject (*res*), and in predicating that "likeness" of the thing to which it belongs. Thus, the conception of truth as *adaequatio intellectus et rei* matches Aquinas' distinctive theory of the proposition and its object according to which the intellect comprehends 'the *esse* of a thing' or '*esse rei*' only through its second operation, by composing an affirmation in which truth is known.

Before we continue, let us summarize the discussion up to this point. I have argued that, given the theoretical context of the discussion, Aquinas' correlation at *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3 between the second operation of the intellect and 'the *esse* of a thing' or '*esse rei*' should be understood as addressing, not the intellect's apprehension of *esse* as a simple (*actus essendi* by itself), but rather the intellect's apprehension of *esse* as it belongs to a subject or supposit. The reason the intellect comprehends 'the *esse* of a thing' or '*esse rei*' in its second operation by composing an affirmation (i.e., by means of *enuntiabilia*) is that 'the *esse* of a thing' is a composed unit subsisting (*consistit*) in, most notably, the composition of essence and *esse*, but also in the composition of form with matter and of accident with subject.

The notion that *enuntiabilia* signify in reality a composite object is a central element of Aquinas' answer to the question of the article, namely, whether *enuntiabilia* are objects of God's knowledge. God's knowledge of *enuntiabilia* is problematic not only because of the composite character of *enuntiabilia*, but also because of the composite

¹²⁹ *In I Sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 1, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 486.

character of that which the human intellect knows by means of *enuntiabilia*. For Aquinas, God's knowledge of *enuntiabilia* is not guaranteed merely by claiming that God knows that which *enuntiabilia* signify, i.e., 'the *esse* of a thing' or '*esse rei*', rather than *enuntiabilia* themselves. Instead, Aquinas adds two other steps to the argument, declaring that God knows 'the *esse* of each thing' (*esse cujuslibet rei*), and therefore, *enuntiabilia*, by knowing his own *esse*, which is simple and not other than his essence:

Similiter etiam in ipso Deo est considerare naturam ipsius, et esse ejus; et sicut natura sua est causa et exemplar omnis naturae, ita etiam esse suum est causa et exemplar omnis esse. Unde sicut cognoscendo essentiam suam, cognoscit omnem rem; ita cognoscendo esse suum, cognoscit esse cujuslibet rei; et sic cognoscit omnia enuntiabilia, quibus esse significatur; non tamen diversa operatione nec compositione, sed simpliciter; quia esse suum non est aliud ab essentia, nec est compositum consequens.¹³⁰

Similarly, in God himself it is possible to consider his nature and his *esse*; and just as his nature is cause and exemplar of every nature, so also his *esse* is cause and exemplar of every *esse*. Thus, just as by knowing his own essence God knows each thing (*res*), so also by knowing his own *esse*, he knows the *esse* of each thing; and thus he knows all *enuntiabilia* by which *esse* is signified; although without diversity of operation or composition, but simply, because his *esse* is not other than his essence, nor it is the result a composite.

The same argument is found in the response to the second objection, where once again Aquinas remarks on the composite character of 'the *esse* of a thing':

Ad secundum dicendum, quod ipsum esse divinum quod est simplex, est exemplar omnis esse compositi quod in creatura est; et ideo per esse suum simplex cognoscit sine compositione intellectum vel divisione omne esse vel non esse quod rei convenit.¹³¹

[T]he divine *esse* itself, which is simple, is the exemplar of every composite *esse* that is in the creature; and for this reason through his own simple *esse* [God] knows without composition or division of concepts every *esse* or *non esse* that belongs to a thing.

God's *esse*, which is simple, is cause and exemplar of "every composite *esse* that is in the creature." Thus, knowing his *esse*, God knows the *esse* of all things (*esse rei*), and therefore what signifies it. But this knowledge introduces no ontological composition or

¹³⁰ *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 903-904.

¹³¹ *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, ad 2, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 904.

division in God, whether in God's act of intellection, as if in a judgment, or in a complex *verbum* produced within God; for, all *esse rei* is a reflection of God's *esse*, which is conceptually distinct from, though really identical to his simple essence, of which it is the act (*esse Dei*). The human intellect, on the other hand, comprehends the *esse* of things by means of composition in act of understanding (judgment) and in *verbum* (the complex *verbum* in the mind that *affirms* 'esse' as true of a 'res'). In answering the question of God's simple knowledge of the composite enuntiabilia, then, Aquinas develops a distinctive theory of propositions and their objects which allows him to capture the "complexity" of all propositions under the unity of the *esse Dei*, not of the divine essence, as their exemplar. The paradigm case for propositions is that of the predication of *esse* or actuality or form of a supposit or subject. Thus, Aquinas reinterprets the paradigm in the standard "inherence theory" of the proposition in terminist logic: the predication of a form of matter or of some subject. Existential propositions such as 'Socrates is' can also be taken as predicating a form. But rather than reducing being to form, Aquinas moves in the opposite direction: all propositions can be related to existential propositions as the primary instance, so that all propositions can be seen as predicating the act of being of a thing; hence, all propositions signify *esse rei*, the act of existence of a thing. And, since propositions are the object of the second act of the mind, this *esse rei* is comprehended only in the act that targets propositions.

In later writings, the second operation of the intellect is no longer associated with *esse rei*. Aquinas rather associates the composition of the intellect, paradigmatically, with real composition, most notably, the composition of form with matter and accident with subject. The logical composition of subject and predicate is said to be rooted in the real

composition of form with matter or accident with subject. It is real composition, not *esse rei*, that Aquinas identifies as the foundation and cause of truth in the intellect.¹³² By now we have seen how such association is perfectly compatible with Aquinas' understanding of propositions as signifying *esse rei*, that is, as signifying the inherence of *esse* in a subject.¹³³ Nevertheless, it must be observed, although in later writing Aquinas no longer associates the second operation of the intellect with *esse rei*, he continues to associate *enuntiabilia* with *esse rei* in the context of the discussion of divine knowledge.

In the *Summa contra Gentiles* (1261-63), for example, having previously showed that God does not know by composing and dividing, Aquinas remarks:

Non autem propter hoc oportet nos dicere quod enuntiabilia ignorat. Nam essentia sua, cum sit una et simplex, exemplar est omnium multiplicium et compositorum. Et sic per ipsam Deus omnem multitudinem et compositionem tam naturae quam rationis cognoscit.¹³⁴

But we must not for this reason say that God does not know *enuntiabilia*. For his essence, since it is one and simple, is exemplar of all multiple and composite things. Thus, through it [his essence], God knows every multiplicity and composition both of nature and of reason.

Notice especially in this passage the reference to multiplicity and composition, both of reason and of nature, in relation to *enuntiabilia*. As we have seen, *enuntiabilia* are *complexa*, and they signify something multiple and composite. Still, this passage invites the familiar objection: if we were right to say that *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3 explains God's knowledge of *enuntiabilia* by appealing, not to the divine essence (alone), but to the divine *esse*, then it could again appear that Aquinas has changed his mind. If we had no further evidence, it might be hard to accept the obvious resolution of the apparently contradictory answers between 1251 and 1259: the '*esse Dei*', which is identical to

¹³² See, *In IX Meta.*, lect. 11, n. 1898; *ST I*, q. 85, a. 5, ad 3. For the texts, see note 101 above.

¹³³ See section 4.2.4, pp. 194-196.

¹³⁴ *SCG I*, c. 58, Leonine ed., vol. 13, p. 166, lines 1-6.

deitas, is invoked precisely to explain *how* God through the exemplarity of his simple essence can know composite *esse rei*. But we do have further evidence.

In the *Summa theologiae* (1265-73), Aquinas addresses once again the question of God's knowledge of *enuntiabilia*. His answer to the question is as follows:

[C]um formare enuntiabilia sit in potestate intellectus nostri; Deus autem scit quidquid est in potentia sua vel creaturae, ut supra dictum est; necesse est quod Deus sciat omnia enuntiabilia quae formari possunt. Sed, sicut scit materialia immaterialiter, et composita simpliciter, ita scit enuntiabilia non per modum enuntiabilium, quasi scilicet in intellectu eius sit compositio vel divisio enuntiabilium; sed unumquodque cognoscit per simplicem intelligentiam, intelligendo essentiam uniuscuiusque. Sicut si nos in hoc ipso quod intelligimus quid est homo, intelligeremus omnia quae de homine praedicari possunt.¹³⁵

[S]ince to form *enuntiabilia* is in the power of our intellect, and God knows whatever is in his own power or in [the power] of a creature, as was said above, it is necessary that God knows all *enuntiabilia* that *can* be formed. But, just as God knows material things immaterially, and composite things simply, so he knows *enuntiabilia*, not in the manner of *enuntiabilia*, namely, as if *in his intellect* there were composition or division of *enuntiabilia*. Rather, God knows each thing through a simple understanding (*intelligentiam*) by understanding the essence of each. It is as if we, by understanding what man is, were to understand all that can be predicated of man.

The response is intriguing because it sounds some notes that resemble the solutions of both 1251 and 1259. As in the *SCG* I, c. 59, God is said to know *enuntiabilia* through a simple understanding (there through his essence, here as if in the simple notion 'human'). Nonetheless, as in *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, Aquinas emphasizes that God knows the complex that we know in our propositional knowledge. In fact, he adds three points not found earlier: God knows all the *enuntiabilia* that we know in our propositions, and, in fact, knows all propositions that can possibly be made (because he knows all potencies, including our own). Later in the same article, in response to the second objection (which

¹³⁵ *ST* I, q. 14, a. 14, Leonine ed., vol. 4, p. 194.

runs along the same lines as the second objection in *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3),¹³⁶

Aquinas makes a reference to that which is signified by *enuntiabilia*, identifying it, as in the *Sentences* commentary, as ‘*esse rei*’ or the *esse* of a thing:

<p>[C]ompositio enuntiabilis significat aliquod esse rei, et sic Deus per suum esse, quod est eius essentia, est similitudo omnium eorum quae per enuntiabilia significantur.¹³⁷</p>	<p>The enuntiable composition signifies some <i>esse</i> of a thing, and in this way God, through his own <i>esse</i>, which is his essence, is a likeness of all those things that are signified through <i>enuntiabilia</i>.</p>
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Aquinas’ general description of *enuntiabilia* in the *Summa theologiae* is one with which we are familiar. Enunciations are characteristic of a human mode of cognition. They are formed by the intellect’s act of composing and dividing, and are thus identified with the sort of composition formed by predication (putting together the predicate with the subject). Furthermore, Aquinas speaks of the “composition” of an *enuntiabile*, which is a sign of ‘the *esse* of a thing’ or ‘*esse rei*’, which *enuntiabilia* themselves are said to signify.

There is certainly some development on Aquinas’ treatment of the question of God’s knowledge of *enuntiabilia* in the mature writings; Aquinas does not do things the same way. But one can see that there is an essential unity in the doctrine.

¹³⁶ *ST I*, q. 14, a. 14, arg. 2, Leonine ed., vol. 4, p. 194: “[O]mnis cognitio fit per aliquam similitudinem. Sed in Deo nulla est similitudo enuntiabilium, cum sit omnino simplex. Ergo Deus non cognoscit enuntiabilia.” Cf. *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, arg. 2, Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, p. 902: “Praeterea ut dicitur in III *De anima*, text. 21, quando intellectus intelligit affirmationem et negationem, fit quaedam compositio intellectuum. Sed in divino intellectus nulla est compositio. Ergo enuntiabilia non cognoscit.”

¹³⁷ *ST I*, q. 14, a. 14, ad 2 (Leonine ed., vol. 4, p. 194).

**Concluding Remarks on the Intellect's Apprehension of *Esse Rei*
at *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3**

From our examination of *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, it is evident that in setting up the correlation between the second operation of the intellect and *esse rei*, Aquinas does not have in mind as the ultimate object of the second operation of the intellect *esse* considered in itself as a simple, the *actus essendi*, as for the standard interpretation, but rather *esse* or *actus essendi* as part of a complex, as predicated and known of things, belonging to them as its subject or supposit. Is this the only manner in which the intellect may apprehend a thing's *esse*? It is true that the intellect cannot apprehend 'the *esse* of a thing' except by composing an affirmation (as some adherents of the standard interpretation may agree). But this composite apprehension is only possible if the human intellect already conceives the *esse* as an act or 'form' to be predicated of a subject or *res*: *esse + rei*. The argument of *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3 presupposes '*est*' or '*est ens*' or '*habet esse*' or '*est homo*' or '*est album*' as 'forms' that may be combined in an enunciation about a subject. From Aquinas' correlation between the two operations of the intellect and a thing's essence and *esse*, it does not follow that the intellect cannot conceive *esse* just as essence as a simple non-composite content. Quite the opposite: without the simple term, the enunciation is impossible. And if Aquinas means the judgment concerns *esse* as simple and non-composite, he fails to address the question of how God knows composite *enuntiabilia* (what is a simple *enuntiabile*?) Aquinas' aim at *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3 is to contrast a propositional or complex apprehension of 'the *esse* of a thing' or '*esse rei*' in humans that in God is not really distinct from his apprehension of his *esse*, which is his essence. Nothing in this project rules out a simple

conception of *esse*. The text of Distinction 38 takes no position on the matter (nor, admittedly, does it make all of the distinctions necessary to address it). The question of a simple conception of *esse* is resolved by examining other texts in light of Aquinas' semantic theory, which shows us that *esse* can, indeed, must be conceived in a simple conception.

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I present evidence for the following two thesis statements:

First, Aquinas recognizes as part of his semantic theory a simple or non-composite conception of *esse*. Second, the traditional reading of Aquinas' remarks in the commentaries on the *Sentences* and on Boethius' *De trinitate* on the intellect's apprehension of a thing's *esse* as ruling out the possibility of a simple conception of *esse* cannot be made consistent with the text.

Chapters II and III provide support for the first statement. In Chapter II, I show that Aquinas subscribes to a version of the standard semantic theory of the mid-thirteenth century Latin west according to which the signification of terms, nouns and verbs alike, is constituted primarily by their "signing relation" with a simple or non-composite conception of some *res*. For Aquinas, a term immediately signifies a concept or conception in the mind, but it ultimately signifies the *res* that is the object of that conception. Thus, the *res significata* (in the paradigm case an extra mental reality) is signified through the mediation of the intellect's conception the term immediately signifies. Most of our terms signify a form or nature, such as humanity; but, the *res significata* of a term is semantically, not necessarily *ontologically* a form. For Aquinas, anything we are able to conceive, we are able to name, including privations. Regarding the conception signified by terms, we have seen that at different places throughout his works Aquinas characterizes it as simple or non-composite (*incomplexa*), whereas the conception signified by propositions is characterized as complex or composite (*complexa*). Also on more than one occasion Aquinas specifically links the kind of conception that nouns and verbs signify to the first operation of the intellect, and the kind

of conception that propositions signify, to the second operation of the intellect.

Accordingly, the complexity of the conception signified by propositions is associated by Aquinas with predication, and hence with its being the subject of truth value. Aquinas refers to the conception signified by terms as simple or non-composite because it lacks the composition of a proposition. Thus, the conception signified by terms, insofar as it contains no predication, is not subject to truth or falsity *per se*.

Under this semantic framework, the nouns ‘*ens*’ and ‘*esse*’ as well as the verb ‘*est*’, all of which have *esse* as their *res significata*, must signify a simple conception of *esse*. Accordingly, as Chapter III shows, these terms, for Aquinas, signify, not a ‘judgment’ of *esse*, but a ‘concept’ of *esse*; that is to say, they signify a ‘simple conception’ of their *res*, which is *esse*. In order to ascertain the sort of conception these terms signify, I examine in Chapter III, the modes of signification that Aquinas assigns to these terms. As shown in Chapter II, following the practice of pre-modist logicians, Aquinas relates the notion of *modi significandi* with that of *modi intelligendi*. Given that the *res significata* of a term is signified through the mediation of the intellect’s conception, which conception term immediately signify, the mode or manner in which a term signifies its *res significata* is a reflection of the mode or manner in which the same *res* is conceived by the intellect. More precisely, the modes of signification of terms form part of the content of the conception signified by terms, the *significatum*. Hence, by examining the mode of signification that Aquinas assigns to the terms ‘*ens*’, ‘*esse*’, and ‘*est*’, we are able to determine the sort of conception these terms signify.

In particular, what such an examination discloses is that Aquinas identifies the pair ‘*ens*’ and ‘*esse*’ as an example of a concrete term and its abstract counterpart.

Furthermore, Aquinas parallels their signification with that of the pairs ‘*albus*’ - ‘*albedo*’ and ‘*currens*’ - ‘*currere*’. All of these pairs have in common that they signify the same *res significata* under different modes of signification: ‘*ens*’, ‘*albus*’, and ‘*currens*’ signify in the concrete mode (i.e., without precision) whereas ‘*esse*’, ‘*albedo*’, and ‘*currere*’ signify in the abstract mode (i.e., with precision). The parallel set up by Aquinas between these terms shows that, for him, the terms ‘*ens*’ and ‘*esse*’ signify the same *sort of* conception that the other terms signify. Otherwise, the parallel would be impossible. Thus, despite possible appearances to the contrary, the terms ‘*ens*’ and ‘*esse*’ must signify a simple conception of their *res*, which is *esse*.

The abstract term ‘*esse*’ appears *the least* to signify a judgment or complex conception. For, it signifies its *res* as ‘that by which’ and as simple; thus, it excludes in its signification all sorts of composition, from which it prescind. By contrast, the term ‘*ens*’ appears *the most* to signify a judgment, for it signifies ‘*quod est*’ (‘what is’). Parmenides exploited the paradoxes that ensues if *ens* entails an existential judgment. But, explains Aquinas, the term ‘*ens*’ does not signify the composition signified when one says ‘*aliquid est*’ (‘something is’). Rather, the term ‘*ens*’, insofar as it signifies *esse* in the concrete mode, “consignifies” composition; for, it signifies ‘a thing having *esse*’; that is to say, it signifies ‘the subject of *esse*’. Furthermore, the kind of composition ‘*ens*’ consignifies is not the kind of composition the judgment ‘something is’ signifies, wherein a comparison is made between a thing and *esse*, based on which a truth value may be assigned. The term ‘*ens*’ signifies ‘*quod est*’, but unlike what is the case in the judgment ‘*aliquid est*’ (‘something is’), the ‘*est*’ in ‘*quod est*’ is not a predicate, but signifies the *res significata* of the term.

The case of the verb ‘*est*’ is parallel to that of ‘*ens*’. Taken in itself, that is, as a verb and not as short-hand for the proposition ‘*aliquid est*’ (‘something is’), ‘*est*’ consignifies composition, for verbs signify their action as inherent in a subject. However, since no actual inherence is asserted, the conception signified has no truth value. Thus, like the noun ‘*ens*’, the verb ‘*est*’ consignifies composition insofar as it includes in its mode of signification the subject of *esse*. Nevertheless, neither the noun ‘*ens*’ nor the verb ‘*est*’ signify *that* some subject is or exists, that is to say, the fact that *esse* actually inheres in some subject. Hence, neither term signifies a judgment.

Chapter IV provides evidence for the second thesis statement: the traditional reading of Aquinas’ remarks in the commentaries on the *Sentences* and on Boethius’ *De trinitate* on the intellect’s apprehension of a thing’s *esse* as ruling out the possibility of a simple conception of *esse* cannot be made consistent with the text. In this chapter, I offer an exegesis of the key text, *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, where Aquinas refers twice to the intellect’s apprehension of a thing’s *esse* in its second operation. My reading of the text is guided by the theoretical context of the discussion. The question Aquinas addresses here is a standard one for thirteenth-century theologians: can God with his simple understanding know *enuntiabilia*, which are complex, and if so, how? In reviewing the theory of *enuntiabilia*, we may see that in both logical and theological contexts, the term ‘*enuntiabilia*’ is used to identify the immediate objects of the intellect’s *act* of composition and division. *Enuntiabilia* are the mental products of the second operation of the intellect, that which the intellect produces and properly understands when it composes and divides. Now, *enuntiabilia* signify something in reality, which at *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3 Aquinas identifies as ‘*esse rei*’ or ‘the *esse* of a thing’. It follows, then, that by

means of *enuntiabilia*, the intellect comprehends in its second operation ‘the *esse* of a thing’ or ‘*esse rei*’. Hence, as Aquinas observes in the text from the *Sentences* commentary, the human intellect comprehends ‘*esse rei*’ by composing an affirmation.

The expression “*esse rei*” as signified by *enuntiabilia* stands, not for something simple, but for something composite. Evidence for this claim is found in Aquinas’ presentation of the inherence theory of predication. In that presentation, the intellect’s composition of subject and predicate involves the predication of *esse*, that is to say, the attribution to a subject of *esse* taken either in the sense of existence or in the sense of a particular mode of being (as in ‘being white’ or ‘*esse album*’). In fact, even in those cases where the verb ‘is’ is not explicitly contained in the predicate, as in the proposition ‘Socrates runs’, *esse* is attributed to some subject; for every verb can be restated with ‘is’. It follows that in the composition of *enuntiabilia*, that is to say, in the composition signified by subject and predicate, the intellect conceives ‘the *esse* of a subject’, either in the sense of ‘the existence of a subject’, as in the *enuntiabile* ‘that Socrates is’, or in the sense of ‘the being-so-and-so of a subject’, as in the *enuntiabile* ‘that Socrates is human’ or ‘that Socrates is white’.

Now, *enuntiabilia* are the primary bearers of truth value. Although that which the human intellect knows in its second operation by means of *enuntiabilia* constitutes one single object, such single object is by no means simple (*unum simplex*). For, how could something which is intrinsically composed, i.e., an *enuntiabile*, be ‘equated to’ something which lacks composition, the simple *actus essendi*? If Aquinas’ conception of truth as *adaequatio intellectus et rei* is to be legitimate, that which corresponds *ex parte rei* to the composition of *enuntiabilia* will be something equally complex or composed (*unum*

complexum), at least in the paradigm case. Thus, if “*esse rei*” is that which all *enuntiabilia* signify in reality, then the expression “*esse rei*” cannot stand for simple or non-composite *esse* by itself, that is, *esse* considered apart from any subject in reality, of which it is affirmed in a way that yields a truth value. We conclude, then, that the expression “*esse rei*,” when used by Aquinas to indicate that which *enuntiabilia* signify, stands paradigmatically for the composed unit in the nature of things that is a subject or supposit and its *esse*. In other words, that which the human intellect knows by means of *enuntiabilia* in its second operation is *esse*, not as simple, but as “inherent” in and predicated of a subject or supposit.

Aquinas’ aim at *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3 is to identify a propositional apprehension of ‘*esse rei*’ or ‘the *esse* of a thing’ in humans that in God is not really distinct from his apprehension of his essence, which is *esse*. It is precisely in the context of explaining divine simple knowledge of *enuntiabilia* that Aquinas develops a distinctive theory of propositions and their objects, where all propositions are related to existential propositions as the primary instance, so that all propositions can be seen as *in some way* predicating *esse* (the act of being) of a thing, and hence as signifying ‘the *esse* of a thing’ or ‘*esse rei*’: *esse + rei*. Aquinas’ association of the intellect’s second operation with ‘the *esse* of a thing’ or ‘*esse rei*’ is thus a consequence of his distinctive view of the object of propositions. By establishing ‘*esse rei*’ as that which the human intellect’s knows by means of *enuntiabilia*, Aquinas is able to explain how God knows *enuntiabilia* in a simple understanding. For, inasmuch as God’s *esse*, which is simple, is cause and exemplar of all composite *esse* in creatures, in knowing his own *esse*, God knows that which *enuntiabilia* signify, although not through composition or division, but

simply. Nothing in this project rules out a simple conception of *esse*. The Distinction 38 of the Book I of the *Sentences* commentary takes no position on the matter (nor, admittedly, does it make the distinctions necessary to address it). The question of a simple conception of *esse* is resolved by examining other texts in light of Aquinas' semantic theory, which shows us that *esse* can, indeed, must be conceived in a simple conception. If *esse* as a simple *actus essendi* is said to be what is known only in judgment, then Aquinas fails to account for the divine knowledge of composites. The standard reading in Aquinas scholarship on the apprehension of *esse* as act, and the only serious alternative reading, that propositional being is meant, appear unwarranted once one examines the distinctive semantic theory of terms and propositions that Aquinas employs to explain God's knowledge.

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