

# Aquinas on Being

ANTHONY KENNY

CLARENDON PRESS · OXFORD

# CONTENTS

---

1. <i>On Being and Essence: I</i>	I
2. <i>On Being and Essence: II</i>	25
3. <i>Commentary on the Sentences</i>	51
4. <i>Disputed Questions on Truth</i>	64
5. <i>Summa contra Gentiles</i>	81
6. <i>Questions Disputed in Rome</i>	114
7. <i>Summa Theologiae: I</i>	131
8. <i>Summa Theologiae: II</i>	159
9. <i>Commentaries on Aristotle's Metaphysics</i>	172
10. <i>Conclusion: Twelve Types of Being</i>	189
 Appendix: <i>Frege and Aquinas on Existence and Number</i>	 195
 <i>Bibliography</i>	 205
<i>Index</i>	209

*This page intentionally left blank*

# I      *ON BEING AND ESSENCE: I*

---

THE short treatise *On Being and Essence* (*De Ente et Essentia*) was written when St Thomas was a young man—while still a bachelor, according to his biographer. The exact date is not known, but it certainly was written during the early years of his first period in Paris before he proceeded to the mastership in 1256 at the age of 30. It quickly became popular as an introductory manual of metaphysics, and so provides us with a useful starting point for the study of Aquinas' theory of Being.<sup>1</sup>

The treatise is heavily influenced by the eleventh-century Arabic philosopher Ibn Sina or Avicenna, whose *Metaphysics* is referred to in the very first lines of Aquinas' prologue.<sup>2</sup> 'Being and Essence', Avicenna is quoted as saying 'are the first things grasped by the intellect', and this is taken to show the importance of conceiving them correctly. The statement is puzzling: both concepts seem abstruse and sophisticated, and the words that express them are far from being the first words learnt by children in any language. Something else must clearly be meant.

The saying is most plausibly represented as based on an analogy between intellectual understanding and sense perception. If I see something out of the corner of my eye, I may

<sup>1</sup> References to *De Ente et Essentia* are given to vol. XLIII of the Leonine edn, chapter and line.

<sup>2</sup> Avicenna (980–1037) was one of the principal interpreters of Aristotle to the Islamic world. Portions of his philosophical encyclopaedia were translated into Latin in Toledo in the second half of the twelfth century, one bearing the title *Metaphysica*.

wonder for a moment whether it is an aeroplane, a bird, a paint-mark on the window, or a mote on my spectacles; but, it may be said, all the time I know it is *something*, a being of some kind or other. However, as St Thomas was often to emphasize, the analogy between the senses and the intellect is a treacherous one. Intellectual understanding proceeds sometimes from the more general to the more specific (I may learn what a tree is before being able to discriminate between an oak and an ash) and sometimes from the more specific to the more general (it is quite possible to be able to recognize a dog before mastering the more abstract notion of animal). It is not plausibly represented as taking its start from the most general and unspecific concept of all.<sup>3</sup>

The first chapter of the treatise begins with a dichotomy, extracted from Aristotle's glossary of philosophical terms in *Metaphysics*, Book Δ, which recurs frequently in Aquinas' writings in every period. Being, we are told, is spoken about in two ways: the kind of being spoken of in the first way comes in one or other of the ten categories; the kind spoken of in the other way signifies the truth of propositions.<sup>4</sup>

The categories of which Aquinas is speaking originate in a classification made by Aristotle of different kinds of predicate.<sup>5</sup> The predicate of a sentence may tell you what kind of a thing something is, or how big it is, or where it is, or what is happening to it, and so on. We may say, for instance, of St Thomas Aquinas that he was a human being, and that he

<sup>3</sup> A more sophisticated, but still unconvincing, defence of Avicenna's doctrine is presented by St Thomas later in *Summa Theologiae* (1a, 85, 3). See my *Aquinas on Mind* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 108–9.

<sup>4</sup> *Ens per se dupliciter dicitur: uno modo quod dividitur per decem genera; alio modo, quod significat propositionum veritatem* (1.2–5). There is a problem of translation here, given that there are no quotation marks in Latin. Should we translate as '“being” is used in two ways' or as 'being is spoken of in two ways'? Of the subsequent clauses, the first suggests the former translation and the second the latter.

<sup>5</sup> See below, p. 178.

was fat, clever, and holier than Abelard; that he lived in Paris, in the thirteenth century, that he sat when lecturing, wore the Dominican habit, wrote eight million words, and was eventually poisoned by Charles of Anjou. The predicates we use in saying these things belong, Aristotle would say, in different *categories*: they belong in the categories of, respectively, substance, quantity, quality, relation, place, time, posture, vesture, action, and passion.

When a predicate in a particular category is actually true of something, then, according to Aquinas, there exists in the world an entity corresponding to the predicate. The first nine of the predications above are, I believe, true: thus, among the items of the world's history we must include Aquinas' humanity, his size, his intelligence, and so on. The tenth of the predications is most probably false, even though Dante believed it to be true. So we cannot reckon, among the furniture of the universe, the poisoning of Aquinas by Charles of Anjou. But the entities corresponding to the predicates of true sentences make up what Aquinas here calls the being that comes in one or other of the ten categories.

What of the other kind of being, being in the sense of the word in which, Aquinas says, it signifies the truth of propositions? In this sense, he tells us, anything about which an affirmative proposition can be formed may be called a being.<sup>6</sup> Obviously, the first-class beings in the ten categories can be called beings in this sense too, since true affirmative propositions can be formed of them. But not everything that is a being in the second sense is also a being in the first sense, as Aquinas goes on to assert. There are second-class beings which 'posit nothing in reality', namely, negations and privations. To explain what he means, Aquinas says 'we say that affirmation is the opposite of negation, and that there is blindness in an

<sup>6</sup> Secundo modo potest dici ens omne illud de quo affirmativa propositio formari potest (1.6-7).

eye'.<sup>7</sup> It is fairly clear what is meant by saying that blindness 'posits nothing in reality'. It does not mean that blindness is something unreal or fictitious: rather, it means that it is not a positive reality, as the power of sight is, but an absence of such a power. The other limb of the explanation, however, is not so clear. Is Aquinas giving an alternative example, with affirmation being an example of a second-class being, or is he producing an argument, and if so what is its force? If we take this passage on its own, it is difficult to find an answer.

There is a further difficulty. Suppose the sentence 'there is blindness in this eye' is false. In that case, surely there is no such thing as the blindness of this eye: not even a second-class entity. Yet, on the face of it, we have formed an affirmative proposition about it. Even if that is not the kind of proposition that Aquinas had in mind, there is no difficulty in forming perfectly straightforward, but false, subject–predicate affirmative propositions about blindness, such as 'Aristotle was blind'. Perhaps what Aquinas really meant as the criterion for second-class beings was that *true* affirmative propositions could be formed about them.

In the present context, the use to which Aquinas puts his distinction between first-class and second-class beings is to make the point that only first-class beings have essences. There is no such thing as the essence of blindness: there are only essences of entities in the ten categories. 'Essence signifies something common to all the natures by which different beings are located in different genera and species: thus humanity is the essence of a human being, and so forth.'<sup>8</sup>

Here we are brought up short by a difficulty. The items in the ten categories, the first-class beings, corresponded to ten

<sup>7</sup> Dicimus enim quod affirmatio est opposita negationi, et quod caecitas est in oculo (I.9–10).

<sup>8</sup> oportet ut essentia significet aliquid commune omnibus naturis per quas diversa entia in diversis generibus et speciebus collocantur, sicut humanitas est essentia hominis (I.22–3).

types of predicate. I gave as an example of the first type of predicate 'is a human being' and said that the entity corresponding to it was an individual's humanity. Now that we are told that the items falling under the ten categories have essences, we would expect that humanity (unlike blindness) has an essence. But instead we are told that humanity *is* an essence—the essence of a human being.

The solution to the puzzle is found by tracing it back to an ambiguity in Aristotle's Greek. Aristotle named the first of his categories the category of *substance* (*οὐσία*): a predication in that category tells you, concerning the thing that the sentence is about, what kind of thing it is—a human being, a cat, a cabbage, a lump of salt. The word 'substance' in this usage marks off one type of predication, in contrast to predications in the other nine categories, which can be called predications that predicate *accidents*. But Aristotle also uses the word 'substance' to refer to the thing that the sentences containing the predicates are *about* (e.g. *Metaphysics*, 1028b, 33 ff.). Thus, Thomas Aquinas was himself a substance, about whom substantial and accidental predications could be made. Sometimes an express distinction is made between these two usages, with substance as subject being called 'first substance' and substance as predicate being called 'second substance'.

When, therefore, we are told that first-class beings are the beings in the ten categories, we should really understand this as including not just the entities corresponding to the ten types of predication, but also the entities of which the predications are made, namely, first substances. Substances, in fact, turn out to be much the most important types of first-class beings.

The lumping together of substances and substantial predicates may seem puzzling to a logical purist; but it is understandable because of the very close relationship between any substance and the predicate which tells you what kind of substance it is. There is an important difference between substantial



and accidental predication. When a substantial predicate ceases to be true of a substance, then that substance ceases to exist; when an accidental predicate ceases to be true, the substance merely changes. Thus, Aquinas could cease to be fat without ceasing to be Aquinas, but he could not cease to be a human being without ceasing to exist.

Thus, when Aquinas in *On Being and Essence* talks of the ‘essence’ of a horse or a cabbage, this is the same as what corresponds to a predication in the Aristotelian category of substance. The essence is what makes a thing the kind of thing it is: what makes a human being human, what makes a cabbage a cabbage and a vegetable, and so on. A predicate in the category of substance gives the answer to the question ‘what kind of thing is this?’ The Latin interrogative used in asking that question is ‘quid?’ and so, Aquinas says, philosophers use the word ‘quiddity’ as equivalent to ‘essence’.<sup>9</sup>

Aquinas goes on to mention other terms that have been used by philosophers in the meaning which he wishes to give to ‘essence’: ‘form’, for instance, in Avicenna, and ‘nature’ in Boethius.<sup>10</sup> In the course of his own writings he will use the three words with distinct meanings. For the moment, he contents himself with drawing attention to the different nuances conveyed by these terms if they are used as equivalent. ‘Form’ is here being used as a general term for the stable element in a

<sup>9</sup> In this context Aristotle uses the almost untranslatable Greek expression τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι (Met. Z, 1028b34, etc.). This is literally ‘the what-is-it to be’ of a thing, i.e. the type of being that answers the question ‘what is it?’ Aquinas reports him thus: ‘hoc est etiam quod Philosophus frequenter nominat quod quid erat esse, id est hoc per quod aliquid habet esse quid’ (I.31–3). He seems to be understanding the Greek interrogative word (corresponding to ‘what?’) as if it were a pronoun or variable, corresponding to ‘something’. His Latin translates roughly as ‘this is what the Philosopher often calls that-which-something-was-to-be, i.e. that to which something owes it that it is what it is’. A paraphrase more intelligible to modern ears might be: ‘the quiddity is that which makes something F, where F is a predicate in the category of substance’.

<sup>10</sup> Manlius Severinus Boethius, a 6th-century Roman senator, author of *The Consolation of Philosophy* and a number of works on logic.

thing;<sup>11</sup> ‘nature’ stresses the link between the essence and the characteristic operations or activities of a thing; ‘quiddity’ indicates that the essence is what is expressed by a thing’s definition. ‘Essence’ itself, he says, is so called because ‘by it and in it a thing has *esse*’.

‘*Esse*’ is the infinitive form of the Latin verb for ‘to be’. In this work it will often be left untranslated when it occurs because, as we shall see, it has multiple meanings in Aquinas’ writing. I shall try in the course of the work to disambiguate these meanings by giving them different English paraphrases, but it is misleading and tendentious to use any one English word (e.g. ‘existence’) to correspond to the Latin ‘*esse*’. The Latin words that give the treatise the title *De Ente et Essentia* are related to the same Latin verb, since ‘*ens*’ is the present participle of the verb, and ‘*essentia*’ is an abstract noun formed from it. They do not, however, present the same systematic ambiguity as ‘*esse*’ does, and so I have retained in general the traditional translations ‘being’ and ‘essence’.<sup>12</sup>

The first-class beings that Aquinas has identified by reference to Aristotle’s categories may, as we have seen, be divided into two kinds: substances and accidents. Accidents are the entities corresponding to the last nine categories: substances are the entities that are assigned to natural kinds by predicates of the first category. It is substances, Aquinas says, that strictly and truly have essences; accidents do so only after a manner of speaking and in a limited sense.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Dicitur etiam forma, secundum quod per formam significatur certitudo uniuscujusque rei (1.34–5).

<sup>12</sup> ‘*ens*’ is not without translation problems of its own. Because Latin has no articles, the word can mean either ‘Being’, i.e. all that is; or ‘a being’, an entity, an individual thing that is. One must rely on context to disambiguate. The English word ‘being’ can correspond not only to the Latin participle, but also to the Latin infinitive, in which case it is equivalent to ‘to be’. This use will be generally avoided in this book, since the infinitive ‘*esse*’ is being left untranslated.

<sup>13</sup> *Essentia proprie et vere est in substantiis, sed in accidentibus est quodammodo et secundum quod* (1.55–7).

In the class of substances, as we shall see, Aquinas included some mysterious entities which are very different from the everyday material objects—such as people, animals, stocks, and stones—that philosophers use to introduce the notion at the outset. Wisely, however, he begins with a discussion of familiar mundane substances as being easier to comprehend, and the first thing he tells us about them is that they are all composite. They are all made up of form and matter.

Aquinas assumes that his readers are familiar with this pair of technical terms, but it is worth pausing to offer a brief explanation of them. ‘Form’ and ‘matter’ have their primary role in the Aristotelian analysis of the changes undergone by individual substances. If a child plays with a piece of plasticine and moulds it first into a boat and then into a giraffe, it is natural to say that the same bit of stuff is taking on different shapes. The Latin words ‘*materia*’ and ‘*forma*’, and still more Aristotle’s Greek words of which they are translations, can have this everyday meaning of ‘stuff’ and ‘shape’. But the moulding of a lump of plasticine, though it is the kind of thing that Aquinas, following Aristotle, often uses as an illustration to introduce the notions of matter and form, is not strictly a case of substantial change. That takes place when a substance of one kind turns into a substance of another kind. A better example to illustrate the Aristotelian notion would be a bottle containing a pint of cream which, after shaking, is found to contain not cream but butter. The stuff that comes out of the bottle is the same stuff as the stuff that went into the bottle, in the sense that nothing has been added to it and nothing has been taken from it. But the kind of stuff that comes out is different from the kind of stuff that went in. The stuff that remains the same parcel of stuff throughout is called by Aristotle *matter*. The matter takes first one *form* and then another: first it has the form of cream, and then it has the form of butter.

Most substantial changes are rather more complicated than this simple example suggests. One of Aquinas’ favourite exam-

ples of such a change is the death of an animal. But when a dog dies and its body rots, we do not have a case of a single substance of one kind turning into a single substance of another, but a case of a single substance turning into many different substances into which the body decomposes. On the other hand, when I eat a varied meal, matter of many different kinds takes on my substantial form, the form of humanity. Most substantial changes are, in the manner illustrated, either one-many changes or many-one changes.

Whenever there is substantial change, there must be an episode that begins with one or more substances  $A, A', A'' \dots$  and ends with one or more different substances,  $B, B', B'' \dots$ . That is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for substantial change to occur. If this is to be a change rather than a substitution, it is necessary that there should be something in common between the substance(s) present at the beginning of the change and the substance(s) present at the end of the change. One way of explaining the concept of *matter* is to say that matter is what is common to the two termini of a substantial change.

Aquinas' purpose in introducing the notions of matter and form at this point is to relate each of them to the notion of essence, his main concern. The essence of a thing is not its matter alone: matter of itself is indeterminate, restricted to no one kind, whereas the essence of a thing is what makes it belong to a particular species and genus. The essence is not pure form, either: the essence of a thing is what is expressed by its definition, and the definition of a natural substance mentions its matter as well as its form. In mathematics, no doubt, we can define a triangle without asking what it is made of; but no similar account could express the essence of a tree or a metal. We have to say that an essence is neither matter nor form, but includes both.

The essence is not some third thing, over and above matter and form—some relationship between them, perhaps. For

matter and form are not two separate entities, existing independently of each other, which can then be joined together by some additional entity. Matter can exist only under some form or other: it is form that actualises matter and makes it into a being, an individual being of a particular kind.<sup>14</sup>

In compound substances, Aquinas concludes, the word ‘essence’ means the compound of matter and form<sup>15</sup>—a definition, he remarks, which accords with those of Boethius and of Averroes.<sup>16</sup> There is something puzzling about this. The only instance of an essence we have so far been given is that humanity is the essence of a human being. Surely it is the human being—not his humanity—that is the compound of matter and form. The human being, we might say, is something concrete, and his essence is something abstract. If we speak in this way, the definition we are given seems to confuse concrete and abstract in a disconcerting way. The confusion thickens when Aquinas goes on to cite, in support of his definition, a dictum of Avicenna to the effect that ‘the quiddity of composite substances is the composition of form and matter’. We already know that quiddity = essence; but now it is being identified with something abstract (‘composition’) rather than with something concrete (‘the compound’).

There is no real confusion here, only a superficial one that is due to Aquinas’ desire to enrol in his support a variety of authors using different terminologies in different languages. Despite appearances, he did not mean to identify the essence (e.g. humanity) with the substance (‘human being’): when he spoke of ‘the composite’ he did not mean ‘a composite substance’ but only ‘a composite item’. What he really means is

<sup>14</sup> Per formam enim, quae est actus materiae, materia efficitur ens actu et hoc aliquid (2.31–2). The form in question is substantial form: accidental forms, like whiteness, can be added to an already existent essence.

<sup>15</sup> Relinquitur ergo quod nomen essentiae in substantiis compositis significat id quod ex materia et forma compositum est (2.38–40).

<sup>16</sup> Averroes, or Ibn Rushd (1126–98), a native of Cordoba in Muslim Spain, was the author of a series of influential commentaries on Aristotle’s works.

set out in his own terms a little further on in his text. ‘The *esse* of a composite substance belongs not to the form alone nor to the matter alone, but to the composite itself; and the essence is that in respect of which a thing is said to have *esse*.’<sup>17</sup> The things that there are in the world around us are neither pure matter nor pure form, but parcels of matter-plus-form, or, less crudely, matter under form, informed matter.

Between them, form and matter constitute the essence, but they contribute to it in different ways. Only form, he says, is, in its own way, a cause of essence and being. The meaning of this is not altogether clear. If we recall Aristotle’s four causes, don’t we remember that there was such a thing as a material cause? On the other hand, if what Aquinas means is not that form is the only cause of essence, but that form is the only formal cause of essence, the point hardly seems worth making.<sup>18</sup> The special role of form, in fact, becomes clear only after Aquinas has considered an objection to the thesis that essence combines matter and form.

The objection goes like this. Matter is the principle of individuation. So if essence includes matter as well as form, essences must all be individual and not universal. But if so, universals cannot be defined, since a definition is something that expresses an essence. But that is absurd.

Before considering Aquinas’ answer to this objection, I should say something about the thesis that matter is the principle of individuation. What is meant is that, however different things may be from each other, it is not the differences between their properties or characteristics that make them distinct from each other. For it is possible for things to resemble

<sup>17</sup> *esse substantiae compositae non est tantum formae neque tantum materiae, sed ipsius compositi; essentia autem est secundum quam res esse dicitur* (2.52–4).

<sup>18</sup> Aquinas tries to clarify the point by a reference to cooking, but his analogy is too dependent on medieval chemistry to be illuminating. A modern paraphrase might go like this: it is the baking that turns the ingredients into the cake, but the essence of the cake is the recipe, which specifies both the ingredients and the baking.

each other totally without being identical with each other. Two peas, for instance, however alike they are, however many properties they have in common, are two peas and not one pea because they are two different parcels of matter. Two cloned animals might resemble each other in every possible respect, yet they would be two, not one, because they were two distinct material bodies.

In answering the objection based on this principle of individuation, Aquinas says that we have to distinguish between senses of ‘matter’:

It is not matter understood in any old way that is the principle of individuation, but only determinate matter. By determinate matter I mean matter considered under specified dimensions. Matter of this kind is not included in the definition of human being qua human; but it would be included in the definition of Socrates, if Socrates had a definition. In the definition of human being what occurs is indeterminate matter; for the definition of human being does not contain this flesh and these bones, but flesh and bones in the abstract, which are the indeterminate matter of human beings.<sup>19</sup>

At first sight, this passage provides an answer to the puzzle we encountered earlier of wondering whether an essence was concrete or abstract. Shall we say, in the light of this text, that an essence is something abstract? It contains matter, not in the sense of containing a concrete lump of flesh and blood, but in the sense of having the abstract property of materiality. To be a human being you must possess flesh and blood; you don’t have to possess any particular chunk of flesh and blood.

But once again, we are thrown into confusion when Aquinas goes on to try to relate his account to that of his predecessors.

<sup>19</sup> *Materia non quolibet modo accepta est individuationis principium, sed solum materia signata; et dico materiam signatam quae sub determinatis dimensionibus consideratur. Haec autem materia in definitione quae est hominis in quantum est homo non ponitur, sed poneretur in definitione Socratis si Socrates definitionem haberet. In definitione autem hominis ponitur materia non signata; non enim in definitione hominis ponitur hoc os et haec caro, sed os et caro absolute quae sunt materia hominis non signata (2.80–4).*

Averroes is quoted with approval as saying that Socrates is nothing other than animality and rationality, which are his quiddity. Whereas the earlier passage puzzled us because it seemed to be treating an abstract entity as a concrete one, this passage seems to be treating a concrete entity (Socrates) as if it were identical with an abstract one (his quiddity or essence). This makes us wonder whether the contrast between concrete and abstract is really helpful in attempting to understand Aquinas.

Both in Latin and in English, there is an undoubted grammatical distinction between concrete and abstract words. 'Animal' is a concrete word in both languages, whereas 'animality' and 'animalitas' are abstract. We say that Fido *is* an animal, but that he *has* animality; and the corresponding contrast obtains in Latin also. But does anything in reality correspond to this grammatical distinction? When we talk about Fido *qua* animal and when we talk about Fido's animality, are we not talking about the same thing?

However we are to understand the passage cited from Averroes, Aquinas in this context regards the contrast between individual and universal as being more relevant than the contrast between concrete and abstract. 'The essence of human and the essence of Socrates', he says, 'differ only as determinate and indeterminate, just as the essence of a genus and the essence of a species differ as determinate and indeterminate.'<sup>20</sup>

Socrates is an individual of the universal species *human*, and *human* is a species of the genus *animal*. In each instance, Aquinas says, we have the relation of determinate to determinable, but the method of determination differs in each case. A species is made more determinate than a genus by the addition of a differentiating characteristic: thus, the species *human* is more determinate than the genus *animal*, because a human is

<sup>20</sup> *Essentia hominis et essentia Socratis non differt nisi secundum signatum et non signatum . . . sic etiam essentia generis et speciei secundum signatum et non signatum differunt* (2.85-7, 90-1).



a rational animal, possessing the differentiating characteristic of rationality. An individual, however, is 'determinate with regard to the species' (i.e. is a particular member of a species) by virtue of the determinate dimensions of the matter that makes it up.

But there is also a question to raise about the application of the universal/individual distinction when we are talking of essences. 'Human' is a universal term, capable of being predicated of many different individual men and women: so the essence, humanity, is a universal essence. However, the passage just quoted makes clear that for Aquinas there is also such a thing as the essence of Socrates, an individual essence. But a few lines earlier, as we saw, Aquinas implied that there was no such thing as a definition of Socrates. How then can there be an essence of Socrates, since essence is what is expressed by definition?

Aquinas does not help us at this point, though there are many passages in his other works, as we shall see, that place it beyond doubt that he believed in individual as well as universal essences. The solution to the problem must be that, whereas every definition corresponds to an essence, not every essence has a definition corresponding to it. Or perhaps we should put the matter thus: different individual essences share a definition, the definition of the species to which they belong in common. Thus, Socrates and Plato both fulfil the definition of *human*; but neither of them has an individual definition, though each of them has an individual essence.

When, at the beginning of chapter II, Aquinas first made mention of form and matter, he gave as an illustration of the concepts 'soul and body in human beings'. Soul and body do not in fact provide a straightforward instantiation of form and matter, and now, as the treatise progresses, Aquinas begins to address the complications involved. He asks whether an animal's body is or is not a part of the animal. To answer the question, he distinguishes between senses of 'body'. 'Body' may be

a predicate in the category of substance: in that case, to say of something that it is a body is to say that it is a three-dimensional object.<sup>21</sup> Now some bodies are alive, and some are not. If, when we say that something is a body, we mean simply that it is an object whose form enables it to be measured in three dimensions, then we can say that the body is only a part of the animal, and that the soul is something quite separate which is added on to it as a distinct part of the animal.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, if by 'body' we mean something that possesses a form which, in addition to making it three-dimensional, may also have other characteristics, then a body is not a part of an animal: it is the animal itself, described generically. When I say that something is, in this sense, a body, I am leaving open what kind of form it is that makes it three-dimensional. There are many possibilities: for instance, it may be the form that makes a stone a stone ('lapidity', Aquinas calls it), or it may be an animal soul. In the case of an animal, Aquinas says, the form that makes the body three-dimensional is the very same as the form that makes it an animal: namely, its soul.

Aquinas' distinction between body as part and body as genus is not easy to make sense of. There is no problem in understanding the second limb of the distinction, where 'body' indicates a general class of which 'animal' indicates a sub-class. All animals are three-dimensional objects, but not all three-dimensional objects are animals. In describing something simply as a body, I am leaving open the question whether it is a stone, a vegetable, or an animal. I may say, for instance, that every body continues in its state of rest, or of uniform motion in a right line, unless it is compelled to change that state by forces impressed thereon. Such a law applies to bodies as such,

<sup>21</sup> Corpus enim secundum quod est in genere substantiae dicitur ex eo quod habet talem naturam ut in eo possint designari tres dimensiones (2.110-12).

<sup>22</sup> anima . . . erit superveniens ipsi corpori, ita quod ex ipsis duobus, scilicet anima et corpore, sicut ex partibus, constituetur animal (2.132-4).

irrespective of whether they are alive or inert. That is the second sense of ‘body’ identified by Aquinas, and it is easily comprehensible, even if (in English) not always idiomatic. It is not so easy to grasp the first limb of his distinction. There seems to be no sense of ‘body’ in English that means ‘inert body’. This may be a mere matter of a difference between the idiom of English and medieval Latin. We do have a word ‘corpse’ in that sense, a word that derives from the Latin word for body, ‘*corpus*’; furthermore, we can use the word ‘body’ to refer to a corpse. But the point that is more than a matter of idiom is that it is not possible to regard a body, in this sense, as being part of an animal. An animal is not a corpse plus a soul, and Aquinas elsewhere makes abundantly clear that he did not think so. Without its soul, an animal’s body is no longer the same body.

Some of Aquinas’ contemporaries thought that the form that made an animal bodily was different from the form that made it a living being, and that that form in turn was different from the form that made it a sensing, feeling animal. Thus, if we analyse an animal in terms of matter and form, we would have to list three forms and not one. On that view, one could see reason to say that an animal’s body was a part of it. An animal would be, as it were, a Russian doll of three levels: the first or inmost figure would be the body; encasing that would be the vegetable; and encasing that would be the animal. The whole doll would be made up of three parts, one of which would be the body. But throughout his life Aquinas consistently rejected the theory of multiple forms, and his teaching does not lend itself to any such fantasy.<sup>23</sup>

Parallel to his distinction between two senses of ‘body’, Aquinas goes on to make a similarly puzzling distinction with

<sup>23</sup> His fullest rejection of the theory came in his *On the Unity of the Intellect against the Averroists* (*De unitate intellectus contra Averroistas*) of 1270, but his own contrary theory is explicitly stated in this early work: non enim anima est alia forma ab illa per quam in re illa poterant designari tres dimensiones (2.142–4).

regard to the word 'animal'. It can mean, he says, something that possesses the perfections of self-movement and perception, but no further degrees of perfection. Or it can mean something whose form enables it to move itself and perceive with the senses, irrespective of whether that form is merely a sensitive soul or a soul that is both sensitive and rational. By analogy with the previous paragraph, it appears, Aquinas expects us to draw the conclusion that 'animal' in the first sense refers to a part of a human being, and in the second sense represents the genus of which humans are a species. Once again, the second sense is unproblematic, but once again, there are difficulties in making sense of the first limb of the distinction. Idiom is not a problem here, because we do in abuse call our enemies animals, meaning that they have forfeited their rationality. But even when we use that idiom, we do not think of a human being as an irrational animal with an intellect somehow tacked on to it or wrapped around it.

In the background of all Aquinas' discussion at this point is the traditional definition that a human is a rational animal. 'Human' marks the species, 'animal' marks the genus, and 'rational' marks the element that differentiates this particular species from other species in the genus. This element in Latin is called '*differentia*', and we may keep this word in English too, though unlike 'genus' and 'species' it has not become acclimatized in the language (though it is listed in the *Oxford English Dictionary*). The scheme of genus, species, and differentia can be applied at various levels, with what appears as genus at one level appearing as species at another: thus, 'an animal is an animated body' can also be regarded as the definition of a species by its genus and differentia.

At this point, Aquinas' purpose is to relate the triad genus/species/differentia to the triad matter/form/composite. He says: Genus and species and differentia stand in the same relationship to each other as matter, form and composite do in nature. But there is no identity here. Genus is not matter, but is derived from matter as

signifying the whole; differentia is not form, but is derived from form as signifying the whole. So we say that a human being is a rational animal, but we do not say that he is a compound of animal and rational in the way that we say that he is a compound of soul and body. For a human being is said to consist of body and soul, like two things which constitute a third thing that is not identical with either of them.<sup>24</sup>

What does this mean? The first point to grasp is that for Aquinas form and matter (body and soul, in this example) are items in the world, extra-mental realities, while genus and differentia are in this context concepts, items in the mind. Whereas a real human being is a compound of body and soul, if we put together *rational* and *animal* what we get is not a human being, but the concept *human*. This concept, he says, is a third concept made up of two constituent concepts.<sup>25</sup> Secondly, a differentia is a concept that applies to something on the basis of its form, and a genus is a concept that applies to something on the basis of its matter, while the species or defining concept applies on the basis of both the matter denoted by the genus and the form denoted by the difference.<sup>26</sup> Thus, in ‘Socrates is an animal’, we are not to think of ‘animal’ as naming or denoting some part of Socrates, but as denoting the whole of Socrates, albeit on the basis of a material part of him. Similarly, in ‘Socrates is a rational being’, we are not to think

<sup>24</sup> genus, species et differentia se habent proportionaliter ad materiam et formam et compositum in natura, quamvis non sint idem quod illa: quia neque genus est materia, sed a materia sumptum ut significans totum; neque differentia forma, sed a forma sumpta ut significans totum. Unde dicimus hominem esse animal rationale, et non ex animali et rationali, sicut dicimus eum esse ex anima et corpore: ex anima enim et corpore dicitur esse homo sicut ex duobus rebus quaedam res tertia constituta, quae neutra illarum est, homo enim neque est anima neque corpus (2.195–207).

<sup>25</sup> Si homo aliquo modo ex animali et rationali esse dicatur, non erit sicut res tertia ex duobus rebus, sed sicut intellectus tertius ex duobus intellectibus (2.208–10).

<sup>26</sup> definitio vel species comprehendit utrumque, scilicet determinatam materiam quam designat nomen generis, et determinatam formam quam designat nomen differentiae (2.190–4).

of the predicate as denoting some part of Socrates, but as denoting the whole of Socrates, albeit on the basis of his soul. In ‘Socrates is a human being’, the predicate similarly denotes the whole of Socrates, this time on the basis of both his constituent parts.

It follows, from the parallel structure that Aquinas presents, that the words ‘matter’ and ‘form’ must operate on a sliding scale, just as the concepts of genus and differentia do. Just as what figures as genus in one context figures as species in another, so something that is material in one compound may be formal in another. When we say that being an animal is a material element in Socrates, we are not thinking of the prime or basic matter which is the substratum of substantial change: we mean his body, with all its animal characteristics, such as the powers of motion and sensation. When on the other hand we say that Fido is an animated body, these animal characteristics are now the formal element in relation to which the three-dimensional body is the matter.

Matter and form were introduced into this treatise by Aquinas in order to illuminate the concept of *essence*. Now that matter and form have been related to genus and differentia, we may go on to ask how genus and differentia relate to essence. Aquinas answers along the following lines. ‘Animal’ is a word that can be used to denote both the human Socrates and the dog Fido. Since it denotes the whole of Socrates and the whole of Fido, it will denote *inter alia* the essence of Socrates and the essence of Fido. But though these two essences can be denoted by the same word, that does not mean that there is a single essence of everything that falls under the concept *animal*. On the contrary, it is because the genus-word is indeterminate that it can cover essences of quite different kinds.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Quamvis autem genus significet totam essentiam speciei, non tamen oportet ut diversarum specierum quarum est idem genus, sit una essentia, quia unitas generis ex ipsa indeterminatione vel indifferentia procedit (2.223–7).

One and the same piece of matter may turn into different kinds of thing by the addition of different forms; but a species is not a genus with something added to it, but rather a genus with an indeterminacy removed. The differentia that determines a species of a genus is already covered, though not specified, by the blanket term for the genus. 'Animal' covers everything that is an animal, and all the parts of anything that is an animal, including the rationality of Socrates and the caninity of Fido.

Once again, Aquinas draws an analogy between, on the one hand, the relation of genus to species and, on the other, the relation between species and individual. 'Human' covers every human individual and every essential part of every human individual; but it does so, Aquinas says, indistinctly.<sup>28</sup> Among other things, it will cover the determinate chunk of matter that makes up Socrates.

However, there is an important difference between the words 'human' and 'humanity'. 'Humanity' signifies what makes a human human (*id unde homo est homo*). But this does not include the individuating matter: that is what makes Socrates Socrates, but it is not part of what makes Socrates human. 'Socrates is human' is correct; the predicate covers, or denotes, the whole of Socrates, including his individuating matter. But 'Socrates is humanity' will not do; nor will 'A human being is humanity', because the word 'humanity' was devised precisely to exclude the individuating matter. Humanity is only a part of Socrates, though a part of a very special kind. It includes both form and matter; what it leaves out is what distinguishes one bit of matter from another.<sup>29</sup> The essence of Socrates is not Socrates.

<sup>28</sup> Species, secundum quod praedicatur de individuo, oportet quod significet totum id quod est essentialiter in individuo, licet indistincte (2.249–52).

<sup>29</sup> Humanitas . . . est forma quae est totum, scilicet formam complectens et materiam, tamen cum praecisione eorum per quae nata est materia designari (2.288–90).

This last conclusion raises a question. One can accept, easily enough, that humanity does not include individuating matter. But this seems to be true of humanity considered as a universal. If, as Aquinas holds, there are individual, and not just universal, essences, we can ask what makes Socrates' essence the essence *of Socrates*. Is it not the very same thing as makes Socrates Socrates—namely, that it is the essence of this particular body? If matter individuates Socrates from all other human beings, why doesn't it individuate Socrates' essence from all other human essences? If humanity as such contains form and some matter of a specific kind, surely the humanity of Socrates contains form and *this* matter of the same specific kind. This is a question the answer to which we seek in vain.

In the third chapter of the treatise, Aquinas' consideration of the relationship between species, essence, and individual brings him face to face with the issues that, in antiquity, gave rise to Plato's famous theory of Ideas. The theory arose as follows. Socrates, Pericles, and Alcibiades are all called 'human'; they have it in common that they are all men. Now when we say 'Socrates is human', does the word 'human' stand for something in the way that the word 'Socrates' stands for the individual man 'Socrates'? If so, what? Is it the same thing as the word 'human' stands for in 'Pericles is human'? Plato's answer is yes: in each case in which such an expression occurs it stands for the same thing, namely that which makes Socrates, Pericles, and Alcibiades all men. Plato gives this various designations in Greek which correspond more or less to the English word 'humanity', but his favourite designation is 'The Idea (or Form) of Human'. This Idea was something quite distinct and separate from any individual human being, and indeed belonged to a different, more stable, and more important world than the world of our everyday existence.

The common predicates that gave rise to Plato's theory are the predicates that Aquinas calls species, genus, and differentia, and he explicitly rejects Plato's treatment of them:



It cannot be said that the notions of genus and species apply to an essence as being something which is a certain existent reality separate from individuals, as the Platonists supposed; because if so species and genus would not be predicated of a particular individual—you couldn't say that Socrates is something which is separate from him—and such a separate entity would be no help in knowing this individual.<sup>30</sup>

St Thomas' own account, as we adumbrated earlier, is that a term such as a species word applies to the whole of which an essence is a part. But he now goes on to explain, in an important passage, that a non-Platonic nature or essence (a part of an individual, not something separate from it) can be considered in two different ways.

Take a given essence, E. If we consider E in the abstract, then all we can say truly about E is what applies to E *qua* E. For instance, a human being *qua* human is rational and animal; but simply *qua* human she is not black or white. So humanity, considered in the abstract, is neither black or white. Suppose now we raise the question: is humanity as such one or many? If we interpret this question as meaning: is it part of what is involved in being human that there should be more than one human being, or that there should be only a single one, then it is clear that we cannot give either answer. Plurality cannot be part of humanity, because at one time there was only Adam, and for all we know at the end of history there may be only a single human left alive. Singularity cannot be part of humanity, because nowadays there are billions of human beings. So we must say that *how many* human beings there are is not part of the essence of humanity, considered in

<sup>30</sup> Non potest dici quod ratio generis vel speciei conveniat essentiae secundum quod est quaedam res existens extra singularia, ut platonici ponebant, quia sic genus et species non praedicarentur de hoc individuo; non enim potest dici quod Socrates sit hoc quod ab eo separatum est; nec iterum illud separatum proficeret in cognitionem huius singularis (3.8–20).

the abstract.<sup>31</sup> Equally, *which* individual persons it is instantiated in is not part of the essence of humanity, so considered.<sup>32</sup>

If we consider humanity in the concrete, however, we find it existing in individual human beings; and many things are true of these individual humanities in virtue of the individuals to which they belong. There are white humans with their individual humanities, and black humans with theirs. But of course it is not part of a white person's *humanity* to be white: being white is no part of what makes a white person human.

There is in reality, for Aquinas, no such thing as humanity in the abstract. Humanity in the abstract exists only in the mind. It is this that gives rise to notions such as species, genus, and difference. Human nature exists in the mind in abstraction from individuating characteristics, related uniformly to all the individual humans existing outside the mind. There is no Idea of Human, only people's ideas of humanity. Aquinas rejects Plato's Forms in favour of Tom, Dick, and Harry's concepts. Any idea of human nature is an idea in some individual's mind.<sup>33</sup>

The species *dog* does not exist in reality, and it is no part of being a dog to be a species, even though dogs are a species. But if being a species were part of what it was to be a dog, then Fido would be a species. When we say that dogs are a species,

<sup>31</sup> Si quaeratur utrum ista natura sic considerata possit dici una vel plures, neutrum concedendum est, quia utrumque est extra intellectum humanitatis, et utrumque potest sibi accidere. Si enim pluralitas esset de intellectu eius, nunquam posset esse una, cum tamen una sit secundum quod est in Socrate. Similiter, si unitas esset de ratione eius, tunc esset una et eadem Socratis et Platonis nec posset in pluribus plurificari (3.37–43). In the paraphrase above I have altered one of Aquinas' examples, because there seems a confusion in his text between 'una' meaning 'undivided' and 'una' meaning 'unique'. Humanity in Socrates is undivided, but not unique, as it was in Adam before the creation of Eve. But the point Aquinas is making is undoubtedly correct, and can be made with a different example.

<sup>32</sup> Homo, non in quantum est homo, habet quod sit in hoc singulari vel in illo (3.66–7).

<sup>33</sup> Quamvis haec natura intellecta habeat rationem universalis secundum quod comparatur ad res extra animam, quia est una similitudo omnium, tamen, secundum quod habet esse in hoc intellectu vel in illo, est quaedam species intellecta particularis (3.102–7).

we are not really, if Aquinas is right, saying anything about dogs: we are making a second-order statement about our concepts. First, we are saying that the concept *dog* is universal: it is applicable to any number of dogs. Second, we are saying that it is a composite concept which has other concepts as constituents: for instance, *animal*. Genus and species are defined in terms of predication: and predicates are things that minds make up, in forming affirmative and negative propositions.<sup>34</sup>

Our ideas are universal in that they can apply to, or represent, many individuals of a kind; on the other hand, they are individual because they are ideas in individual minds: my ideas are mine and not yours, even though you and I may have ideas of the same things. Following a suggestion of Aquinas, we can think of a statue on a cenotaph: it represents indefinitely many of the fallen, but it is itself a single piece of marble. Thus, Aquinas can defend a robustly anti-Platonic principle: there are no universals outside the mind, not even universal ideas.

Plato, however, is not the only target that Aquinas has in his sights at this point. Averroes would agree with him that there are no universals outside minds. However, he argued from the universality of our concepts that there must be only one single intellect for the whole human race. Aquinas, on the contrary, insists that each of us has an individual intellect: my mind is not your mind any more than my body is your body.

Once again, the analogy with the statue helps: just as one statue may represent many people, so many statues may represent a single person (e.g. Stalin). That an idea of humanity may represent the common element in many humans does not mean that it has itself to be an element common to many humans.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Praedicari convenit generi per se, cum in eius definitione ponatur. Praedicatio enim est quiddam quod completur per actionem intellectus componentis et dividitatis (3.133-5).

<sup>35</sup> Et ideo patet defectus Commentatoris, . . . qui voluit ex universalitate formae intellectae unitatem intellectus in omnibus hominibus concludere; quia non est universalitas illius formae secundum hoc esse quod habet intellectum, sed secundum quod refertur ad res ut similitudo rerum (3.107-13).