The Categories Argument for the Real Distinction Between Being and Essence: Avicenna, Aquinas, and Their Greek Sources

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THE CATEGORIES ARGUMENT FOR THE REAL DISTINCTION BETWEEN
BEING AND ESSENCE: AVICENNA, AQUINAS,
AND THEIR GREEK SOURCES

by

Nathaniel B. Taylor, B.A.

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the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT
THE CATEGORIES ARGUMENT FOR THE REAL DISTINCTION BETWEEN BEING AND ESSENCE: AVICENNA, AQUINAS, AND THEIR GREEK SOURCES

Nathaniel B. Taylor, B.A.
Marquette University, 2023

There is a distinctively Avicennian way of understanding the categories to be found in the works of Thomas Aquinas that vindicates Aquinas’s early argument for the distinction between being and essence. Two of the most important and influential Aquinas scholars in the twentieth century recognized the roots of this Avicennian way in Aquinas, but neither Etienne Gilson and Cornelio Fabro made good on their insights. In this dissertation, I trace this Avicennian way through its sources in the Greek commentators and demonstrate how it provides the necessary insight into the structure and nature of the categories that render Aquinas’s Genus Argument intelligible. When one studies the history of the phrase “being per se” as a (quasi) definition of substance, one encounters a tradition of reading the categories after Aristotle that regards them as categorizing essences to which “being per se” or “being not in a subject” is like a property, concomitant, or “completer” of substance. Avicenna, as both a recipient and participant in this tradition of late antique commentary, recognizes the need to clarify in what sense of “being” the phrases “being per se” or “being not in a subject” can—and, more importantly, cannot—designate a property or completer of substance. Thanks to Avicenna, Aquinas resumes this tradition. For Aquinas, the ten genera categorize essences that are distinguished according to their diverse modes of being—modes that are, in one sense, proper to them and, in another sense, owed to them as something external. Only when we understand this background, can we understand Thomas’s “Genus Argument” not as a mere logical argument, subject to a fallacious inference from logical to ontological considerations. Just as we must ascribe to Avicenna an argument from the (quasi) definable essence of the categories to an extramental distinction between essence and “being in act” (wujūd bi-fi'l), so Aquinas’s Genus Argument is a form of Avicenna’s “Categories Argument” from the structure of the ten genera or categories of reality.
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Chapter I: Introduction

1. Background

In 1952, writing about those who understand Thomas Aquinas’s metaphysics as a centrally Aristotelian metaphysics, Étienne Gilson wrote the following:

For those who identify what Thomas calls being with what is commonly called substance, there can be no distinction between essence and existence, since being and ousia are one and the same thing. Each time Thomas Aquinas himself is looking “at being” as at a substance, he thereby reoccupies the position of Aristotle, and it is no wonder that, in such cases, the distinction between essence and existence does not occur to his own mind.¹

Gilson does not mention whom he has in mind who endorses this view, but the view may report a common reaction to reading Thomas: when one finds Thomas thinking about the theory of substance that he inherited from Aristotle, he often does not display any hint of the distinction between essence and existence that famously grounds all of his metaphysics and philosophical theology.

But thanks to Gilson’s own work subsequent to Being and Some Philosophers, we know well that, when it comes to thinking about substance, Thomas does not simply reoccupy the position of Aristotle. Gilson’s often-cited study “Quasi Definitio Substantiae,” published in 1974, reports his surprise upon discovering (after over thirty years of reading) that Aquinas’s understanding of substance is firmly rooted in the thought of Avicenna.² Gilson was surprised to discover that the common scholastic

¹ Étienne Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952), 158. Quotation marks added.
definition for substance, \textit{ens per se} (being through itself), did not meet with Aquinas’s approval, and that the authority whom Thomas cites in offering a correction to the definition is Avicenna. For, according to Aquinas, the correct (quasi) definition of substance is “a thing to whose essence it is due to be not in something.”

It will surprise my reader, at least by the end of my study, that Gilson’s 1974 paper is, apparently, the first thematization of Aquinas’s Avicennian (quasi) definition of substance in the scholarly literature.\footnote{That Aquinas modifies the phrase “a being \textit{per se}” (\textit{ens per se}) in order to allow it to form part of a (quasi) definition of substance was known before Gilson’s article. See Régis Jolivet, \textit{La notion de substance: Essai historique et critique sur le développement des doctrines d’Aristote à nos jours} (Paris: Bibliothèque des Archives de Philosophie, 1929), 48-49. Jolivet, however, does not acknowledge that in so modifying the phrase “a being \textit{per se}” Aquinas follows Avicenna. Avicenna’s influence on Aquinas’s metaphysics was recognized as early as 1926: M.-D. Roland-Gosselin, \textit{Le “De ente et essentia” de s. Thomas d’Aquin} (Kain, Belgium: Le Saulchoir, 1926), 187-198. There are, of course, many allusions to Aquinas’s Avicennian definition on substance since the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, each of those authors, not unlike Gilson himself, apparently treat Aquinas’s definition as a sidebar, as a noteworthy, but parochial concern, a mere logical consequence of Aquinas’s philosophical reflections. See Peter Coffey, \textit{Ontology or the Theory of Being: An Introduction to General Metaphysics} (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1918), 234; A. Rozwadowski, “De perception substantiae et de eius habitudine ad accidentia,” \textit{Gregorianum} 7 no. 1 (1926): 73-96, at 73; William Walton, “Being, Essence and Existence for St. Thomas Aquinas (II),” \textit{The Review of Metaphysics} 5 no. 1 (1951): 83-108, at 85, fn. 7; Herman Reith, \textit{The Metaphysics of St. Thomas Aquinas} (Milwaukee, WI: Bruce Publishing Co., 1958), 67-68; Albert G. Judy, “The Use of Avicenna’s Metaphysics, VIII, 4 in the Summa Contra Gentiles” (Dissertation, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1969), 81-82.}\footnote{Thomas Aquinas, \textit{De potentia} q. 7 a. 3 ad 4, in \textit{S. Thomae Aquinatis Quaestiones disputatae}, vol. 2, ed. Paulus Pession (Turin: Marietti, 1953), found at https://www.corpusthomisticum.org/qdp7.html#60138: “Sed si substantia possit habere definitionem, non obstante quod est genus generalissimum, erit eius definitio: quod substantia est res cuius quidditati debetur esse non in aliquo.”}

the Aristotelian substance cannot enter the world of St. Thomas Aquinas without at the same time entering a Christian world; and this means that it will have to undergo many inner transformations in order to become a created substance. […] In short, Aristotelian substances exist in their own right. Not so in the Christian
world of Thomas Aquinas, in which substances do not exist in their own right.\textsuperscript{5} One can immediately see how Gilson locates the transformation of “substance” against his characteristic approach to Aquinas: the Christian philosopher, who is in this case a theologian, has transformed the Greek (and Arabic) inheritance because of his religious vision.

As Gilson notes elsewhere, the phrase “being per se” (\textit{ens per se}) signifies God primarily and substances must be thought of as essences that receive the being proper to them. “Being per se” cannot be said in an unqualified way of creatures. Accordingly, Gilson is wont to emphasize that the key to Avicenna’s and Aquinas’s corrected (quasi) definition of substance is the famous and much disputed distinction between essence and existence\textsuperscript{6}: adopting a creationist worldview in which God, the totally simple first cause whose very essence is being (\textit{esse}), demands that we rethink substance, not as “being through itself” (\textit{ens per se}), but as an essence which stands under (\textit{sub-stare}) its being (\textit{esse}).\textsuperscript{7} Behind the scenes, again, are Gilson’s well-known interpretative stances: Aquinas is a theologian exercising Christian philosophy, transforming his sources from water into wine. For Gilson, sometimes the reader of Aquinas discovers those sources in his text in an untransformed state when the theologian wants to incorporate Aristotle as an unadulterated witness. On Gilson’s account, this is what Thomas has done with Aristotle’s theory of substance. When at other times Thomas speaks with his own voice, the concept of substance is transformed within a creationist metaphysics based on the distinction between being (\textit{esse}) and essence.

\textsuperscript{5} Étienne Gilson, \textit{Being and Some Philosophers}, 160.
\textsuperscript{6} “[T]he key to the problem of the true definition of substance…is the celebrated distinction of essence and \textit{esse} in finite beings.” Gilson, “\textit{Quasi Definitio Substantiae},” 119.
\textsuperscript{7} See Gilson, “\textit{Quasi Definitio Substantiae},” 120.
Let us return to the theme of Gilson’s quotation with which I opened: does the
distinction between being (esse) and essence arise in Thomas’s mind as a result of
looking at being as at substance? Though Gilson denies that Thomas simply reoccupies
the position of Aristotle when it comes to substance, he seems ultimately to agree with
the claim: Thomas does not look at being as substance and see there the distinction
between being and essence. Rather, for Gilson, the Christian philosopher looks at being
as created and therefore as receiving existence from another. So, after recognizing the
essence-existence distinction, the Christian philosopher looks back on substance and,
only then, recognizes the composition of being and essence in the category of substance.

I ask my reader to contrast Gilson’s view with that of Cornelio Fabro. Gilson and
Fabro are the two most influential readers of Aquinas in the last century, and, although
Gilson’s writings have been vastly more influential than Fabro’s in the English-speaking
world, Fabro’s voluminous oeuvre has been dominant outside that world, and it is
increasingly important in contemporary English scholarship thanks to scholars trained in
Europe such as John Wippel. We find in Fabro, on an isolated page, a claim that is
undeveloped, that does not well square with the rest of his thought, and that is
diametrically the opposite of Gilson’s: the composition of being (esse) and essence
results from the very notion of the categories. Fabro quotes and comments on a passage
from early Aquinas that offers what has come to be called the “Genus Argument” for the
real distinction between esse and essence. Fabro’s page, like his thought there, is
condensed, so I quote him, reversing the order of two paragraphs, and then comment.

The first division of being [into substance and accident] cannot but bring with it
Insofar as substance and accident are, in fact, the supreme genera of finite being, they are not able to agree in a common, “formal” content. A like treatment [applying something like genus and differentia] would either lead the conceptual resolution to infinity, or it would oblige [one] to treat being [ens] as a genus. All that remains, therefore, is to admit, between the two [namely, between substance and accident], [1] an “agreement in the mode of realizing” the composition of an essence with an act of being which [the essence] receives in itself from outside and to which it is united as to an actualizing principle – [2] in a different mode according as regards the one or the other [that is, substance or accident].

Being (ens) is the first and widest term, observes Fabro (apparently following Aquinas’s argument at De ver. q. 1 a. 1 co.). Therefore, it cannot be considered to be a definitional genus (implying differentiae), says Aquinas routinely, since a differentia would have to be somehow outside of being (ens), i.e., would have to be a non-being. Consequently, continues Fabro, the first division of being cannot, as would a genus, contain any “common formal content.” Instead, in Thomism, he argues, there is a feature (una convenienza) that befits both substance and accident, namely, the composition of essence

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8 Although Thomas uses the phrase “real distinction,” he speaks of a “real composition” of essence and esse, which he says “differ in reality,” but never of their “real distinction.” Accordingly, Fabro sometimes uses “real composition” rather than the traditional terminology in discourse post-Aquinas: “real distinction.”

9 Cornelio Fabro, “Neotomismo e Neosuarezismo: una battaglia di principi (continuaz),” Divus Thomas 44 (1941): 473: “La prima divisione dell’ente [in sostanza ed accidente] non può portare che sui modi della composizione reale fra essenza ed esistenza. In quanto, infatti, sostanza ed accidente sono i generi supremi dell’ente finito, essi non possono convenire in un contenuto « formale » comune: un simile trattamento o porterebbe la risoluzione concettuale all’infinito, od obbligherebbe a trattare l’ens come un genere. Non resta perciò che ammettere, fra i due, una ‘convenienza nel modo di realizzare’ la composizione di un’essenza ad un atto di essere che riceve in sè dal di fuori e che ad essa si unisce come principio attuante, in modo diverso secondo che si tratta dell’uno o dell’altro.” All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

10 Thomas Aquinas, De potentia q. 7 a. 3 ad 4.
and existence or act of being (esistenza, atto di essere) that it receives from without, plus something that is diverse: a diverse mode in which this composition is realized (modo diverso [di realizzare]) in one and the other, that is, in substance and accident. In short, “the first division of being cannot but bring with it […] modes of composition between essence and existence.”

Far from the real distinction being read onto Aristotelian substance post hoc, as for Gilson, the very notion of substance is here said to require the real distinction. As a result, Fabro, again following Aquinas, describes the first genera as having modes of being as quasi-differentiae:

[I]n Thomism, the “being which is divided by the ten genera” preserves as intrinsic the relationship of the essence with the act of being; it follows from this that the first division of (finite) being into substance and accident is reduced to being the expression of two fundamental forms according to which that relationship of the composition of essence with esse is realized: the substance as ‘that to which it belongs,’ [and] ‘that which has esse in itself’; the accident as ‘that to which it belongs to have esse in another.

In other words, the first division of finite being (ens) is into substance and accident insofar as substance is an essence to which being (esse) belongs in se, and accident is that to which being belongs in another. Thus, a distinction between being (esse) and essence is

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12 By referring to “ten,” Fabro shows that he takes “genus” to signify “category.”
13 Fabro, “Neotomismo,” 472-473: “nel Tomismo 1’ens quod dividitur per decem genera’ conserva intrinseco il rapporto dell’essenza all’atto di essere; segue da ciò che la prima divisione dell’ente (finito) in sostanza ed accidente si riduce ad essere l’enunciazione delle due forme fondamentali secondo le quali si realizza quel rapporto di composizione dell’essenza con 1’ ‘esse’: la sostanza come ‘id cui competit,’ ‘id quod habet esse in se’; l’accidente come ‘id cui competit habere esse in alio.’ La nozione di predicamento come tale include perciò nel Tomismo la posizione esplicita della distinzione reale fra essenza ed esistenza.” [Italics added.]
contained in the distinction between the category of substance and the other categories of accidents. The very notion of a predicate shows us how.

In Thomism, explains Fabro, that notion contains the explicit affirmation (*esplicita posizione*) of the real distinction between essence and existence. Here is the reason, he remarks, that we find Aquinas in his *De ente* (and Avicenna “in his *Metaphysica,*” says Thomas) proving the real distinction between being (*esse*) and essence with the “Genus Argument,” (i.e., the argument based on the “common formal content” of a genus). The argument is “most valid” once “reduced to its principles, concludes Fabro without further clarifications: “Ricondotto ai suoi principi, l’argomento è validissimo.”

This dissertation fulfills the promise found on Fabro’s page. It explains how the “Genus Argument” is, in Fabro’s words, “most valid” (as well as sound) in Avicenna and Aquinas as a meditation upon a problem in the text of Aristotle raised by the Greek commentators and passed on thereby to the Arabic philosophers. Despite the great insight contained in Fabro into the composition of “essence and mode of being (*modus essendi*)” in the categories as it relates to the distinction between essence and existence (*esse*), both he and Gilson (and especially his student, Joseph Owens) ultimately ground any possible argument for the “real distinction” exclusively in a “God to creatures” argument, rejecting altogether the “Genus Argument” (and perhaps any argument).

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14 Fabro, “Neotomismo,” 473. By “once reduced to its principles,” perhaps Fabro intends: once what is for him a *logical* argument, the “Genus Argument,” is understood in light of the *metaphysical* “Participation Argument” that he had presented two pages before; that is, once argumentation is remembered that distinguishes between participated, separated perfection (*esse*) and the participating creature that does not have a right to being in itself. Fabro came in 1954 to reject the “Genus Argument” altogether, and by 1956 he apparently rejects the language of “argumentation” in favor of seeing the “real distinction” as a “per se known to the wise,” in the language of Boethius.

2. Thesis

By reversing Gilson’s approach, in this dissertation I argue that Avicenna’s and Thomas’s thinking about the correct (quasi) definition of the category of substance, and by association the (quasi) definition of the categories in general, is the key to unlocking the distinction between being (*esse*) and essence. In other words, contemplating what the categories are and what it takes to be in a category provides an occasion on which to prove a real distinction between being and essence. In that sense, whereas Gilson rejected looking at being (*ens*) as substance, I take seriously the idea that Avicenna and Aquinas can look at substance as a being (*ens*) and see there a real distinction between being (*esse*) and essence.

Since the dissertation proceeds historically, I express the same thesis in a historical way. Contemplating the structure and nature of the categories as presented in the Aristotelian commentary tradition, I show, provides the occasion on which Avicenna discovers the need to exclude “being” (*wujūd*) in the sense of “act” or “to be actually” from the (quasi) definitions of the categories. Avicenna did not expressly propose a “proof of the real distinction of essence and being.” But his thought can be reexpressed as such a proof, to be called “Avicenna’s Genus Argument,” or, better, “Avicenna’s Categories Argument.” The renaming of the Genus Argument allows us to see it, not as a logical argument from the logical notion of a genus, as Fabro and others have held, but as a metaphysical argument based on Aristotle’s categories of being. Aquinas recognizes Avicenna’s line of reasoning and on its basis devises a proof for the real distinction between being and essence, which has been called the “Genus Argument,” but which I argue should be seen as a version of Avicenna’s “Categories Argument.”
How would contemplating the structure and nature of the categories lead one to affirm and offer a proof of the real distinction between being \((wujūd, esse)\) and essence? We must first see just what is meant by the “structure” and “nature” of the categories, as well as by a “real” distinction between being and essence. In saying that we can contemplate the “nature” of the categories, I mean to say that we must understand just what it is that the categories are meant to categorize, and in saying that we can contemplate the structure of the categories, I mean to say that we must understand the proper or characteristic features of the categories. In other words, we must understand what makes the categories a unified set (i.e. that by virtue of which they are all called “category” commonly), and what properties or characteristics make the categories distinct from each other. By “real,” I mean that the distinction between being and essence belongs to the domain of extramental being. The Genus Argument is not a logical argument that derives metaphysical conclusions. I show how the Genus Argument, as based in the commentary tradition’s understanding of the categories as genuinely extramental, and as inspired by Avicenna, begins and ends in the domain of metaphysics.

In order to see the nature and structure of the categories that are indispensable to understanding the Genus Argument, we must pay special attention to the phrase “being per se” (first of all, \(to\ on\ kath’\ hauto\)) This is no mere expedient heuristic. Rather, the phrase “being per se” in its many senses, and the effort to disambiguate and clarify the senses of “being per se” as it applies to the categories is the very source from which Avicenna and Aquinas derive their line of thinking in the Categories and Genus Arguments.

Procedure. Chapter II opens with the question: is “being through itself” \((to\ on\ kath’\ hauto)\)
*kath’ hauto* a definition of substance in Aristotle (or like a definition)? The answer is rather complicated, “yes and no.” We can ascribe to Aristotle two senses of the phrase “being through itself.” In one sense, “being through itself,” ascertained through Aristotle’s use of “*kath’ hauto,*” signifies that a thing does not inhere in a subject because it is itself a subject. In this sense, “being through itself” pertains to substance uniquely and distinguishes substance from the other categories. However, in another sense, “being through itself” is said of all of the categories—including the categories of the accidents. The reason for this, I argue, is that, unlike happenstance *per accidens* beings, the categories comprise determinate, intelligible patterns, that is, essences, such that anything in a category has a determinate “what it is to be.” For this reason, I distinguish between what I call the “Subject Sense” of “being through itself” and the “Essence Sense.” I show that several contemporary commentators on Aristotle fail to recognize both of these senses of “being through itself” and end by reducing the Essence Sense to the Subject Sense, so that only things in the category of substance are beings through themselves. This result blinds us to an important teaching concerning the categories and one that will pave the way for Avicenna’s discovery of the real distinction: that the categories are categories of definable essences.

In Chapter III, I outline three consensuses that developed in late antiquity among the Greek commentators on Aristotle concerning how to read Aristotle’s *Categories.* First, as I show, these commentators solidify the Essence Sense of “being through itself” to the point that it becomes common, already in Alexander, to talk about the “natures” (*phuseis*) that are found in the categories. Second, because the Neoplatonic commentators had to deal with the apparent tensions between an Aristotelian metaphysics of sensible
individuals as *ousiai* and a Platonic metaphysics of the Forms as *ousiai*, it became a standard view of Aristotle’s *Categories* that it is an introductory work that concerns only sensible substance (or, *language* about sensible substances). This hermeneutic steers the commentators, third, to think of the ten categories as categories of natures or essences necessarily tied up with matter and, thus, necessarily composite. Along these same lines, these essences are composite, not only because they are tied up with matter, but also because, in contrast with incomposite Forms, they have certain properties (*idia*) insofar as they are in a category. This third consensus, namely, that “not being in a subject” and “being in a subject” are like properties, concomitants, or “completers” (*symplērōtika*) of the “essences” in the categories, follows from the understanding in the commentary tradition of *Categories* 5 as an articulation of the “properties” (*idia*) of substance. Thus, since “not being in a subject” is discussed there, the commentators understand “not being in a subject” (*to mē en hupokeimenō einai*; Ammonius, *In Cat.* 44, 16) to be a property, concomitant, or “completer” of substance and, as such, the commentators understood “not being in a subject” as like a definition or differentia of substance. Accordingly, we may observe another way in which the categories are seen

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17 See below on Ammonius in Chapter 2.
18 Ammonius, *In Aristotelis Categorias Commentarius*, in *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca* Vol. 4 part 4 ed. Adolffus Busse (Berlin: Reimer, 1895), 44, 8-15: “ἐπειδὴ δὲ ἡ οὐσία γένος ἐστὶ γενικώτατον, τῶν δὲ γενικώτατων ὁρισμὸν οὐ δυνάμεθα ἀποδοῦναι διὰ τὸ τοὺς ὁρισμοὺς, ὡς ἴσμεν, ἐκ γένους καὶ συστατικῶν διαφορῶν λαμβάνεσθαι, τῆς οὖσιας τὸ ἴδιον ἐπιζητεῖ· ἔοικε γὰρ πως τοῦτο τῷ ὁρισμῷ· ὥσπερ γὰρ ὁ ὁρισμὸς μόνῳ καὶ παντὶ ὑπάρχει, οὗ ἐστιν ὁρισμός, καὶ πρὸς τὸ ὁριστὸν ἀντιστρέφει, οὕτω τὸ ἴδιον μόνῳ καὶ παντὶ ὑπάρχει, οὗ ἐστιν ἴδιον, καὶ ἀντιστρέφουσι πρὸς ἄλληλα, διὰ ταύτην οὖν τὴν αἰτίαν ἴδιον τῆς οὐσίας ἀποδοῦναι βούλεται;” (*Ousia* is the most general genus, and we are not able to give a definition of the most general genera because definitions, as we know, are taken up from the genus and from constitutive differentiae. Therefore, [Aristotle] seeks what is proper (*idion*) to substance; for, this is in some way like a definition; just as the definition is what belongs to all and to only that of which it is the definition, and it is convertible with the defined, so too does what is proper belong to all and only that of which it is proper,
by the commentators to be categories of composite beings: the essences in the categories are composite in that they have properties that follow necessarily from them.

Chapter IV turns to Avicenna’s account of the (quasi) definition of substance. There we see Avicenna put these three commentatorial consensuses to use in his own understanding of the categories, and, in particular, in his consideration of the (quasi) definition of substance. My work furthers the current scholarly awareness of Avicenna as steeped in the Greek commentatorial tradition.¹⁹ This learning is precisely the grounds of his remarkable originality when he departs from that tradition, criticizing the Baghdadi Aristotelians, for example, who slavishly followed it.²⁰ Avicenna shares the view of the Greek commentators: “being not in a subject” is like a property or completer (Avicenna uses the word “constituent” (muqawwim) of the essence of a substance). Unlike the commentators, however, Avicenna is keenly aware of an ambiguity in saying that “being not in a subject” follows necessarily from the essence of the substance. For, if one takes “being” in “being not in a subject” in an existential sense, then one should be able to infer that substances actually exist by virtue of their own essences. As we shall see, Avicenna argues that such a consequence is impossible; otherwise, one could know that some \( x \) actually exists simply by knowing that \( x \) is a substance. It does not follow, argues Avicenna, that something has being in act (\( wujūd bi-fi’l \)) simply from the fact that something is a substance. The reasoning in the background supporting Avicenna’s claim,

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I suggest, is Aristotle’s distinction between “being” in the sense that applies to the ten categories (to on kath’ hauto in the Essence Sense) and “being” (on) in the sense of “actuality.”\textsuperscript{21} For, Aristotle tells us that actuality and potency divide even the category of substance. If it were the case that being a substance entailed being in act, then it would not be possible for there to be potential substances, as Aristotle clearly thinks there are. Thus, the reasoning behind Avicenna’s argument concerning the sense of being that pertains to the categories has Aristotle for a source.

We see in Avicenna’s argument here, I argue, the real distinction between essence (the sense of “being” that applies to the ten categories) and existence (“being” in the sense of “actuality”).\textsuperscript{22} Because “being not in a subject” follows necessarily from the essence of the substance, as a constitutional property (muqawwim) of substance, the “being” in “being not in a subject” cannot mean “actually being” (wujūd bi-fi’l). Otherwise, it would be necessary that every substance actually exist by virtue of itself in the manner of the Necessary Being. Moreover, if to be a substance necessarily includes to be in act, then it would be impossible for a substance to be in potency and, thus, substantial change would be impossible. This recognition that “being not in a subject” is essential to substance but “actually being not in a subject” is not essential shows that “being in act” must pertain to a substance, not by virtue of itself, but by virtue of a separate cause. “Being in act,” as outside the (quasi) definitional essence, is in that sense accidental to the essence of substances and, indeed, to the essences in every category. I lay out Avicenna’s reasoning in a simplified fashion as what I call “Avicenna’s

\textsuperscript{21} See Aristotle, Metaphysics Δ.7, 1017a22-1017b9. I owe this insight to David Twetten.

\textsuperscript{22} In a paper in draft, David Twetten, “The Source of Aquinas’ “Being as Act” (Esse ut Actus) in Arabic Philosophy,” had already pointed out the language of “being in act” associated with Avicenna’s doctrine on existence, but not the nominalization of the term.
Categories Argument” for the “essence-being in act” real distinction. Avicenna scholarship has not focused on the texts I bring out in Chapter IV as a key source of Avicenna reasoning on the essence-existence distinction.

My mention of “accidental” raises the issue of Averroes’s criticism of Avicenna, specifically of the claim that existence is something that is outside of essence. According to Averroes, Avicenna breaks with standard Aristotelian methodology by introducing a sense of “being” that is an accident. The standard Aristotelian way of dealing with “being” in the sense of “existence,” argues Averroes, is through “being” (*to on*) in the sense of “is true;” and so, answers to the question “does x exist?” belong to this sense of existence in *Metaphysics Δ.7.*

Thus, according to Averroes, the Aristotelian need not affirm being as an accident to explain existential propositions. Instead, she need only have recourse to propositional being: “exists” in a proposition reflects a concept in the mind that corresponds to an extramental thing. By contrast, as I show based on Avicenna’s texts concerning the (quasi) definition of substance, Avicenna agrees with the standard Aristotelian view expressed by Averroes, but is concerned with a sense of “being” that is entirely outside the scope of Averroes’s criticism. Averroes’s remarks, far from being a genuine criticism, amount to a dismissal of the very sense of being that Avicenna is forced to distinguish from essence. Thus, on the one hand, Avicenna’s view of propositional being and categorial being is actually not far from Averroes’s own; whereas, on the other, Averroes misses a side of “being in act” that cannot be accounted for by propositional being.

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Chapter V brings all of the preceding to bear on the thought of Thomas Aquinas. We find in the texts of Thomas precisely the Avicennian insight into the categories that leads to the discovery of the real distinction. According to Thomas, “being” in the sense of “essence” is common to all of the categories, with the result that the categories are distinguished according to something without them, namely, according to diverse “modes of being” (modi essendi). The language of “modes,” put to this use, is not found in in the late antique commentators on Aristotle or Avicenna, though it appears to be inspired by the Latin Avicenna. Indeed, Aquinas’s use of “modes of being” to distinguish the categories from each other presents a novel way of avoiding an issue that plagued the preceding commentary tradition—namely, that the language of “being not in a subject” as a completer or constitutional property is associated with the way a differentia divides a genus into species. A “mode of being” for Thomas signifies the modulation of an act of being (actus essendi) by which essences are actualized and perfected. It is adverbial, as it were—it signifies how an essence has its act of being. Thus, substances are distinguished from accidents according as substances are subjects to which is due that they exist through themselves, whereas accidents are in subjects. This account of modes of being as “owed” or “suited to” an essence has the same consequences as Avicenna’s view of “being not in a subject” as a constituent property, without sounding like an accidental addition superadded to being (see Aquinas, De veritate 1.1c24). Thus, Thomas’s language of “modes of being,” by systematizing Avicenna’s claims, corrects a metaphysical flaw in the Greek commentary tradition, namely, treating “being not in a subject” and “being in a subject” as proper accidents that distinguish and diversify “being” as something

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belonging in common to all of the categories.

Thomas’s own proofs for the essence-*esse* real distinction also disclose Avicenna’s vision of the structure of the categories. Chapter VI has two principal tasks: to show the Avicennian heritage of Aquinas’s Genus Argument, and to reread that argument in light of this heritage.

Aquinas may be the first to thematize and argue expressly for the real distinction between essence and *esse*. The so-called Genus Argument is his creation, but I show how its early versions are based on his reading of Avicennian texts. At the same time, Aquinas’s Genus Argument proceeds at a level of greater abstraction and is simpler than any reasoning that can be formulated based on Avicenna’s wording. Although it introduces a new theme of the class-member relation, Thomas follows Avicenna in arguing that everything in a genus has an essence distinct from its “being in act.” The reason is that the essence or common nature, which is that by virtue of which something is in the categories cannot be identical to the “being in act” whereby a thing actually is. For, the essence (in pre-Ockham “essence realism”) is that which is held in common by the members of a category. So, if the essence were identical with an individual’s being in act (*esse in actu*), every item in a category would “be” by an identical “being in act.”

Though Avicenna never presents the same line of reasoning as is found in Aquinas’s Genus Argument—namely, that “being in act” and essence must be distinct in any genus to avoid the aforementioned consequence—Aquinas’s argument exhibits Avicenna’s fundamental insight: that being in act cannot be included in the quasi-definable essence of the very thing that it actualizes. Aquinas’s point is not that one must affirm a unique *actus essendi* in order to explain how things are individuated within a genus. Rather,
Socrates has individuation, but he only exists within the genus or category of substance in virtue of something that accounts for actually existing. And, that feature cannot be what makes Diotima exist. Failing to see the Avicennian background in which definitional essences account for what is common in Socrates and Diotima, but cannot account for “being in act” has misled Thomists to think that Aquinas is using a logician’s class-membership to infer an ontological claim.

Aquinas’s Genus Argument is in fact a version of Avicenna’s Categories Argument. The genera of the Genus Argument are principally the categories, especially the category of substance. Once this fact is seen by understanding the Avicennian heritage, it is not difficult to respond to the weighty arguments against the Genus Argument as a logical argument from class-membership to ontology. Those criticisms miss the mark by missing the metaphysical character, from start to finish, of Aquinas’s reasoning.

Retrospective. By drawing out the commentary tradition preceding Avicenna and Aquinas, I show that Avicenna and Aquinas are participants in a broad discussion found in the commentary literature. When one studies the history of the phrase “being per se” as a (quasi) definition or description of substance, one encounters a tradition of reading the categories after Aristotle that thinks of the categories as categories of essences to which “to be per se” or “not being in a subject” is like a property, concomitant, or completer of substance. Avicenna, as both a recipient and participant in this tradition of late antique commentary on the categories, recognizes the need to clarify in what sense of “being” the phrases “being per se” or “being not in a subject” could designate a property or completer of substance, and, more importantly, in what sense of “being” they cannot designate a
property or completer of substance. Thanks to Avicenna, Aquinas resumes the late antique tradition of reading the categories as categories of composite essences distinguished according to their diverse modes of being – modes that are, in one sense, proper to them and, in another sense, owed to them as something external. In this way, in line with the scholarship of Amos Bertolacci and Robert Wisnovsky, I read Avicenna as an inheritor of and participant in the late antique Greek commentary tradition, and, by extension, I read Aquinas likewise as an inheritor and participant of that same tradition through his engagement with Avicenna. I argue that, unless we understand this background in how the late antique commentators understood the categories, we cannot hope to understand Thomas’s Genus Argument.

As such, I do not argue that the Genus Argument is the *only* proof for the distinction between being (*esse*) and essence or that it is the *best* proof. I do not make any determination about whether it is a good proof or that one must, given the tradition of Aristotelian commentary, affirm a distinction between being and essence. There are certainly other ways of approaching substance found within this broader tradition presented by authors who do not end up affirming a distinction between being and essence. Averroes is a fine example of this. However, as I argue in Chapter IV, it is important to recognize Averroes’s criticism of Avicenna as an alternative to Avicenna rather than a direct refutation of Avicenna’s view. Thus, the goal of this dissertation is not to refute alternative lines of explanation regarding the categories and the distinction between being and essence; rather, my aim is to bring to light the theory of the categories that makes something like the Genus Argument an authentic argument of the mature Aquinas for an *extramental* distinction between being and essence.
We are now in a position to see two major consequences of my research. First, in knowing the sources of Aquinas’s Genus Argument, we can with confidence gloss Thomas’s use of the term “genus” in the argument with the term “category,” as do both Avicenna and al-Ghazālī (an important source for Aquinas of Avicenna’s Persian philosophical work): in other words, both claim that essence and being in act (\(\text{wujūd bi-fi'īl}\)) are distinct in every category. Thus, Aquinas’s version of Avicenna’s Categories Argument does not reason from a logician’s use of “genus” or from “genus” as a mental entity; it does not move surreptitiously from a logical distinction to a real distinction, as John Wippel maintains.²⁵ In speaking of the categories, Aquinas makes it clear that he is not concerned with a ratio common to them in the sense of a universal concept in the mind that ranges over many instances. Rather, as the context and source of the argument make clear, Aquinas has in mind a distinction between the essence by virtue of which a thing is in a category and the act whereby it actually exists. The Genus Argument does not begin in the realm of mere concepts: its genera are, first of all, the categories of extramental being and the essences by which actual existents belong to those categories.

Second, as now becomes clear, Aquinas learned from Avicenna to think of the categories as categorizing essences that are of themselves composite and, thus, in a sense, incomplete. Though “being not in a subject” is an essential fact about substance and pertains to it by virtue of itself, “actually existing through itself, not in a subject” is not something that pertains to the essences in the category of substance by virtue of themselves. This message is as old as the Greek commentators who viewed Aristotle’s Categories as pertaining exclusively to composite, terrestrial, and thus imperfect

substances. Though the commentators understood the categories to categorize composites of form and matter, Avicenna and Aquinas draw attention to a more fundamental composition: that of essence and being in act (ṣubās, *wujūd bi-fī ḍ; esse in actu*).

In sum, as the arguments and textual evidence will show, contemplating the structure and (quasi) definitions of the categories provides Aquinas and Avicenna alike the occasion on which to discover the real distinction between essence and being in act. Gilson’s claim that the essence-existence distinction is the key to understanding Thomas’s Avicennian definition of substance is correct in a sense: at the level of principles, indeed, the real distinction is the key to Thomas’s Avicennian definition. But, at the level of discovery, the Avicennian definition of substance provides the major occasion, apart from the *Intellectus essentiae* Argument, for discovering the real distinction. Thus, the real distinction of essence and being in the categories is the result of a tradition of reading Aristotle’s *Categories* which is rooted in the Greek commentators. The “real distinction” is not merely a theologically motivated tool to help distinguish the Creator from the created, or the result of Muʿtazilī Quranic commentary— though, of course, each of these plays a role in the story. Moreover, the Categories Argument in Avicenna and Aquinas does not rely on some further God-to-creatures or participation argument as we find in Fabro. On one page of his work, Fabro glimpsed that the structure and nature of the categories offer a promising avenue for viewing the real distinction, but he too quickly dismissed the argument as fundamentally logical rather than metaphysical. Fabro missed the Greek background that motivates and vindicates the

26 Fabro presents Aquinas’s texts as offering two fundamental arguments for the essence-*esse* real distinction: the logical argument, which can be fleshed out as either the “Genus” or the “Intellectus essentiae” Argument; and the metaphysical argument from separate perfection, which is best elaborated through participation; “Neotomismo,” 497.
Categories Argument. Just as Robert Wisnovsky has shown in the case of Avicenna on the soul, so I argue in the case of the real distinction between essence and being in act: it is the result of a prolonged engagement with the late-antique Neoplatonic commentators’ view of the categories. This is a tradition that Aquinas inherited and carried forth following his foremost authority on metaphysics: Avicenna.

3. Status quaestionis

Although within each chapter, I take up the scholarly literature where relevant, here I present the literature as it affects the dissertation as a whole, focusing on two themes: the problem of the Genus Argument for the “real distinction;” and, the structure of the categories as the key to the understanding the Genus Argument.

*The Problem of the Real Distinction and the Genus Argument.* The real distinction between esse and essence has garnered its fair share of controversial writing since the 19th century. It occupies an ambiguous position. On the one hand, it is recognized as perhaps the most central and important thesis of Thomistic metaphysics, whereas, on the other, it had posed against it serious doubts about the validity of Thomas’s attempts to prove it. In reaction to those doubts, Gilson came to deny that anyone has been able to demonstrate a distinction between existence and essence, and this rejection of any proper demonstration of the distinction led Armand Maurer and R.E. Houser to

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interpret Thomas’s arguments as dialectical rather than demonstrative. Others have thought that some version of Aquinas’s argument for the real distinction between being and essence is valid, though only by first proving the uniqueness of a being in which esse and essence are not really distinct: in everything else, esse must be something outside of the thing’s essence. As we saw above, this is what Fabro proposed. Those who have catalogued Aquinas’s arguments call this “top-down” reasoning a form of “God-to-creatures” Argument, or the “Hypothetical Essence that is Esse” Argument.\(^3\) We find this view in Joseph Owens\(^3\) and John Wippel,\(^3\) though the two disagree over whether a thing whose essence is existence must be proved actually to exist in order to infer a real distinction between being and essence in everything else (the view of Owens) or whether the proof that it is impossible for there to be many things whose essence is existence suffices as a proof of the real distinction without needing to prove that a thing whose essence is existence actually exists (the view of Wippel). For both Owens and Wippel, the Genus Argument fails, and the Intellectus essentiae Argument (the “first stage” of the reasoning in De ente et essentia 4), establishes, and is intended to establish, nothing more than a conceptual distinction.\(^3\) Others have thought that the Genus Argument and the Intellectus essentiae Argument fail in that they prove nothing more than a distinction between essence and supposit.\(^3\)


\(^3\) John F. Wippel, “Aquinas’s Route to the Real Distinction: A Note on De Ente et Essentia,” The Thomist 43 no. 2 (1979): 279-295, at 289-291. Wippel, Metaphysical Thought 164-174, also recommends certain versions of the Participation Argument, and has brought the “Limitation of Esse” Argument.


\(^3\) Joseph de Finance, Etre et Agir dans la Philosophie de Saint Thomas (Rome: Université Pontificale
There are, of course, defenders of the *Intelectus essentiae* and *Genus*

Arguments, some of whom appeal to Aquinas’s semantics. But there remains an obstacle to defending these arguments. On Fabro’s account, *esse* for Avicenna arises from the posing of the question, “does x exist?” (vs “what is x?”). The answer affirms that a possible essence exists or is realized, whether in the mind or in reality. This answer involves no distinct *actus essendi*, or intensive *esse*, such as is needed to ground a “real distinction.” Thus, *esse* for Fabro’s Avicenna signifies the realization of an essence; it is the source of the Latin *esse essentiae* vs *esse existentiae* distinction. As a result, Avicenna’s *esse* does not enter into composition with essence as the act of a potency. Avicenna’s thinking is purely formal. The mature and authentic interpretation of the real distinction in Aquinas’s thought involves being liberated from all Avicennian

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41 Fabro, *Participation et causalité*, 261 fn. 34, 283, 314.


influence: “désormais libérée de toute influence avicennienne.”  

Not unlike Fabro, many contemporary commentators on Avicenna deny that he offered anything beyond a conceptual distinction, either as a distinction at the level of conceptualization or as a methodological distinction between how different sciences approach essences. Indeed, some authors take it to be indubitable that Avicenna’s distinction between being and essence is a merely conceptual one. But Goichon, an early expositor of Avicenna’s thought, took Avicenna to be offering a real distinction and there are contemporary scholars who confirm this view. Despite the interest that Avicenna’s distinction has attracted, the details of Avicenna’s actual argumentation for a real distinction have not been catalogued with the same precision as we find in the Aquinas literature, with the notable exception of a piece by Roland E. Houser. However, the argumentation that Houser finds in Avicenna corresponding to the Genus Argument in Aquinas is not a perfect match. Indeed, there is something like Aquinas’s Genus Argument to be found in Avicenna, and it is, in fact, the source of Aquinas’s

44 Fabro, Participation et causalité, 209.
45 Caterina Belo, “Essence and Existence in Avicenna and Averroes,” Al-Qanṭara 30 no. 2 (2009): 403-426, at 414. Fabro’s early works present Avicenna as the source of Aquinas on the “real distinction,” and he sometimes acknowledges in his “mature” works that Avicenna believed in a real distinction (even if his arguments and conceptions cannot justify one).
49 Goichon, La Distinction d’après Ibn Sīnā, 136-141.
Genus Argument, as Muhammad Legenhausen has shown.\textsuperscript{53} But aside from Legenhausen’s 2007 study, Avicenna’s Genus Argument is not well known in the literature.

\textit{The Structure of the Categories as the Key to the Genus Argument.} Interest has arisen in Avicenna’s view of the nature and (quasi) definition of the categories thanks to the study of Alexander Kalbarczyk in 2018.\textsuperscript{54} Kalbarczyk’s work is of importance for our purposes because it situates Avicenna’s reading of the \textit{Categories} not only in relation to later thinkers in the Islamic philosophical tradition, but also in relation to the late antique Greek commentators. This approach has proved fruitful also in the studies of Robert Wisnovsky,\textsuperscript{55} Dimitri Gutas,\textsuperscript{56} Yagane Sheyagan,\textsuperscript{57} Fedor Benevich,\textsuperscript{58} and Amos Bertolacci.\textsuperscript{59} Some of these studies even discuss the (quasi) definition of the category of substance, including Kalbarczyk’s aforementioned work, and an article by Abraham Stone in 2008.\textsuperscript{60}

Investigations of Aquinas with an eye to the late antique commentary tradition are

\textsuperscript{53} Muhammad Legenhausen, “Ibn Sina’s Arguments Against God’s Being a Substance,” in \textit{Substance and Attribute: Western and Islamic Traditions in Dialogue}, eds. Christian Kanzian and Muhammad Legenhausen (Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag, 2007), 116-143, at 123-130. It is worth noting that for Legenhausen, Aquinas does not follow Avicenna’s precise argumentation. “Aquinas reasons in a manner similar to Ibn Sina, except that Ibn Sina focuses on the definition of substance as neither in nor predicatable of a subject, while Aquinas speaks of substance as what ‘exists of itself’. Also, Aquinas does not have what I have called the ‘curious argument’ of Ibn Sina, to wit that we can know that the definition of substance applies to a thing without knowing whether the thing exists” (p. 131).

\textsuperscript{54} Alexander Kalbarczyk, \textit{Predication and Ontology}, 221-227.

\textsuperscript{55} Wisnovsky, \textit{Avicenna’s Metaphysics in Context}, 3.

\textsuperscript{56} Dimitri Gutas, \textit{Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition}, 237-322.


\textsuperscript{58} Fedor Benevich, “Fire and Heat: Yahyā B. ‘Adl and Avicenna on the Essentaility of Being Substance or Accident,” \textit{Arabic Sciences and Philosophy} 27, no. 2 (2017): 237-267, at 254-266.


less common than in the case of Avicenna, with the exceptions of Wayne Hankey and Michael Chase. Instead, much of the literature on Aquinas’s understanding of the categories focuses on his derivation of the categories from diverse modes of predicking. This is not the fault of the scholarly community. Thomas did not leave us with a commentary on the Categories, so his views about the nature and structure of the categories have to be gleaned indirectly. Thus, a study dedicated to Thomas’s (quasi) definition of the category of substance and the other categories is a desideratum. In fact, the state of the literature on Thomas’s (quasi) definition of substance and the other categories has not advanced much since Gilson’s 1974 study.

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Although it does not appear to be Leo Elder’s intention to dispute Gilson’s account, he apparently does not see that Thomas adopts Avicenna’s new (quasi) definition of substance. Instead, for Elders, Avicenna’s definition of substance is “a being per se,” and St. Thomas corrects Avicenna, contriving for himself the new, quidditative definition of substance.
Chapter II: Being *kath’ hauto* and *ousia* in Aristotle

1. Introduction

Gilson says that when Thomas talks about substance, he reoccupies the position of Aristotle. But, Gilson has also noted that, when it comes to defining substance (as much as one is able to define substance), Thomas follows Avicenna. So, does Thomas have an Aristotelian or an Avicennian theory of substance? To ask this question assumes that Avicenna and Aristotle have different theories of substance, and settling this question should be easy enough so long as we can figure out what Aristotle’s quasi-definition of substance is and compare it to Avicenna’s.

It is here that we run into a problem: Aristotle does not give us one, clear, univocal answer to the question, “what is substance?” If we read *Metaphysics* Δ.8, we find the term ‘substance’ or ‘*ousia*’ said of the elements, bodies, parts of bodies, things composed of bodies, whatever is the cause of being (*aition tou einai*) in things which are not ‘said of’ a subject, which are not constitutive parts of a thing the removal of which would destroy the thing (e.g. the removal of the line destroys the plane), and the essence (*to ti ēn einai*) of a thing.¹ From these examples, Aristotle says that substance is said in two ways (*kata duo tropous tēn ousian legesthai*): it is said to be (i) the underlying subject that is not predicated of another; and (ii) the shape or form (*hē morphē kai to eidos*). The arguments concerning what substance is in *Meta.* Ζ.3-17 are famously difficult and inconclusive, but the candidates for substance throughout that text include form, matter, the composite of form and matter, essence, and universals.² In *De anima* 2.1 we find that “*ousia*” is said in three ways: matter, form, and the composite of matter and

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² Ibid., Ζ3, 1028b33 ff.
form.\textsuperscript{3} Even in works traditionally known as introductory texts like the \textit{Categories}, we do not find an easy definition of “\textit{ousia},” though we are told that (primary) \textit{ousiai} are neither said of nor ‘present in’ a subject. Thinking of these texts as a whole, we note that in some, we are told what kinds of things are substances, in others we are told the senses in which “\textit{ousia}” is said, and in others we get something like criteria; but in all of these we never get a simple, concise definition—certainly, nothing as memorable and pithy as the medieval Latin formula “\textit{ens per se}.”

Now, my purpose in this dissertation is not to settle the question of just what substance is in Aristotle’s metaphysics or to give an interpretation of those central books of the \textit{Metaphysics} dealing with substance. Rather, my purpose regarding Aristotle’s theory of substance is constrained to a comparatively parochial question: is “a being through itself” (“\textit{to on kath’ auto}”) a formula for Aristotle and a (quasi) definition for substance? Below I will argue that there is not a straight-forward answer to this question and, perhaps unsurprisingly, considering Aristotle’s general philosophical method, we will find that a different answer to the question is given depending on the senses of the term involved. Therefore, in what follows I review the important passages concerning “being through itself” in Aristotle and disambiguate the sense in which “a being through itself” might belong to substance from the sense in which “a being through itself” cannot (quasi) define substance. In short, I show that one might build up a case that Aristotle thinks of \textit{ousia} as “what is through itself;” but one should not think that Aristotle treats such a formula as a (quasi) definition.

2. Is “Being through Itself” a Quasi-Definition of \textit{Ousia}? Sic et non.

As was noted in the introduction to this dissertation, the phrase “a being through

\textsuperscript{3}Aristotle, \textit{De Anima} 2.1, 412a6-11.
“itself” was commonly used as a (quasi) definition of substance throughout the Middle Ages and is found even today in our philosophical parlance. Robert Pasnau notes that “a being through itself” was commonly used by medieval authors as a standard definition, that it is rooted in Aristotle’s metaphysical thought, and that the Scholastics used the phrase “per se” as an equivalent of “non in aliud” or “non in subjecto.” This final point is evident from, among other texts cited by Pasnau, Eustachius a Sancto Paulo’s gloss in his *Summa Philosophiae Quadripartita* (1609), the summary of late scholastic Aristotelianism praised by Descartes. The detail that this sense of “a being through itself” is the opposite of “a being through another” or “a being in a subject” will prove to be the crucial detail distinguishing the sense in which “a being through itself” might be ascribed to *ousia* in Aristotle. Let us begin with this sense and review the textual evidence.

2.1. Is “Being through Itself” a Formula Justifiably Used of *Ousia*? *Sic.*

In order to answer this question in the affirmative, we have to know two things: that a substance is that which is not in a subject, and that what is not in a subject is said to be “through itself.” Regarding the first, this doctrine is taught early on in Aristotle’s *Categories*. After distinguishing homonymous terms from synonymous and paronymous terms, Aristotle goes on to develop a matrix of things which are sorted according to whether they are said of a subject or not and whether they are in a subject or not.

[T1: Aristotle, *Categories* 2, 1a20-b6]

Τῶν ὄντων τὰ μὲν καθ᾿ ὑποκειμένου τινὸς ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ δὲ οὐδενὶ ἐστιν, Among beings, there are those which are λέγεται, ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ δὲ οὐδενὶ ἐστιν, “said of” some subject and which are not

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οἷον ἄνθρωπος καθ᾽ ύποκειμένου μὲν λέγεται τοῦ τινὸς ἄνθρωπου, ἐν ύποκειμένῳ δὲ οὐδενὶ ἐστὶ· τὰ δὲ δὲ ἐν ύποκειμένῳ μὲν ἐστὶ, καθ᾽ ύποκειμένου δὲ οὐδενὸς λέγεται (ἐν ύποκειμένῳ δὲ λέγω, ὃ ἐν τινὶ μὴ ὡς μέρος ἡπάρχον ἀδύνατον χωρὶς εἶναι τοῦ ἐν ὃ ἐστίν), οἷον ἡ γραμματική ἐν ύποκειμένῳ μὲν ἐστὶ τῇ ψυχῇ, καθ᾽ ύποκειμένου δ᾽ οὐδενὸς λέγεται, καὶ τὸ τι λευκὸν ἐν ύποκειμένῳ μὲν τῷ σώματι ἐστὶ (ὥστε γὰρ χρῶμα ἐν σώματι, καθ᾽ ύποκειμένου δὲ οὐδενὸς λέγεται· τὰ δὲ καθ᾽ ύποκειμένου τε λέγεται καὶ ἐν ύποκειμένῳ ἐστίν, οἷον ἡ ἐπιστήμη ἐν ύποκειμένῳ μὲν ἐστὶ τῇ ψυχῇ, καθ᾽ ύποκειμένου δὲ λέγεται· τὰ δὲ οὔτ᾽ ἐν ύποκειμένῳ ἐστὶν οὔτε καθ᾽ ύποκειμένου λέγεται, οἷον ὁ τίς ἄνθρωπος καὶ ὁ τίς ἵππος· οὐδὲν γὰρ τῶν τοιούτων οὔτε ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ ἐστὶν οὔτε καθ᾽ χρήσεως λέγεται.

“in” a subject, e.g. “human” is said of a subject, [that is,] of some human, but it is not in a subject. And there are things that are in a subject but are not said of a subject (and I call “in a subject” that which is in something not as a part that is present in it that is not able to be separated from that in which it is), e.g. some grammatical knowledge is in a subject, [namely.] in the soul, but it is not said of the subject; and some white is in a subject, [namely] in a body (for all colors are in a body), but it is said of a subject. And there are those that are said of a subject and are in a subject, e.g. knowledge is in a subject—it is in the soul—and it is said of a subject, [namely,) grammar. And there are those that are neither in a subject nor said of some subject, e.g. some human and some horse; for, no such things are either in a subject nor said of a subject.

Now, Aristotle makes use of this division in chapter 5 where he tells us that those things that are neither said of a subject nor in a subject are substances properly speaking, but
those things that are not in a subject but are said of a subject may be called substances in a derivative way.

[T2: Aristotle, *Categories* 5, 2a5-19]

Substance said in the foremost, primary, and highest sense is that which is neither “said of” some subject nor is it “in” some subject, e.g. some human or some horse.

But secondary substances are said [to be] those in which as in species the substances called primary are present—these and the genera of these species, e.g. some human is present in the species “human,” and the genus of the species is “animal.” Therefore, these are called secondary substances, e.g. human and animal.

The fact that some substances are not said of a subject while others are leads Aristotle to conclude that what both primary and secondary substances have in common is that neither of them are in a subject.

[T3: Aristotle, *Categories* 5, 3a7-15]

Being not in a subject is common to every substance. For, the primary substance is neither “said of” a subject nor “in” a subject. And as for the secondary...
οὐσίων φανερὸν μὲν καὶ οὕτως ὅτι οὐκ εἰσὶν ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ. ὁ γὰρ ἄνθρωπος καθ᾿ ὑποκειμένου μὲν τοῦ τινὸς ἄνθρώπου λέγεται, ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ δὲ οὐκ ἔστιν· οὐ γὰρ ἐν τῷ τινὶ ἄνθρώπῳ ὁ ἄνθρωπός ἐστιν.

Aristotle’s idea here seems to be that “human” is not said to be “in” a subject precisely because it is the subject. “Human” is not just another quality that comes and goes, is sometimes present in and other times absent from the subject. Rather, “human” is said of the subject—i.e. the subject itself is called human—because a human is itself a subject.

When one takes a walk around the block, one does not run into the white itself, but rather a white cat, or the orange itself, but rather an orange cat. However, when one takes a walk around the block, one might run into a human—not the human human, as we said of the white and orange cats above—but simply a human. “Human” is not in a subject for Aristotle because “human” is a subject—it is the name for a subject.

From the above, we may conclude that a quasi-definition for substance is that which is not in a subject. Now, in the Posterior Analytics, the phrase “kath’ hypokeimenou legetai” returns again, though here in a text outlining the various senses in which the phrase “through itself” or “kath’ hauto” is said. This passage, although inconclusive in itself, initiates a path, I argue, to concluding that for Aristotle, substance

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is a “being through itself” by being a subject of other things which are only beings through another. Aristotle writes, explaining the third of four senses of “kath’ hauto”:

[T4: Aristotle, Posterior Analytics 1.4, 73b5-8]

有意思的文本内容(155,641),(906,887)

This text is quite unclear. It tells us more precisely about what the sumbebēkota (per accidens) are than about the kath’ hauto or per se. Instead, it tells us merely what the kath’ hauto is not: something said of a subject, such as a property or accident.

It is important to note about the context of this text that there is a shift in how Aristotle talks about kath’ hauto. In the first two senses of “kath’ hauto,” Aristotle speaks about predication whereas, in this third sense of “kath’ hauto,” Aristotle appears to be speaking about things or kinds of things.⁶ The first two senses of “kath’ hauto” concern how a predicate term relates to a subject term. In the first sense, the predicate term relates to the subject term because it is included in the essence (the ti esti) of the subject term. In

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the second sense, the predicate term is related to the subject term because the subject term is included in the *ti esti* of the predicate term. For example, “human is animal” is a case of the first sense of “*kath’ hauto*” because the predicate term “animal” falls into the account of the subject term “human” (for, to be a human is to be a rational animal) and “the number is odd” is a case of the second sense of “*kath’ hauto*” because the subject term “number” falls into the account of the predicate term “odd” (for, to be odd is to be a number not divisible by two).^7

After giving these two senses of “*kath’ hauto*,” Aristotle stops speaking about the relationship between subject and predicate and begins discussing things. In the text above, Aristotle calls “*kath’ hauto*” that which is not said of a subject, and he gives us the example of the difference between “walking” and “the walking thing.” The examples show us this: that “walking” can be said of a subject as a predicate term (e.g. “Socrates iswalking”) because it is an attribute whereas “the walking thing” clearly indicates the subject of the predication and is not here an attribute. Thus, “the walking thing” is “*kath’ hauto*,” not in the sense that walking pertains *kath’ hauto* to it, but also because it is the subject. We have to recognize, therefore, that there is a sense of “*kath’ hauto*” that is said of things, not just relationships between predicates and subjects, because those things are subjects and, because primary *ousiai* are subjects, it follows also that *ousiai* are *kath’

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^7 It should be noted here that the proposition “the number is odd” cannot be converted to read “the odd is number” and, as a result, cannot produce a proposition that is *kath’ hauto* in the first sense because the proposition “the odd is number” is poorly formed in Aristotle’s logic. The reason is that “odd” cannot be the subject of “number” and “number” cannot be an attribute for “odd.” The proposition “the number is odd” is correctly formed because the subject term is not only the grammatical subject but also the metaphysical subject. This is why Aristotle introduces here two senses of “*kath’ hauto*” rather than just one: because the subject term in a demonstration must be the actual subject for the attribute signified by the predicate term. See David Bronstein, *Aristotle on Knowledge and Learning: The Posterior Analytics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 45. Perhaps it is because of this need to distinguish kinds of things which are said of a subject and those that are not that leads Aristotle to his third sense of “*kath’ hauto*” immediately following these two predicative senses.
"hauta in this sense.

What we have seen in these texts thus far is that substance, ousia, might be said to be kath’ hauta on account of its role as the ultimate subject for other things, that is, accidents. Whereas properties and accidents are not kath’ hauta, that of which they are predicated is kath’ hauta. Notice, however, that “kath’ hauta” is not here expressly connected with “being”: “is per se,” or “is a being per se.” Nor is it explicitly connected with “being a subject of” something else.

Perhaps the most famous presentation of this doctrine is found in Metaphysics Z.1.

[T5: Aristotle, Metaphysics Z.1, 1028a10-b4]

Τὸ ὄν λέγεται πολλαχῶς, καθάπερ διειλόμεθα πρότερον ἐν τοῖς περὶ τοῦ
ποσαχῶς· σημαίνει γὰρ τὸ μὲν τί ἐστι καὶ τόδε τι, τὸ δὲ ποιὸν ἢ ποσὸν ἢ τῶν ἄλλων
έκαστον τῶν οὕτω οὐσίως κατηγορουμένων. Τοσαύταχως δὲ λεγομένου τοῦ ὄντος
φανερὸν ὅτι τούτων πρῶτον ὄν τὸ τί ἐστιν, ὃπερ σημαίνει τὴν οὐσίαν (ὅταν μὲν γὰρ
εἴπωμεν ποιὸν τι τόδε, ἢ ἄγαθον λέγομεν ἢ κακόν, ἀλλ’ οὐ τρίπηχον ἢ ἄνθρωπον· ὅταν
dὲ τί ἐστιν, οὐ λευκὸν οὐδὲ θερμὸν οὐδὲ τρίπηχο, ἀλλὰ ἄνθρωπον ἢ θεὸν), τὰ δ’
ἄλλα λέγεται ὅντα τῷ τοῦ οὕτως ὄντος τὰ
μὲν ποσότητες εἶναι, τὰ δὲ ποιότητες, τὰ δὲ πάθη, τὰ δὲ ἄλλο τι. Διό κἂν ἀπορήσει τις πότερον τὸ βαδίζειν καὶ τὸ ὑγιαίνειν καὶ τὸ καθήσθαι ἐκαστον αὐτὸν ὄν σημαίνει, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων ὅτουον τῶν τοιούτων: οὐδὲν γὰρ αὐτὸν ἐστὶν οὔτε καθ’ αὑτὸ πεφυκὸς οὔτε χωρίζεσθαι δυνατὸν τῆς οὐσίας, ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον, εἴπερ, τὸ βαδίζον τῶν ὄντων καὶ τὸ καθῆμενον καὶ τὸ ὑγιαίνον. Ταῦτα δὲ μᾶλλον φαίνεται ὄντα, διότι ἔστι τὸ ὑποκείμενον αὐτοῖς ὡρισμένον (τοῦτο δ’ ἐστὶν ἡ οὐσία καὶ τὸ καθ’ ἕκαστον), διὸ ἐμφαίνεται ἐν τῇ κατηγορίᾳ τῇ τοιαύτῃ· τὸ ἀγαθὸν γὰρ ἢ τὸ καθῆμενον οὐκ ἄνευ τούτου λέγεται. Δῆλον οὖν ὅτι διὰ ταύτην κἀκείνων ἕκαστον ἕστιν, ὥστε τὸ πρῶτως ὃν καὶ οὐ τί ὅν ἄλλ’ ὄν ἀπλῶς ἢ οὐσία ἢ εἰῆ. Πολλαχῶς μὲν οὖν λέγεται τὸ πρῶτον· ὁμοὶς δὲ πάντως ἢ οὐσία πρῶτον, καὶ λόγῳ καὶ γνώσει καὶ χρόνῳ. Τὸν μὲν γὰρ ἄλλον

“good” or “bad,” but not “it is three cubits long” or “it is human”; whereas when we say what it is, [we say of it,] not “white” or “hot” or “three cubits long,” but “human” or “god”). And the others are called beings (onta), some of them by being quantities, others qualities, affections, and others something else. For this reason, one might be puzzled about whether one of these, “walking” or “being healthy” or “sitting,” signifies a being (on), and likewise about any other such things. For, none of these is either of a nature [to be] through itself (kath’ auto) or is able to be separated from substance (ousia), but rather, if anything, what walks [counts] among beings, and what is seated and what is healthy. Instead, these things [such as “walking” or “being healthy”] appear to be beings (onta) to a higher degree on account of the fact that there is some definite

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8 According to Frede and Patzig, if one does not delete pephukos with Jaeger (following Ps-Alexander), one should supply einai or “to be”; Aristoteles, ‘Metaphysik Z’, vol 2: Kommentar, ed. Michael Frede and Gunther Patzig (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1988), 18. This seems to be the commonly accepted translation. It is not clear, however, that pephukos cannot be accompanied by the subsequent infinitive chōrizesthai.
κατηγορημάτων οὐθέν χωριστόν, αὕτη δὲ καὶ τοῦλογῳ δὲ τοῦτο πρῶτον (ἀνάγκη γὰρ ἐν τῇ ἑκάστῳ λόγῳ τὸν τῆς οὐσίας ἐνυπάρχειν) καὶ εἰδέναι δὲ τότ’ διὰ τοῦ λόγου δὲ τοῦτο πρῶτον (ἀνάγκη γὰρ ἐν τῷ ἑκάστῳ λόγῳ τὸν τῆς οὐσίας ἐνυπάρχειν) καὶ εἰδέναι δὲ τότ’. Καὶ δὴ καὶ τὸ πάλαι τε καὶ νῦν καὶ ἀεὶ ζητούμενον καὶ ἀεὶ ἀπορούμενον τί τὸ ὄν, τοῦτό ἐστι τίς ἡ οὐσία

subject for them (i.e., the substance and the particular [to kath’ hekaston]), which is clear in this sort of predication. For, “good” or “seated” is not said without this [i.e., a subject]. Thus, it is clear that, for this [reason], each of these things are, with the result that being (to on) in the primary sense, absolutely, and not being (on) in some respect, would be substance. Now, “primary” is said in many senses. Still, substance is primary in every sense: in account (logos)⁹, in knowledge, and in time. For, none of the other categories are separable, but this alone [ousia] is. And this is primary in account, for it is necessary that in the account of each [of the others], substance is present. And we think that each [person] understands best whenever we know what a human is, or what fire is, rather than when we know of

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⁹ My preference is to leave “λόγῳ” untranslated—for, most authors (e.g. Bostock 1994) translate “λόγῳ” as “in definition” here. I do not think “in definition” is the correct way to understand this. For, the underlying subject does not fall into the definition of the thing because the definition is constructed from the genus and the difference, of which the underlying subject is neither. Rather, if we understand “λόγῳ” more broadly as “in account,” then it makes more sense to say that the underlying subject does fall into the account of such things as “walking” or “sitting.” For, in giving an account of “walking,” one must, at some point, make mention of that which walks—namely, the subject of the walking.
what sort [it is] or how much [of it there is]
or where, since we understand each of
these very things when we know what is
[its] quantity or quality. So, that which is of
old, now and always sought, and over
which there is always puzzlement, is: “what
is being (to on)?” this is [really] “what is
substance (ousia)?”

Aristotle here teaches that, though being is said in many senses, being is said primarily of
the category of substance (ousia) because substance is separable and prior in every sense.
Substances are said to be beings most of all and beings absolutely because they are a
definite subject unlike such things as “walking” or “sitting” which, on their own, are
inseparable from the subjects (that is, that which walks and that which sits) on which they
rely.¹⁰ Because of substance’s role as the ultimate subject for all things, Aristotle says
that substance is prior in account, time, and knowledge because something of the
substance as a subject is mentioned in an account of the other things (e.g. to give an
account of colors, one must mention that colors are colors of surfaces). Substance is
before the other things because the other things are ontologically dependent upon
substance, which can often exist prior without such things. And substance is prior in
knowledge because a being is known best when it is known what it is (i.e. its substance or
ousia) and not when only accidental features of it are known.

The most important detail in this text for our purposes is Aristotle’s claim that no
other kind of thing is “of a nature [to be] through itself (kath’ auto),” which may lead one

¹⁰ See also Aristotle, Meta. Δ.8 1017b20-25.
to infer that only *ousia* is of a nature to be through itself or to be separately. This claim and the claim that “being” is said most properly of *ousia* gives us reason to think that it is entirely appropriate to speak of substance as “(a) being through itself” and to distinguish it from accidents on account of its role as the ultimate subject.

The account in *Meta. Z.1* gives priority to substance over other kinds of things similarly to what we see in *Meta. Γ.2*. In considering whether there could be a science that studies all beings universally, Aristotle answers that there is such a science because there is one nature, or primary analogue, to which every sense of being relates. There can be a science of being *qua* being despite the fact that there is not one distinct kind of being, because every kind of being relates to that which is being in a primary way. As in *Z.1*, *Meta. Γ.2* affirms that this primary sense of being is *ousia*.

[T6: Aristotle, *Metaphysics* Γ.2, 1003b5-10]

Thus being is said in many senses, but each one in relation to one principle. For some things are called beings because they are substances (*ousiai*), others because they are attributes (*pathē*) of substance, and others because they are a way (*hodos*) to substance, or corruptions or privations or generative of substance or of things said in relation to substance, or negations of any of these or of substance—wherefore we even
say that that which is non-being is non-being.

Why is it, then, that there can be a single, unitary science of being when there are so many different kinds (so to speak) of beings? Because all of them relate back to ousia or substance—they are all either substances themselves or something that stands in a relation to substance. It is substance that might be called a being unqualifiedly; but everything else is a being because of its relationship to ousia. Further, because every other kind of being is not of a nature [to be] through itself or is inseparable from ousia, it would seem to follow that ousia alone may be called a being through itself, whereas every other thing is a being through ousia—i.e. through a subject.

What we can see clearly from all of these texts is that, if we are going to speak of ousia as “a being through itself” so as to distinguish ousiai from the other kinds of things, then we should understand “through itself” to signify that ousia is that which is without a subject on account of the fact that it is itself a subject. In Aristotle’s metaphysics, a central distinction is drawn between those things which are in subjects and those things which are subjects or are the names of subjects. These subjects, the ousiai, enjoy an ontological, epistemic, and logical priority over the other things by virtue of their role as a subject. Moreover, we find that anything which is a subject is through itself unlike what is through another. It would follow therefore that ousiai, qua subject par excellence, are the sorts of things that are through themselves.

2.2. Is “Being through Itself” a Quasi-Definition of Ousia? Non.

Above, we have articulated in what sense “ousia” might come to be spoken of as “a being through itself” for Aristotle. We saw that the primary reason for giving this
(quasi) definition to *ousia* is that *ousiai* are the ultimate subjects in which other things are realized, and to which all other things are related. Were the question at hand, “is it Aristotelian to call *ousia* “a being through itself?” then our task would be comparatively simple. We have seen the case for this, even though Aristotle doesn’t literally use the expression. But, alas, our question is a bit more complicated: “is ‘being through itself’ a (quasi) definition of *ousia*?” Since we are looking for something that (quasi) defines *ousia*, we must find something that pertains exclusively to *ousia*. In this section, I shall review some texts which suggest that “being through itself” cannot be said exclusively of *ousia*.

The central text motivating the “non” in my subtitle is Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* Δ.7. In the above “sic” texts we saw that the purpose of (quasi) defining *ousia* as “a being through itself” would be to distinguish *ousiai* from other kinds of things, namely, beings *en hypokeimenō*. But when you consult the text on the senses of “*ta legomena einai kath’ hauta*”—the text most explicitly discussing our whole phrase “being through itself”—we do not find a contrast between beings *kath’ hauto* and beings *en hypokeimenō*. Rather, we find beings *kath’ hauto* distinguished from beings *kata sumbebēkos*. In *Meta. Δ.7*, Aristotle categorizes the different ways in which we use the words “is” (*esti, einai*) or “being” (*on*). He first divides our use of “is” or “being” according as we say something “happens to be so and so”—i.e. “to be accidentally” (*einai kath’ sumbebēkos*)—and according as we say something “is *kath’ hauto*”—i.e. not episodically, but necessarily connected to the thing by virtue of itself or per se. There are three reasons why something might be said “to be accidentally”:

Thus, those things which are said to be (einai) accidentally are called thus either because both things are present in the same being (on), or because [this one] is present in that being (on), or because this one is the very thing in which [that] is present [and] of which it is predicated.

Of the things which are said “to be accidentally,” Aristotle explains that they are accidental either because two things are present in the same being (e.g. in the proposition “the just man is musical,” it is not by virtue of being just that the man is musical, nor by virtue of being musical that the man is just—rather, the man just so happens to be both just and musical), one thing B is present in A (e.g. in the proposition “Socrates is musical,” there is no necessary connection between being Socrates and being musical—Socrates just so happens to be musical), or vice versa (e.g. in the proposition, “the musical is just,” the musical is the being which receives the quality just, but not necessarily). Aristotle here seems to be distinguishing between accidental unities which are unities comprising many accidental properties, unities comprising a substance and an accident, or an accident taken substantively together with another accident. In all of these cases, the things united constitute a being, but the unification of these things is a happenstance cooccurrence of things: a being kata sumbebēkos, such as the musical that is just.

Thus, one of the ways in which we use the word “is” or “to be” is to signify a coincidental and accidental relationship between things—be they two qualities coinciding
(e.g. “the just man is musical”—which, in Aristotle’s Greek could be said without including the subject “man” such that the sentence may read “the just is musical”) or one quality coinciding with a thing (e.g. the man is musical). In these cases, we may say that the musical man or the musical and just man come together into a unified thing, but this unified thing is only an episodic unity: they are beings precisely because they are the mere coincidence of attributes found together, or happenstance attributes concurring around a thing.

Before we conclude our discussion of kata sumbēkos beings, let us take a look at Aristotle’s treatment of kath’ hauto beings so as to complete the comparison between the two. Aristotle observes, first, that we use “is” in a kath’ hauto manner of all of the categories.

[T8: Aristotle, Metaphysics Δ.7 1017a22-30]

καθ’ αὐτά δὲ εἶναι λέγεται δισαιρημενον τὰ σχήματα τῆς κατηγορίας· ὅσαχώς γὰρ λέγεται, τοσαυταχώς τὸ εἶναι σημαίνει. ἐπεὶ οὖν τῶν κατηγορουμένων τὰ μὲν τί ἐστι σημαίνει, τὰ δὲ ποιόν, τὰ δὲ ποσόν, τὰ δὲ πρός τι, τὰ δὲ ποιεῖν ἢ πάσχειν, τὰ δὲ πού, τὰ δὲ πότε, ἐκάστῳ τούτων τὸ εἶναι ταὐτό σημαίνει· οὐθὲν γὰρ διαφέρει τὸ ἄνθρωπος υγιαίνων ἐστιν ἢ τὸ ἄνθρωπος βαδίζων ἐστιν ἢ τέμνων τοῦ ἄνθρωπος

The things are said to be (eining) through themselves (kath’ hauto) are as many as are the ways the figures of predication signify; for in however many ways they are said, in so many ways do they signify being (to einai). Therefore, since some of the predicaments signify what [x] is, and others what sort, others how much, others relations, others to do or to suffer, others where, and others when, in each of these the same being (to einai) is signified; for,
βαδίζει ἢ τέμνει, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων.

there is no difference between “the human 

is (esti) recovering” and “the human 

recovers,” nor [is there a difference 

between] “the human is walking” or “the 

human is cutting” and “the human walks,” 

or “the human cuts,” and similarly also in 

the case of the other [predicaments].

On this account, not only is substance “a being through itself” but so too are the 

things in all of the other accidental categories. The distinction between kath’ hauto beings 

and kata sumbebēkos beings in Meta. Δ.7 is not a distinction between the category of 

substance and the accidental categories, this much is clear.¹¹

But precisely to what the distinction between beings kath’ hauto and kata 

sumbebēkos amounts is a bit unclear. W.D. Ross understands Aristotle to be saying that 

kath’ hauto beings are those things that are not episodic or coincidental unities but are 

necessary unities. Thus, if accidental beings are exemplified in such propositions as “the 

just man is musical,” where there is no necessary connection between being just and 

musical, then per se beings are exemplified in such propositions as “the human is an 

animal” or “white is a color.” In these last two propositions, the predicate is the genus of 

the subject, and thus it is necessarily the case that this subject and this predicate are found 

together.¹² It is the necessary connection of predicate and subject that characterizes to on 

kath’ hauto for Ross.

But how does the necessary connection of subject and predicate express a sense of

¹¹ See Aryeh Kosman, “Ontological Differences: Being and Substance in Book V of the Metaphysics.” 
being specifically? Ross explains that the “is” that we find in such *kath’ hauto*
propositions as “the human is animal,” or “white is a color” in fact signifies different
things because “‘is’ takes its colour from the terms it connects.” In other words, the ‘is’
in “the human is animal” gets its meaning from the predicate, which in this case signifies
a substance. The ‘is’ in the proposition “white is a color,” gets its meaning from the
predicate ‘color,’ which is a quality. Thus, these two propositions, though using the same
word “is,” signify different *kath’ hauto* beings: being a substance and being a quality. It
is in this way that ‘is’ or ‘being’ is said differently according to the category in which the
predicate belongs. In sum, Ross offers us what I will call the Predicamental Reading:
some $x$ is a being *kath’ hauto* iff $x$ is a subject $S$ to which a predicate $P$ is predicated *kath’
hauto*. Ross’s reading ties *kath’ hauto* being to *kath’ hauto* predication.

Allen Bäck has argued that Ross errs by identifying *kath’ hauto* being with *kath’
hauto* predication. Rather, Bäck reads these as two different distinctions that do not
relate: the distinction between being *kata sumbebēkos* and being *kath’ hauto* on the one
hand, and the distinction between *kata sumbebēkos* predication and *kath’ hauto*
predication, on the other. Bäck’s proof that these distinctions differ is that certain *kata
sumbebēkos* predications are considered beings *kath’ hauto* in *Meta*. $\Delta.7$. For example,
Aristotle concludes his discussion of being *kath’ hauto* with the proposition “a human
walks,” which is clearly a *kata sumbebēkos* predication. Thus, Bäck infers, *kath’ hauto*

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14 This seems in line with how Aristotle thinks about the use of “to be” in predication in *De Interpretatione*
3, 16b19. Commenting on that passage, Charles Kahn says, “Aristotle’s point is that whereas subject noun
and predicate adjective (or predicate noun or participle) indicate the two components (σωκέμνα) of the
proposition or judgment, ἐστί adds a meaning (προσσημαινει) which is not another component but simply
the propositional form that determines the combination of the two; i.e. ἐστί specifies that the predicate
belongs to the subject. See Charles Kahn, “The Terminology for Copula and Existence,” in *Essays on Being*
predications are not the same as *kath' hauto* beings. Now, I think that this is true to say, but not for the reason Bäck gives. Bäck here fails to respond to Ross’s view; for, Ross denies that the examples given at the end of [T8] are examples of beings *kath’ hauto*, and I agree with Ross on this point. Ross suggests that these examples illustrate that the copula “is” takes its meaning from the predicate term, not that they illustrate beings *kath’ hauto*. On Ross’s view, Aristotle is showing that because “is walking” and “walks” are equal that the meaning of “is” is governed by the meaning of the predicate term.

That being said, Bäck’s objection raises an important question: what is the difference between the being *kath’ hauto/kata sumbebēkos* distinction and the *kath’ hauto/kata sumbebēkos* predication distinction? It is clear that these two distinctions are related, but it is not clear how. I think part of the difficulty here concerns just what Aristotle intends when he gives these senses of “being” or “is.” If he means to give the various senses of “is” in the sense of the “is” of predication, then the account of being *kath’ hauto/kata sumbebēkos* will be the same as *kath’hauto/kata sumbebēkos* predication. This seems to be view of Ross.

Others have taken the “being” that is disambiguated in *Meta. Δ.7* to be “being” in the sense of “exists.” This existential reading is found in Bäck,16 Christopher Kirwan,17 David Bostock,18 and Michael Frede.19 On this view, we find Aristotle in *Meta. Δ.7* laying out the different senses of existence that are attached to the categories. As Bostock writes, “[s]ince the categories classify ‘the things that are’, evidently meaning by this ‘the things that exist’, one naturally supposes that it is ‘is’ in the sense of ‘exists’ that

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Aristotle is speaking of.” Because the categories are categories of existents, Aristotle’s claim that being is said in as many ways as there are categories should, therefore, on this reading, be taken to mean that there are ten ways or modes of existing. This is most clear when we compare propositions like this:

(1) A human exists.
(2) Pallor exists.
(3) Outside of Lambeau Field exists.

These three propositions each reveal different ways of existing upon analysis: when we consider what it is that exists when we say “a human exists,” it is clear that we are committed to the existence of a substance. Likewise, when we consider what it is that exists when we say “pallor exists,” it is clear that we committed to the existence of some substance which is pale—i.e. is qualified by pallor. Finally, when we consider what it is that exists when we say “outside of Lambeau Field exists,” it is clear that we are committed to the existence of two substances, one of which is Lambeau Field, which stand in a certain relationship—namely, some substance being placed outside of Lambeau Field.

The general strategy of the existential reading of *Meta. Δ.7* is to make sense of the claim that “being” is said in as many ways as there are categories by analyzing the ontological commitments of propositions consisting merely of a subject term and “is” as the predicate term. The virtue of this account is that it clearly shows how “is” taken as “exists” can signify all of the different categories: for, “exists” in each of the above propositions reveals that the truth of the proposition entails a commitment to the existence of a substance in (1), a quality in (2), and a place and relationship in (3). If we were to go
through various examples of propositions of the form “S exists” and catalogue what are the sorts of things to whose existence we are committed by affirming those propositions, we should (in theory) reach Aristotle’s list of ten categories.

Now, there seems to be some corroboration of the existential reading in Alexander of Aphrodisias, but Alexander’s account of existence (*hypostasis*) and its relation to the categories seems to differ from the contemporary commentators who endorse the existential reading. Moreover, Alexander’s account raises the issue of whether the example “S exists” is the right way of thinking about how *kath’ hauto* being is expressed in a proposition. Alexander writes:


φησὶ δὲ τοσαυταχῶς τὸ καθ’ αὑτὸ δὲ τούτου ἀποδίδομεν τὸν ρήμα τὸν ὁμώνυμον· εἰ δὲ δεκα ἐπέκαθεν τὸν ὁμώνυμον· εἰ δὲ δέκα οὕτως κατὰ τὰ ἀνώτατα γένη διαφοράς δεκαχῶς κατηγορίων ἄλλοις ὑπάρχειν. τὸ μὲν γὰρ τὴν καθ’ αὑτὸ ὄνλεγεσθαι ὅσα σχήματα καὶ γένη κατηγορίων. σχήματα δὲ κατηγορίων τὰς δέκα κατηγορίαις λέγει· δεκαχῶς οὖν φησι τὸ καθ’ αὑτὸ ὄν λέγεσθαι. καὶ αἰτίον τούτου ἀποδίδωσιν· ἐπεὶ γὰρ ἑκάστῳ τῶν ὄντων τὸ εἶναι συντασσόμενον ταύτῃ τῇ ὁμώνυμῃ ὑπάρξει τῇ ὁμώνυμῃ. εἰ δὲ δεκα ἐπεκάθεν τὸν ὁμώνυμον· εἰ δὲ δέκα οὕτως κατὰ τὰ ἀνώτατα γένη διαφοράς δεκαχῶς κατηγορίων ἄλλοις ὑπάρχειν. τὸ μὲν γὰρ τὴν καθ’ αὑτὸ ὄνλεγεσθαι ὅσα σχήματα καὶ γένη κατηγορίων. σχήματα δὲ κατηγορίων τὰς δέκα κατηγορίαις λέγει· δεκαχῶς οὖν φησι τὸ καθ’ αὑτὸ ὄν λέγεσθαι. καὶ αἰτίον τούτου ἀποδίδωσιν· ἐπεὶ γὰρ ἑκάστῳ τῶν ὄντων τὸ εἶναι συντασσόμενον ταύτῃ τῇ ὁμώνυμῃ ὑπάρξει τῇ ὁμώνυμῃ. εἰ δὲ δεκα ἐπεκάθεν τὸν ὁμώνυμον· εἰ δὲ δέκα οὕτως κατὰ τὰ ἀνώτατα γένη διαφοράς δεκαχῶς κατηγορίων ἄλλοις ὑπάρχειν. τὸ μὲν γὰρ τὴν καθ’ αὑτὸ ὄνλεγεσθαι ὅσα σχήματα καὶ γένη κατηγορίων. σχήματα δὲ κατηγορίων τὰς δέκα κατηγορίαις λέγει· δεκαχῶς οὖν φησι τὸ καθ’ αὑτὸ ὄν λέγεσθαι. καὶ αἰτίον τούτου ἀποδίδωσιν· ἐπεὶ γὰρ ἑκάστῳ τῶν ὄντων τὸ εἶναι συντασσόμενον ταύτῃ τῇ ὁμώνυμῃ ὑπάρξει τῇ ὁμώνυμῃ. εἰ δὲ δεκα ἐπεκάθεν τὸν ὁμώνυμον· εἰ δὲ δέκα οὕτως κατὰ τὰ ἀνώτατα γένη διαφοράς δεκαχῶς κατηγορίων ἄλλοις ὑπάρχειν. τὸ μὲν γὰρ τὴν καθ’ αὑτὸ ὄνλεγεσθαι ὅσα σχήματα καὶ γένη κατηγορίων. σχήματα δὲ κατηγορίων τὰς δέκα κατηγορίαις λέγει· δεκαχῶς οὖν φησι τὸ καθ’ αὑτὸ ὄν λέγεσθαι. καὶ αἰτίον τούτου ἀποδίδωσιν· ἐπεὶ γὰρ ἑκάστῳ τῶν ὄντων τὸ εἶναι συντασσόμενον ταύτῃ τῇ ὁμώνυμῃ ὑπάρξει τῇ ὁμώνυμη

He [Aristotle] says that the ways being (*on*) through itself is said are as many as [are] the figures or kinds of predicates. And he says that the ten categories are the figures of predications. Thus he says that being (*to on*) through itself is said in ten ways. And he gives the reason for this: for, the “being” (*to einai*) that is syntactically arranged with each of the beings (*onta*) signifies the same thing as that to which is arranged. For “being” (*on*) as homonymous signifies the proper existence (*huparxis*) of each.
σημαίνει, τὸ δὲ τῷ ποσῷ τὴν ὡς ποσοῦ, καὶ τῷ ποιῷ τὴν ὡς ποιοῦ, καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων γενῶν ὅμοιως.

genera are ten, then both “a being” (to on) and “being” (to einai) will be said in ten ways. For, the being (to einai) that is syntactically arranged with substance signifies substantial existence (huparxis), and [the being (to einai) that is syntactically arranged] with quantity [signifies existence] in the manner of quantity, and [the being (to einai) that is syntactically arranged] with quality [signifies existence] in the manner of a quality, and likewise in the case of all the other genera.

Alexander says that “being” (on) is said in as many ways as there are categories, and what being (to einai) signifies varies depending on the term with which “is” is syntactically arranged (suntassetai). When “is” is syntactically arranged with substance, it signifies substantial existence (huparxis). This fits with the sorts of examples we find in the interpreters advocating for the existential reading, e.g. “Socrates is” or “a human is” signifies substantial existence whereas to say “pallor is” signifies qualitative existence. In these sorts of examples, the interpreters advocating for the existential reading give examples where “is” or “exists” is stationed with a subject term such that “is” or “exists” is the predicate term. Now, Alexander never specifies where the “is” and the term with which it is syntactically arranged are located. He does not say that “is” is the predicate
term and the categorial term is the subject. The presumption behind “suntassetai” is that the “is” has a syntactical relation with the categorical term in the predicate. Although huparxis in Imperial Greek normally means “existence,” how it should be read here depends on what makes sense. “Socrates is human” can be rephrased as “Socrates has a human existence.” Alexander need not be saying thereby that “Socrates is human” and “Socrates has a human existence” entail “Socrates exists (or has huparxis, full stop).” Alexander would be guilty of an obvious sophism.

Is it necessary, then, that the categorial term be in the subject position? It certainly seems possible—for, as Frede has argued, “katēgoria” could be translated as “predication” rather than “predicate”\(^\text{20}\)—but is it necessary? Perhaps not; authors such as Emerson Buchanan\(^\text{21}\) and Jiyuan Yu\(^\text{22}\) have read Meta. Δ.7 as concerning the predicate term’s complex (i.e. the copula and the predicate term) rather than as concerning the subject term; thus, the kath’ hauto being is “is human” or “to be human” rather than “a human exists.” Buchanan writes, “‘being’ or ‘to be,’ taken by itself, seems to mean the whole predicate (i.e., the copulative verb and the predicate adjective or noun) taken by itself in isolation from the proposition into which it may enter—e.g. ‘is musical’ as opposed to ‘the man is musical’ or ‘being musical’ as opposed to ‘a man’s being musical.’”\(^\text{23}\) This could also be what Alexander has in mind: Alexander says in the above text that substantial existence is signified when einai is syntactically arranged with substance. Thus, “substantial existence” is signified by “to be human” or “being a


\(^{23}\) Buchanan, Aristotle’s Theory of Being, 12.
human.”

On this reading, we can see how “being” signifies that with which it is syntactically arranged, and, thus, how “being” signifies in as many ways as there are categories. Let us take our same examples from above.

(1) to be human
(2) to be pale
(3) to be outside of Lambeau Field

Just as in the existential reading, we can see how “being” takes on its sense from the predicate with which it is syntactically arranged. For, when we give an account of what it is to be human, our account will indicate that a human is not in a subject, but is a subject. Likewise, when we give an account of what it is to be pale, our account will indicate that pale is a complexion and a complexion is a quality of skin. Likewise finally with our account of what it is to be outside of Lambeau Field: our account will indicate that it is to be near to but not in a place. In each of these examples, “to be” for each of these differs because the accounts of what it amounts “to be” these things differs: to be a human amounts to being an animal, a body, and thus a substance, whereas to be pale amounts to being a complexion and thus a quality.

Emphasizing this “to be P” analysis of kath’ hauto being helps us see another important feature of the categories and why being kath’ hauto is tied up with the categories: “to be P” is something about which you can give an account, and thus you can give an account of “what it is to be” for any of the categories. The central text I have in mind here is mentioned by Ross in his interpretation of [T8], but I shall put it to a different use. In Topics 1.9, Aristotle teaches:
δῆλον δ' ἐξ αὐτῶν ὅτι ὁ τὸ τί ἐστι σημαίνων ὅτε μὲν οὐσίαν σημαίνει, ὅτε δὲ ποσόν, ὅτε δὲ χρώματος λευκοῦ κατηγοριῶν. ὅταν μὲν γὰρ ἐκκείμενον ἰδέαν γίνει ἡ ζῷον, τί ἐστι λέγει καὶ οὐσίαν σημαίνει· ὅταν δὲ ἐκκείμενον ἰδέαν γίνει ἡ χρώμα, τί ἐστι λέγει καὶ ποσόν σημαίνει. ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἐὰν ἴδιαν ἰδέαν μεγέθους ἐκκείμενον γίνει, τί ἐστι λέγει καὶ ποσόν σημαίνει. ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἐὰν ἴδιαν ἰδέαν μεγέθους ἐκκείμενον γίνει, τί ἐστι λέγει καὶ ποσόν σημαίνει. ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἐὰν ἴδιαν ἰδέαν μεγέθους ἐκκείμενον γίνει, τί ἐστι λέγει καὶ ποσόν σημαίνει. ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἐὰν ἴδιαν ἰδέαν μεγέθους ἐκκείμενον γίνει, τί ἐστι λέγει καὶ ποσόν σημαίνει.

It is clear, then, from these [things above] that the one who is signifying what [x] is [or the essence] sometimes signifies substance, sometimes quantity, sometimes quality, and sometimes one of the other categories. For, whenever one says of a human placed before [oneself] that the thing placed before him is a human or an animal, one says what it is and signifies substance. And whenever the color white is placed before [oneself], one says that the thing placed before [oneself] is white or a color, and he says what it is and signifies a quality. Similarly, if when a magnitude of a cubit long is placed before [oneself], one says that the thing placed before [oneself] is a magnitude of a cubit long, one says what it is and signifies quantity. And similarly in the case of all of the other [categories]. For, each of such things, if it is spoken of [as] itself, and if the genus is said of this, [one] signifies what it is.
As this text makes clear, though “ti esti” (lit. “what it is”) is often a phrase Aristotle uses to name the first, most basic category of ousia, as opposed to “of what sort it is” (as we saw above in [T5]), one can give an account of “what it is” for any of the categories: I can give an account of what it is to be white, to be near Lambeau Field, or to be one cubit wide. What this fact suggests is that the categories are categories of whatnesses, i.e. of determinate sorts about which we can answer the question “what is it?” There is a determinate “what it is to be” for each of the categories, and for this reason we can say that each of the categories categorize types of essences.

This is one of the implicit lessons of Meta. Δ.7, together with the difference between kath’ hauto and kata sumbebēkos beings. Kata sumbebēkos beings are episodic sorts of things—things that are coincidental, happenstance, and serendipitous. When it comes to beings kata sumbebēkos, they are that which we cannot study scientifically (see Meta. E.2) because there is no natural pattern into whose cause we could investigate and expect generalizable, non-anecdotal results. Kath’ hauto beings, on the other hand, are patterned in a way kata sumbebēkos beings are not: they have features that follow necessarily from their natures as such, universally or at least typically, and they are the sorts of things that we can therefore study scientifically. A kath’ hauto being is a discrete, intelligible pattern in nature.

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24 Yu, The Structure of Being in Aristotle’s Metaphysics, 8.

25 Metaphysics E.2, 1026b2-5: ἐπεὶ δὴ πολλαχῶς λέγεται τὸ ὄν, πρῶτον περὶ τοῦ κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς λεκτέον, ὅτι οὐδεμία ἐστὶ περὶ αὐτὸ θεωρία. σημεῖο δέ: οὐδεμιᾷ γὰρ ἐπιστήμῃ ἐπιμελὲς περὶ αὐτοῦ οὔτε πρακτικῇ οὔτε ποιητικῇ οὔτε θεωρητικῇ. (Since being is said in many senses, accidental being should be spoken of first—there is no study of it. A sign of this is that no science concerns: neither practical, productive, nor theoretical science.)

26 This understanding of kath’ hauto is corroborated in Aristotle’s Metaphysics Δ.18 where he tells us that “kath’ hauto” signifies the essence (to ti en einai) for each thing.

27 See Aristotle, Physics 2.5, 196b27-29: τὸ μὲν οὖν καθ’ ἀὑτό αἴτημα ὁρισμένον, τὸ δὲ κατὰ συμβεβηκός ἀόριστον ἔστω· γὰρ ἄν τὸ ἓν συμβαίνῃ. (Thus, on the one hand, the kath’ hauto cause is definite while, on the other hand, the accidental cause is indefinite. For, an unlimited [number of accidental features] might occur to one thing.)
These considerations lend support to the view of Buchanan and Yu that we should understand the *per se* beings to be analyzable as the predicate complex rather than in terms of existential propositions. Further, this Predicate Complex interpretation avoids the issue that propositions like “white exists” or “being outside of Lambeau Field exists” are not well-formed formulae in Aristotle’s logic—for, neither “white” nor “being outside of Lambeau Field” are proper Aristotelian subjects. This is no surprise to the interpreters advocating the existential reading—for, they are all aware that the ontological commitments of propositions like “white exists” in fact direct us to a subject that is white. Still, this approach reduces all of the categories to their ontological dependence on substances. Such a reduction is not the intention of Aristotle in Meta. Δ.7: Aristotle is not reducing *kath’ hauto* being to the category of substance, but extending it to all of the categories.

In conclusion, let us return to our central question of this section: is “a being *kath’ hauto*” a (quasi) definition of *ousia*? The answer has to be no: for, the phrase “a being *kath’ hauto*” as found in Aristotle applies to all of the categories, not just to the category of *ousia* or *ti esti* because all of the categories are patterned and intelligible. Though elsewhere in his works Aristotle will distinguish *ousiai* from accidents so as to distinguish that which is essential to and identical with the subject from that which is outside of the essence of the subject, in these texts Aristotle offers us a different view of essence, one that sees essences not only in the category of *ousia* but in all of the categories.

3. *Caveat lector*: Balancing the Two Senses of “Being *kath’ hauto*”

We have seen above that the phrase “being *kath’ hauto*” could be taken in two
senses for Aristotle: the first is as the opposite of being *en hypokeimenō*, and it is said uniquely of *ousiai* in order to show that *ousia* is that which does not need a subject but *is* a subject. In this first sense, being said *kath’ hauto* distinguishes *ousiai* from beings in the other categories. In this sense, the beings in the other categories are not *kath’ hauto* beings because they are not separable from their subjects. The subject figures into the account of these beings. In the second sense, being *kath’ hauto* is the opposite of being *kata sumbebēkos* and it is said of all of the categories: *ousia* and the accidents. Here, *kath’ hauto* being does not distinguish *ousiai* from the other categories but, in fact, covers all of them together. *Kath’ hauto* being, in this sense, signifies the patterned, intelligible, simple beings about which we can give an account of what it is. Thus, *kath’ hauto* beings are those beings that have “whatnesses” or essences. I will distinguish these two senses of *kath’ hauto* being as the “Subject Sense” and the “Essence Sense.”

It has been observed in the literature that there is something of a tension between these two different senses of “being *kath’ hauto*.” Charlotte Witt identifies these two senses as in tension after reviewing two of the texts that we have discussed above. She writes, “In *Metaphysics* V.7, Aristotle says there are as many kinds of per se being as there are categories of being; so substance, qualities, and so on are all per se beings. The final complication comes in Metaphysics VII.1, where, as we have seen, Aristotle seems to reserve the title of per se being for substance alone, presumably because all nonsubstances inhere in substances.” 28 Also recognizing this complication, Yu gives an extended argument as to why these two senses are not in contradiction with each other. 29

What is the contradiction? Where are these accounts in tension? The problem is

not only that Aristotle uses the phrase “kath’ hauto” applied to being in two distinct senses, but in one sense of the phrase accidents are going to be included and, in the other sense of the phrase, excluded. Not only are accidents excluded from the Subject Sense, but they are in fact the opposite of kath’ hauto being in the Subject Sense: they are the en allō to substance’s kath’ hauto. Furthermore, despite including accidents in the Essence Sense—entailing that accidents have essences—Aristotle denies in Meta. Z.4 that accidents have essences in the proper sense.

This text and the subject sense have led some authors to deny entirely that accidents have essences. A famous example of it is in Joseph Owens’s 1978 study. Owens writes, “the accidents will not possess the nature of Being in themselves. The nature according to which they are Being will not be their own natures. It will be the Entity [Owens’s word for “substance”] of which they are affections.” On Owens’s account, only substance is a being per se because only it possesses the nature of being per se. G. E. L. Owen likewise, in a famous article, denies essence or being of accidents independently of the subject in which they inhere. Owen writes, “the claim of [Metaphysics] IV that ‘being’ is an expression with focal meaning is a claim that statements about non-substances can be reduced to—translated into—statements about substances; and it seems to be a corollary of this theory that non-substances cannot have matter or form of their own since they are no more than the logical shadows of substance.” This image of accidents as “logical shadows,” as parasites entirely reducible to the substance in which they inhere is also found outside of Aristotle exegesis, notably in Gilson, Cornelio Fabro, and Armand Maurer. Many of these authors are motivated by the Subject Sense of “being kath’ hauto” to deny that there is any sense of “being kath’ hauto” that may be said of anything in an accidental category because in no sense are accidents found not in a subject.

But to take this stance is to neglect that there is a sense in which accidents are

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called beings kath’ hauto—namely, in the Essence Sense of “being kath’ hauto.”

Because there is a determinate, patterned “what it is to be” for accidents, it follows that even accidents have essences. Though this eclipsing of the Essence Sense of “being kath’ hauto” is common both in Aristotle scholarship and in medieval scholarship, there has been some effort to bring the Essence Sense into the light, notably by Yu (as mentioned above), Aryeh Kosman, Martha Husain, and Barry F. Brown. But any such attempt must explain how the Subject Sense and the Essence Sense are not in tension with each other. I propose to offer some contributions to this effort.

Let us begin, then, with the most obvious problem: does [T11] above (Meta. Z.4) pose a problem for my interpretation of Meta. Δ.7’s “being kath’ hauto” as patterned, being-with-an-essence? In other words, does [T11] deny that accidents have the essences of definitions? It does not. [T11] does not deny that accidents have essences; rather, it denies that accidents have essences in the same way as substances. For, it is substances which are said to have essences primarily, and accidents secondarily. This claim makes sense given what we learned in T5 above (Meta. Z.1): the subject of the accident, in some way, enters into the logos of the accident. Thus, when we give an account of what it is to be an accident, we must at some point mention the subject in which it inhere. Thus, I take Aristotle’s claim that accidents have essences “not absolutely” to be a claim that the logos of an accident implies another thing. This claim does not entail that accidents do not have essences or that the essence of the accident just is the subject. Rather, though the subject enters into the account of the accident, and the accident depends upon the subject,

nevertheless the account belongs to the accident, not to the subject.

It is in this important sense that, pace Owen, all statements about accidents cannot be reduced to statements about subjects or substances. For, to give an account of what an accident is implies a substance, but is not reducible to a substance. I think the challenge of my view is not so much in keeping the Subject Sense and the Essence Sense distinct, but rather in keeping the Subject Sense from swallowing and thereby nullifying the Essence Sense.

Although I have advised caution when using the phrase “being kath’ hauto,” another challenge of my view is also to be cautious when using the phrase “being kata sumbebēkos.” On my view, the following argument is unsound:

P1 If \( x \) is in a subject, then \( x \) is a being kata sumbebēkos.

P2 Accidents are in subjects.

C1 Accidents are beings kata sumbebēkos.

The problem is P1—for, P1 treats “being kata sumbebēkos” as a logical consequence of being in a subject. However, as we saw in [T7] and [T8], this is not what “being kata sumbebēkos” means as it is literally used in Aristotle. For, “being kata sumbebēkos” is the opposite of “being kath’ hauto” in the Essence Sense—but we have no textual evidence that “being kata sumbebēkos” is the opposite of “being kath’ hauto” in the Subject Sense. In fact, in the later commentary tradition, especially in the medieval period, the opposite of the Subject Sense will be codified in the distinction between ens per se and ens in/per/ab alio.

It is easy to confuse these senses here. Even authors who otherwise recognize that even accidents are kath’ hauto beings make this mistake. Yu writes that substance and
accident are distinct in that substance is always and in every sense a kath’ hauto being whereas accidents are in one sense kath’ hauto beings and, in another sense, kata sumbebēkos beings.38 By “kata sumbebēkos beings,” Yu means that accidents are said en hypokeimonō. But, this is not what it means to be “a being kata sumbebēkos:” a “kata sumbebēkos being” is a happenstance being—a being that has no essential unity and no scientifically scrutable pattern. It is something like the opera-loving postal worker or the belligerent Cubs fan; it is not a pattern in nature that postal workers love opera, though some might, and it is not a pattern in nature that Cubs fans are belligerent (despite how things might appear when they show up in Milwaukee for a Cubs at Brewers series). “Being kata sumbebēkos” does not apply to the accidental categories. The use of this phrase is inappropriate here because it conflates “kata sumbebēkos” with “en hypokeimonō.”

4. Conclusion

I have argued that we can find two distinct senses of “kath’ hauto” being in Aristotle: the Subject Sense and the Essence Sense. In one sense, something is called “kath’ hauto” because it is not in a subject—rather, it is a subject. In this sense, only substances are said to be kath’ hauto. In other sense, however, something is called a “being kath’ hauto” because it is an essence—i.e. a determinate, intelligible pattern in nature. In this other sense, not only are substances called “beings kath’ hauto” but so too are accidents; for, “being kath’ hauto” is said of all of the categories. I have argued that these two senses of “kath’ hauto” are not in tension with each other.

Yu, The Structure of Being in Aristotle’s Metaphysics, 35. “If we put Top. i.9 and Cat. 4 together and put senses [of “kath’ hauto” from APo. 1.4] (1) and (3) together, the result is that, while substance is always a per se being, other categories are both per se beings (in sense [1]), and per accidens beings (in sense [3]). The two roles of non-substances are not incompatible, but are relative to different senses of per se.”
In the next chapter we will continue our investigation of the phrase “being through itself” in the late-antique commentators. As we shall see, both the Subject Sense and the Essence Sense are going to play important, though at times ambiguous roles. That the categories categorize essences will become a common view, as I shall show. Moreover, the late-antique commentators will have much to say about the Subject Sense of being *kath’ hauto* as a (quasi) definition of *ousia*. As I shall attempt to show, the late-antique tradition will deny that “being *kath’ hauto*” or “being not in a subject,” are (quasi) definitions of *ousia* because they not unique to *ousia*.; nevertheless, they will continue to maintain that the phrase pertains, somehow, to very nature of substance and, thus, serves as an important phrase for characterizing *ousia*. In Chapters IV-VI, we shall see Avicenna, and Aquinas in his wake, dealing with a problem that arises from this commentatorial analysis.
Chapter III: Some Consensuses concerning *Ousia*, Being *kath’ hauto*, and the Categories in Commentary Tradition.

1. Introduction

In the previous chapter I outlined two distinct senses of being “through itself” (or “*kath’ hauto*” in Aristotle’s Greek). There, I argued that there has been some difficulty in understanding this phrase “being *kath’ hauto*” in Aristotle because of an erroneous tendency among contemporary commentators to force one sense, the Subject Sense, to eclipse the other sense, the Essence Sense. The error consists in denying that there is any sense of “being” that could be said of accidents *kath’ hauto* by reducing accidents to the subjects or substances in which they inhere. The reasoning goes something like this: because accidents need a subject in order to be, accidents are not beings through themselves, but instead beings through another. Therefore, it might be argued, accidents are not beings *kath’ hauto*. On this view, accidents are the “logical shadows” (as Owen memorably puts it) of *ousiai* and are not beings in their own right. But as I argued, this is simply not true to say for Aristotle. For Aristotle, there is an important sense in which those things falling into the accidental categories are beings *kath’ hauto*: in the sense that they are determinate, intelligible patterns in nature—i.e. essences.

Now, this error of denying the Essence Sense on account of the Subject Sense is by no means a tendency unique to modern commentators. In fact, this kind of reductivism goes back to the earliest efforts to arrange Aristotle’s writings into a coherent corpus, as we shall see. As I argue in this chapter, the recognition of this error codifies and solidifies the reading of the categories as categorizing essences in the commentary tradition. In the commentary tradition, it is normal to refer to the categories as natures and, therefore, to think of all of the categories as having essential characteristics and, thus, essences. Then
the question becomes, if the categories share something in common in some way, how are they diversified?

In this chapter, I want to take a closer look at how the later commentators on Aristotle understood the categories: what they are, what they categorize, and how to (quasi) define them or describe them. I lay out three general consensuses in the commentary tradition: (1) Aristotle’s categories are limited in their ontological scope to the realm of composites (Section 2), (2) the categories categorize essences or natures (Section 3), and (3) “being (einai) not in a subject” or “to be kath’ hauto” in the Subject Sense is like a property of substance that is constitutive of the essence of the substance (Section 4). We may think of Sections 2 and 3 as establishing in general, first, the quasi-genus that categories have in some way in common; then the quasi-differentia in Section 4. In these Sections we shall see first the Essence Sense of “to on kath’ hauto” emerge (usually using such language as physis, rather than to on or to ti en einai) as something quasi-generic, as it were, and then we shall see the Subject Sense emerge in the form of a quasi-differentia. These three consensuses are also worth noting for our purposes in subsequent chapters. For, these consensuses set the stage for Avicenna to see in the structure of the categories, I argue, a real distinction between essence and existence.

Since the aim of this chapter is to show that the commentary tradition provides the raw material, so to speak, from which the motivation behind Avicenna’s Categories Argument is based, I do not present here a chronological account of these consensuses in the commentary literature. Rather, I merely show that the following consensuses are present in the commentary literature and repeated by central commentators.
2. The Categories Categorize Composite, Sensible Being: or, How a Platonist Learns to Stop Fearing Aristotle and to Love the *Categories*.

Recall that this section establishes the first commentatorial consensus: Aristotle’s categories are limited in their ontological scope to the realm of composites. In an analogous way, Avicenna and Aquinas see the categories as limited to compound and caused things (though not merely to form-matter composites).

The vast amount of commentary on the *Categories*, especially by Platonist commentators, deserves an explanation. After all, of the works of Aristotle that could be considered most critical of a Platonic worldview, the *Categories* is near the top of the list. There, Aristotle bestows Plato’s honored title of “*ousia*” not on the transcendent, unmixed, divine, and stable Forms, but instead on the sensible individuals that populate the world of sense and common speech. Those things that Plato would call Forms—namely, the universals that range over particulars by causing them to be what they are and to be conspecific—are called “*ousiai*” only in a derivative sense by Aristotle: Aristotle’s “secondary *ousia*.” For this reason, it is well worth asking: how did such an anti-Platonic work of Aristotle end up being the required reading in a Platonic curriculum?

The story is complicated, with twists and turns, and so it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to enter into the whole story. Still, I would like to highlight some important moments in the story and to note how they contribute towards a consensus which will later influence the way late antique and medieval readers of the *Categories* approach substances and accidents. It is worth beginning with Plotinus, who notes that Aristotle’s *Categories* discusses sensible *ousiai* exclusively—thereby indicating that, for
him, the ontological picture of the Categories is a limited one.\(^1\) Moreover, Plotinus raises the issue\(^2\) that—given the fact that Aristotle recognizes that form, matter, and the composite of form and matter are all called “ousia,” though form is called “ousia” primarily—it is hard to see how ousia could be one of the highest genera. For, a genus is always predicated synonymously of its species, and Aristotle himself calls the categories “genera.” Thus, how could a grouping of things which are said according to priority and posteriority comprise a genus?

Dexippus responds to the issue of Aristotle’s excluding the intelligible ousiai (that is, the Forms) from consideration by saying that such considerations would be contrary to the subject matter (para tēn prothesin) of the Categories.\(^3\) For, according to Dexippus, the Categories is an introductory work in which it would be inappropriate to consider, given the difficulty of the subject matter, intelligible ousiai. Porphyry too regards the Categories as introductory material, explaining the treatise as an elementary teaching (stoicheiōsin) concerning simple expressions which signify things.\(^4\) Thus, the Categories

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2 Perhaps this is not an aporia of Plotinus’s own devising, but instead an aporia that was previously established and discussed in the commentary literature (e.g. by Lucius and Nicostratus); see De Haas, “Did Plotinus and Porphyry Disagree?” 495.

3 Dexippus, *In Aristotelis Categorias Commentarium*, p. 40 lns. 19-20 (ed. A. Busse; CAG 4.2 [Berlin: Reimer, 1888]): Ἐστὶ μὲν οὖν πρὸς ταῦτα τρόπον ἀντειπεῖν, ὅτι παρὰ τὴν πρόθεσιν τὰ ἀπορήματα ταῦτα προσάγεται. Οὔτε γὰρ περὶ τῶν ὄντων οὔτε περὶ τῶν γενόν τῆς πρώτης ὁσίας νῦν αὐτό πρόκειται λέγειν[.] (“It is easy to reply to this, that these difficulties are being brought up irrelevantly. For it is not the purpose of this work to discuss [real] beings, nor the genera of primary substance; for it is aimed at young people who can follow only the simpler doctrines”; *Dexippus, On Aristotle’s Categories*, trans. John Dillon [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990], 74.)

4 Porphyry, *In Aristotelis Categorias Commentarium* p. 58 lns. 18-20 (ed. A. Busse; CAG 4.1 [Berlin: Reimer, 1887]): [...] εἰκότως Κατηγορίας ἐπέγραψεν τὴν περὶ τῶν ἀπλῶν λέξεων στοιχείωσιν τὴν καθό
serves as an introductory text because of the content with which it deals: namely, simple expressions signifying things that are well known to all people. The same point is present throughout Ammonius. For example, in answering the question “under which category do things like points and privations fall?” Ammonius responds that a point is a principle (archē) of things and, as such, along with other simple ousiai, is not discussed in the Categories. Rather, the Categories concerns things known by perception and to the many: composite (i.e. sensible) ousiai.5

Concerning the issue of how there could be a genus of ousiai which are called “ousia” according to priority and posteriority, both Plotinus and Porphyry mention the fact that “genos” has the sense of a descendent, and, thus, any line of descendants might be called a “genos.”6 In this sense, it might be appropriate to call a “genos” the set that

5 Ammonius, *In Aristotelis Categories commentarius* pp. 33 ln. 24-34 ln. 5: [...] ὁ Ἀριστοτέλης διαλέγεται περὶ πραγμάτων τῇ τε αἰσθήσει γνωρίσων καὶ τοῖς πολλοῖς, τὸ δὲ γε σημεῖον αὐτὸ μὲν τὶ πράγμα ψφετηκὸς οὐκ ἔστιν, ἀρχὴ δὲ ἐστὶν ἄλλως πραγμάτων. ὁμοίως γὰρ ἂν θα παραφήσω καὶ περὶ τῆς ὕλης καὶ τοῦ εἴδους, ἀλλ’ ὡς ἔφακεν οὔτε περὶ τῆς ἁπλῆς καὶ κρείττονος τῆς συνθέτου οὔτε περὶ τῆς ἁπλῆς καὶ χείρονος τῆς συνθέτου, ἀλλὰ περὶ τῆς συνθέτου οὐσίας αὐτῷ νῦν ὁ λόγος. (“With respect to points, our response is that Aristotle is here discussing things known by perception, and to ‘the many’. But a point is not an independently existing thing; it is a principle (arkhē) of things in general. One would be similarly puzzled about matter and form, but as we shall explain, the present discussion concerns neither the simple substance that is superior to the composite, nor the simple substance that is inferior to the composite, but composite substance”; Ammonius, *On Aristotle’s Categories*, trans. S. Marc Cohen and Gareth B. Matthews [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991], 44.) See also Ammonius, *In Cat.* pp. 45 ln. 21-46 ln. 1: διδάσκει οὖν ἐνταῦθα ὁ Ἀριστοτέλης περὶ μόνης τῆς συνθέτου οὐσίας τῆς ἐν γενεσίᾳ καὶ φθορᾷ, λέγω δὴ περὶ τε ἀτόμων καὶ εἴδων καὶ γενῶν. (“Now Aristotle’s teaching here concerns only composite substance that is subject to coming into being and destruction, I mean individuals, species, and genera”; trans. Cohen and Matthews, 56.)

6 Porphyry, *Isagoge* p. 1 Ins. 18-22 (ed. A. Busse; CAG 4.1 [Berlin: Reimer, 1887]): Ὑπάρχει δὲ μήτε τὸ γένος μήτε τὸ εἶδος ἁπλῶς λέγεσθαι. γένος γὰρ λέγεται καὶ ἡ τινὶ ἐχόντων ποὺ δὲν τῇ ἀλληλούς ἀθροίσις, καθ’ ὑπάρχει μέν τὸ Ἡρακλείδων λέγεται γένος ἐκ τῆς ἀντικείσεως, λέγω δὴ τοῦ Ἡρακλείδων, καὶ τοῦ πλείους τῶν ἐχόντων ποὺ δὲν ἀλληλούς τῆς ἁπὲκείνος οἰκοδομήτα. (“Neither genera nor species, it seems, are so called simply. Thus we call a genus an assembly of certain people who are somehow related to some one item and to one another. The genus of the Heraclids is so called in this meaning, from their relation to some one item—I mean, to Hercules—, the plurality of people somehow related to one another taking their name, in contradistinction to the other genera, from the affinity derived from him”; Porphyry, *Introduction*, trans. Jonathan Barnes [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003], 3.) See also
includes forms, matter, and composite ousiai. This sense in which ousia is a genus is, of course, distinct from the sense in which “animal” is a genus. For, “animal” is a genus because it is that under which species are ordered on account of some common feature(s).

Notice that it is possible to think of the diverse things like Aristotle’s primary ousiai, the principles of ousia like form, matter, and (as we will see below) the differentia, as well as the divine ousiai all as comprising a single genus. It becomes standard in the Alexandrian school of commentators to read the Categories as an introduction to the whole of Aristotelian philosophy, with the purpose of directing the mind from sensible things to the principle of all things—the one good itself. Thus, the focus of the Categories is on sensible ousiai, the treatise is nevertheless a propaedeutic...
for the study of intelligible ousia, because sensible and intelligible ousiai comprise a single (though homonymous) genus.

Finally, since the Categories is concerned with composite ousiai like humans and horses, rather than with simple ousiai like the divine or the differentia (as I will discuss below), what precisely is meant by the term “composite”? Now, the obvious answer, given that composite ousia is distinguished from simple ousia, is that composite ousia is called “composite” (synthetos) because it has matter. This is the most common use of the term “composite substance” in Aristotle and the commentors, namely, to signify the ousia which is the form-matter composite. Thus, the Categories is primarily concerned with material substances. Yet, the secondary ousiai, like genus and species, are also discussed in the Categories; does this then mean that they are also material ousiai? The answer is “yes.” Ammonius affirms as much in his commentary: the genus and the species—i.e. the universals—that concern us in the Categories are not the universals ante rem, but rather the universals in rem. In fact, Ammonius calls these the genera and species that are in things “sensible;” the Categories, he says, is concerned with “tóν aisthētōn genōn kai eidōn.”8 We find this language of “katholou...pro tōn pollōn” and “en tois pollois,” in Ammonius’s commentary on the Isagōgē: the universal that is prior to the many, in the many, and after the many.9

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8 Ammonius, In Cat. p. 41, Ins. 5-11: καθόλου δὲ λέγεται οὗ τὰ πρὸ τῶν πολλῶν, ἀλλὰ τὰ ἐν τοῖς πολλοῖς. τούτου χάριν πρόσκειται τοῦτο διὰ τὸ ἐν τῇ Εἰσαγωγῇ Πορφυρίου εἰρημένον, ὅτι ἐνδέχεται τὸν εἴδον πάντων καθ᾽ ὑπόθεσιν ἀνηρμένον τὸ γένος εἶναι ἐκεῖ ὅν διελέγετο περὶ τῶν νοητῶν γενῶν καὶ εἰδῶν τῶν πρὸ τῶν πολλῶν, ἐνταῦθα δὲ περὶ τῶν αἰσθητῶν γενῶν καὶ εἰδῶν διαλέγεται, τούτ’ ἐστι περὶ τῶν ἐν τοῖς πολλοῖς. (“It is not what is prior to the many but what is in the many that is called universal. This [remark] has been added on account of what is said in Porphyry’s Isagoge, [viz.] that it would be possible for the genus to exist even on the hypothesis that all the species had been destroyed. There, of course, [Porphyry] was discussing intelligible genera and species, which are prior to the many, whereas here [Aristotle] is discussing perceptible genera and species, that is, those in the many”; trans. Cohen and Matthews, 51.)

one sense, genus and species are in the many, but he even adds that they are inseparable
from matter. It is in this sense, then, that even the genus and species as secondary ousiai
are composed with matter: as the forms immanent in sensible ousia, they are the forms of
the matter and, thus, are inseparable from the matter which they inform. According to
Ammonius and the Alexandrian school, these are the genera and species that concern
Aristotle in the Categories.

Given this discussion, we may set down CC1 as the first consensus in the
commentary tradition:

(CC1) Aristotle’s Categories provides a limited ontological analysis: the ousiai
and accidents discussed in the Categories are the sensible, composite ousiai and
their accidents, not the intelligible, divine ousiai, or the simple principles of the
sensible, composite ousiai.

3. The Categories Categorize Essences: What are the Categories and How Many
Categories are There?

This section establishes the second commentatorial consensus: Aristotle’s
categories categorize essences or natures. In a certain way, the commentators, by
focusing on the problem of determining what the categories share in common—as it
were, what is their quasi-genus—disclose the Essence Sense of “being through itself,”
although usually without directly using this terminology. Below I discuss the view of
Andronicus, who denies that “kath’ hauto” is said of all the categories, instead reserving it
for the category of substance alone. In response to Andronicus, many commentators insist
that even accidents are kath’ hauto and phuseis idiai (proper natures) because they are
self-same and irreducible with respect to being what they are. Similarly, Simplicius,
considering what kind of division the categories are, makes clear that the categories must comprise some unity or whole.

Accordingly, I present evidence for the second consensus in three subsections. First, we shall see how in the commentary literature accidents are called *kath’ hauto* (namely, in Simplicius’s report of Eudorus’s view and in Dexippus’s commentary). Second, by using the commentaries of Alexander and Dexippus, I present evidence that accidents are beings *kath’ hauto* in the Essence Sense for the commentators, and that this entails, in their customary idiom, that accidents are certain natures (*phuseis*) or essences. Third, we shall see how, in the views of Archytas and Simplicius (all by way of Simplicius’s *Categories* commentary) the categories are thought of as a unity or a whole, such that they all share something in common.

*Accidents are kath’ hauto: Responding to Andronicus of Rhodes.* As we saw in the previous chapter, a common error occurs when distinguishing the category of substance or *ousia* from the other nine categories of accidents: holding that, although *ousiai* are *kath’ hauta*, and may be thought of as *kath’ hauta* beings in the Subject Sense and accidents are not, it follows therefore that accidents are beings *kata sumbebēkos*. This is erroneous because “being *kata sumbebēkos*” is not the opposite of “being *kath’ hauto*” in the Subject Sense, but rather it is the opposite of “being *kath’ hauto*” in the Essence Sense. Therefore, it is erroneous to infer from the fact that accidents are in subjects that they do not have essences. Further, it is erroneous to reduce accidents to their subjects such that one does not recognize the sense in which even accidents have their own, proper essences. Although it is true to say that the account of an accident includes the subject, it is false to say that the essence of the accident is merely, or is reducible to, the
essence of the subject.

One of the reasons why this error is so easy to make is that there is no clear and express opposite in Aristotle for “being kath’ hauto” in the Subject Sense. Indeed, the very phrase “being kath’ hauto” in the Subject Sense is attributable to Aristotle only by inference, so perhaps it is not surprising that its opposite is not explicit. The best that can be found, it appears, is “in a subject,” “en hypokeimenō,” but unlike Meta. Δ.7 where the opposition between being (to on) kata sumbebēkos and kath’ hauto is clearly laid out, in no text is such opposition clear. Notice, for example, that what Aristotle calls “en hypokeimenō” in the Categories he labels “kath’ hypokeimenou” in APo. 1.4, 73b5. It is here that we get some assistance from the later Aristotelian commentary tradition. One of the first attempts10 to use the phrase “kath’ hauto” exclusively of ousia is by Andronicus of Rhodes, who uses the dichotomy of being “kath’ hauto/pros ti or allou” (in itself/relative to or of another) to distinguish the category of ousia from the other nine categories.11 On this view, only the category of ousia or ti esti would be kath’ hauto whereas all of the other nine categories would fall under the umbrella term “relative” or “of another.” Andronicus’s motivation for making this division seems to be this: he reads the Categories as a logical work that is a propaedeutic for the Posterior Analytics and for demonstration. Now, in order to make successful demonstrations, one must correctly define things (for, the middle premise in a demonstration is a definition), and in order to define things correctly, one must be able to distinguish between those attributes which pertain to what the object is—i.e. those attributes which are predicated kath’ hauto and

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10 Though Andronicus may have been following the lead of Xenocrates. See Michael J. Griffin, Aristotle’s Categories in the Early Roman Empire (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 48.

11 Simplicius, On Aristotle’s “Categories 1-4,” trans. Chase, 78, Ins 22-25 (on Cat. 1b25): “Xenocrates and Andronicus and their followers seem to include everything in [the opposition] ‘by itself’ (kath’ hauto) and ‘relative’ (pros ti), so that, according to them, so large a multitude of genera is superfluous. Others make the division into ‘substance’ and ‘accident’.”
are in the category of ousia—from those attributes which are not essential to the object—i.e. those attributes which are predicated kata sumbebēkos and are in one of the nine accidental categories. For this reason, the ten categories assist us in keeping clear which predications will produce definitions and which will not: propositions where the predicate term is in the category of ousia will furnish definitions whereas propositions where the predicate term is in one of the categories of accidents will not.

Whether it was his intention or not, Andronicus did not mention propositions in which a predicate is said kath’ hauto of its subject and the subject is an accident, e.g. “white is a color.” As a result, the Platonist Eudorus criticized Andronicus’s view for neglecting such cases and, thus, Eudorus suggests that “it is necessary to say that the nine categories are considered in the kath’ hauto (“en tō kath’ hauto hai ennea katēgoriai theōrontai”). Eudorus’s motivation is that of a Platonist: the Forms are self-predicating and, thus, “Wisdom is wise” is a kath’ hauto predication with the predicate term in the category of quality.

This criticism of Andronicus, whether Andronicus is really guilty of the charge or not, became a standard point of commentary, being mentioned both by Simplicius and Dexippus, for example. However, the error of which these authors accuse Andronicus is not, as I argued in the previous chapter, that Andronicus conflated the Essence Sense and the Subject Sense of “to be kath’ hauto.” Rather, the error Andronicus makes, according to Eudorus, Dexippus, and Simplicius, is that Andronicus’s “kath’ hauto/pros ti” distinction turns the ten categories into two categories. This is why Andronicus’s view is mentioned in the parts of Simplicius’s and Dexippus’s commentaries discussing the

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12 Griffin, Aristotle’s Categories in the Early Roman Empire, 41-53.
number of the categories. For, if we think of the categories of accidents as always and necessarily of another thing, then they cannot, of themselves, be categories since the categories are categories of essences, and essences are proper to a thing by virtue of itself.

**Accidents are Distinct Natures: Dexippus and Alexander.** Dexippus suggests another way of thinking of the issue in response to Andronicus: accidents are relative only when considered as they relate to their subject, but they are of themselves their own proper nature. Dexippus writes, “concerning the accident, if we refer (anapheroimen) it to the subject, it [is] relative…but in and of itself (auto kath’ hauto) the accident is some distinct nature (phusis).” Notice the term “kath’ hauto” used of accidents in the Essence Sense.

This use of “nature” or “phusis idia” is found throughout the commentators, and marks, I suggest, the commentary tradition’s solid recognition of and grounding in the Essence Sense of “to be kath’ hauto.” Moreover, it is recognized in the commentary literature that this doctrine comes out of Aristotle’s *Meta. Δ.7*. We can see this source in Alexander’s commentary on this passage. When explaining that the “is” takes its coloring from the predicate term with which it is syntactically arranged (recall the previous discussion in Chapter II), Alexander says that the “is” signifies the “nature with which it is syntactically arranged” *(to estin, hō an suntassētai, ekeinēn sēmainein tēn phusin).* In

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14 Dexippus, *In Cat.* p. 31, Ins. 28-30: καὶ τὸ συμβεβηκὸς εἰ μὲν ἀναφέροιμεν εἰς τὸ ὑποκείμενον, πρὸς τι, ὡσπερ ὁ ἄγρος ὡς κτῆμα πρὸς τι, αὐτὸ δὲ καθ’ αὑτὸ τὸ συμβεβηκὸς φύσις τις ἰδία. (“And if we relate the accident to a given subject, it is a relative (as for instance the farm, as a possession, is a relative), but in and of itself the accident is a distinct nature”; trans. Dillon, 65.) See also Simplicius, *In Cat.* pp. 63 ln. 33-64 ln. 1: εἰ οὖν οὕτως καὶ τὸ συμβεβηκὸς ἀναφέροιμεν προς τὸ ὑποκείμενον, οὐδὲν θαυμαστόν, ἐπεὶ αὐτὸ καθ’ αὑτὸ φύσις ἰδία ἐστίν[.] (“If we were thus to refer the accident, too, back to its substrate, this is not surprising, since [an accident], taken by itself, is a particular nature [phusis idia]”; trans. Chase, 78.)

15 Alexander of Aphrodisias, *In Aristotelis Metaphysica commentaria*, ed. M. Hayduck (CAG 1 [Berlin: Reimer, 1899]) p. 371, Ins. 29-33: δεικτικόν δὲ τοῦ τὸ ἔστιν, ὃ ἂν συντάσσηται, ἐκείνην σημαίνειν τὴν φύσιν, παρέδεχο τὸ μηδὲν σημαίνειν ἄλλο τὸ ἀνθρώπου υγιάν ἔστιν ἢ τὸ ἀνθρώπος ὑγιάν, τούτοπο τὸ ἔστιν, ὃ ἐπὶ τῇ ύγείᾳ συντέτακται, μηδὲν ἄλλο ἢ τὴν τῆς ύγείας ὑπαρξίν σημαίνει. (“To show that ‘is’
other words, the “is” that is syntactically arranged next to a predicate in a category of accidents nevertheless signifies the nature of the category, entailing that the categories of accidents are categories of natures or essences. We have, of course, already seen that this is true for Aristotle as well, and thus this view is not unique to the later commentators, but I emphasize this point here to show that how, with Alexander’s help, this view of the categories as categorizing essences becomes a standard reading of Aristotle’s categories.

*The Categories Form a Unified Whole: Simplicius.* On this view of the categories as categories of essences or natures, having an essence or nature is common to all items in the categories, and thus one cannot distinguish the categories from each other as though one category (e.g. substance) categorizes essences whereas others (e.g. the categories of accidents) do not. Indeed, when we refer to the categories, we refer to them as a group of ten categories. Therefore, there must be something common to the categories in order to speak intelligibly about the categories as a group, and the commentators have understood this unity and commonality to consist in the fact that the categories are all categories of what is *kath’ hauto.*

We find this way of thinking about the categories perhaps most explicitly in Simplicius’s discussion of Archytas. Simplicius notes that in the articulation of the ten categories, Archytas gives not only an example of something in the category, but also “a property in accord with the concept” (*tēn kata tēn ennoian idiotēta*) that the category evokes.\(^{16}\) We will return to Archytas on the property evoked by the category of substance. Of interest here is how Archytas’s approach leads Simplicius to consider what

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signifies the nature of that to which it is attached, Aristotle adds that to say, ‘A man is regaining his health’ signifies nothing other than, ‘A man regains his health’; that is, the ‘is’ which is attached to health signifies only the existence of health[*];* Alexander of Aphrodisias, *On Aristotle’s Metaphysics* 5, trans. William E. Dooley [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993], 45.)

\(^{16}\) Simplicius, *In Cat.* 4, 60, 32-61, 2.
sort of categorization is going on with the categories. Simplicius asks what kind of “cut” (*tomē*) Archytas is making. He goes on to reject the possibility that Archytas is dividing the categories as species of the same genera or parts of the same whole. For, to make such a division, observes Simplicius, would be to treat “being” as a genus and, thereby, to treat “being” as though it were said equally of all of the categories. No, the categories cannot be a division of a whole into parts or of a genus into species. But, Simplicius adds, this fact does not mean that there is no unity at all among the categories. For, to say otherwise “would destroy the continuity (*sunecheian*) and mutual coherence (*allēlouchian*) of the cosmos if we left no commonness among the primary genera.”

Therefore, Simplicius concludes, the categories have to be distinguished according to their primary properties (*kata tinas prōtas idiotētas*).

From this we get the general picture of the categories as categories of essences that are distinguished according to primary properties, an example of which we saw above: “to be *kath’ hauto*” characterizes *ousia*. Simplicius does not tell us what the primary properties of accidents are such that one could distinguish, say, the category of quality from that of quantity, but Simplicius does at least say that the properties of the accidental categories are that they are related to *ousia*. Now, although the accidents are distinguished from *ousia* on account of the fact that it is proper to them to be related to

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17 Simplicius, *In Cat.* p. 62, lns. 1-3: ἀλλὰ τοῦτο τὴν συνέχειαν καὶ ἀλληλουχίαν ἀναιρεῖ τῆς διακοσμήσεως, εἴπερ μὴ μενοῦν κοινότητα τῶν πρῶτων γενῶν ἀπολείπομεν. (“Yet it would destroy the continuity and interconnection of the cosmic order, if we did not leave any commonality between the primary genera”; trans. Chase, 76.)

18 Simplicius, *In Cat.* p. 62, lns. 3-7: βέλτιον οὖν τὰς μὲν διαφορὰς τῶν γενῶν ἀφορίζεσθαι κατά τινας πρῶτας ἰδιότητας, καθόσον δὲ περὶ τὴν οὐσίαν ἐστὶν τὰ συμβεβηκότα καὶ ἐν τῇ οὐσίᾳ ὑφίσταται καὶ συντάττεται πρὸς αὐτὴν, κατὰ τοσοῦτον ἀφομοιωτέον αὐτὰ τοῖς ἄρ’ ἕνος καὶ περὶ ἐν συνταττομένως. (“It is therefore better to determine the differentiae of the genera in accordance with some primary properties [*kata tinas prōtas idiotētas*]; but accidents, insofar as they are in conjunction with substance and come into existence within substance, and are co-ordinated with relation to it, to the same extent they are to be assimilated to things which are co-ordinated ‘from one thing and in relation to one thing’”; trans. Chase, 76.)
ousiai and not be merely through themselves or on their own right, Simplicius cautions against inferring from this that the accidental categories are therefore reducible to ousia. Accidents, he says are “around” (peri ousia, are hypostasized (huphistatai) in and ordered to ousia. To that extent, with Iamblichus, they are understood in terms of Aristotle’s pros hen equivocity, or, in Iamblichus’s words, they should be likened to what is “from one (aph’ henos) and ordered to one.” Simplicius clarifies, however, that “from one” means, not “from substance,” but from being (to on); otherwise, there would be nine categories rather than ten. For, if the categories are a division of substance rather than being, then substance could not be one of the categories since it is that which the categories divide. As Simplicius explains, pros hen equivocity is sufficient for the analysis of the Categories as a logical work. In that context, “being” is appropriately said to have many senses and to be said of ousia primarily. Nonetheless, as a Platonist, he sees Aristotle’s Metaphysics as deriving all of the categories from one Being. Notice, then, that for Simplicius, Being is a Form from which all of categories are derived, substance first. It is obvious, therefore, how his teaching harmonizes with Meta. Δ.7’s teaching that

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19 Simplicius, In Cat. p. 62, Ins. 7-17: ὁ δὲ Ἕρμῖνος “ἀπαρίθμησις οὖν ἔστιν, φησίν, καὶ οὔτε διάίρεσις οὔτε μερισμός: οὔδὲν γὰρ ὁλὸν ἐπ’ αὐτῶν οὔτε ὡς γένος οὔτε ἄλλον τρόπον ὁλὸν”. ἀλλὰ πρὸς μὲν τὰ τοῦ θείου Ἰαμβλίχου ἐκ τῶν αὐτοῦ ρητέων ὃτι τῷ ἄφ’ ἕνος ἐν οὐσίας ληπτέον· οὕτως γὰρ ὅλον ὁ δέκα τῆς ἀπαρίθμησιν, ἀλλὰ τῇ τῆς οὐσίας θεαμάτω· μᾶλλον δὲ ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄντος, ἀπὸ ἔντεια μὲν πολλαχῶς λεγόμενον εἰς τὰς δέκα κατηγορίας Ἀριστοτέλης διαιρεῖσθαι βούλεται, καὶ εἰκότως, ἐπειδῆ περὶ λέξεων σημαντικῶν ἐν τούτοις ὁ σκοπός· ἐν δὲ τῇ Μετὰ τὰ φυσικὰ ὡς ἄφ’ ἑνοῦ στίς ὡς ὄντος τὰ δέκα ἐν τάξει παράγεσθαι φησί, πρώτην ἔχοντας τὰς δέκα κατηγορίας καὶ περὶ αὐτῆς τῶν ἄλλων συνταττομένον. (“Herminus, however, says, ‘it is thus neither a division [diairesis] nor a partition [merismos], but an enumeration [aparithmesis], for there is no whole in their case, neither in the sense of a genus, nor is there any other kind of whole’. In response to the view of the divine lamblichus, however, we may reply, using his own terms, that ‘from one thing’ [to aph’ henos] is not to be understood as ‘from substance’ [apo tes ousias]; for if this were the case, the enumeration we would carry out would not be of ten things, but of nine. Rather, it is [to be understood as] ‘from being’ [apo tou ontos]. [and it is Being] which, here [considered] as something said in many senses, Aristotle wishes to be divided into the ten categories. Rightly so, moreover, since here the goal [skopos] is about significant expressions. In the Metaphysics, however, he says that the ten [sc. categories] are produced in order as if from one thing [to aph’ henos], viz. from being, with substance holding the first rank and the other [categories] being coordinated around it”; trans. Chase, 76.)
all of the categories belong to “being kath’ hauto” in the Essence Sense.

In sum, what we see in the discussion beginning with Andronicus of whether the categories are best sorted into kath’ hauto/pros ti categories, and whether the categories are all reducible to and derived from substance is the consistent insistence and consensus on the doctrine that even the accidental categories are categories of essences (or of “being” in that sense), which are what they are by virtue of themselves. This is our second commentatorial consensus:

(CC2) The categories categorize essences variously related to ousia.

Further, though the doctrine in Meta. Δ.7 may motivate this doctrine in the background, we see that the most immediate motivation for the commentators is to defend the precise number of categories that Aristotle enumerated. Clearly the commentators thought that any approach to the categories that resulted in a different list should be dismissed, and any approach to categories that reduces the accidental categories to ousia violates the integrity of Aristotle’s categories.

We have also seen in these discussions the recognition of the phrase “to be kath’ hauto” as like a property of substance that distinguishes substance from the other categories. The precise status of the phrase “to be kath’ hauto” is yet unclear. Simplicius appears to make “to be kath’ hauto” or [an item having] “being kath’ hauto” (as a verbal participle) something akin to a “property” of substance, though he also calls it a “description” (hypographê). As we shall see next, these are not the only ways of describing the different senses of “to be kath’ hauto.”

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20 Simplicius, In Cat. 95 uses similar language.
4. Property, Description, Concomitant and Completer: What is "To Be kath' hauto" in Relation to Substance (ousia)?

As we saw in the previous section, several late antique authors used the phrase “to be kath' hauto” to characterize substance. We find kath' hauto in Andronicus of Rhodes and “to be kath' hauto” in Archytas, and thus their views become the point of discussion across various Neoplatonic commentaries. I argued in Section 3 that we may see the commentators wrestling with the same error that we discussed in the Chapter I, namely, that of reducing the nature and being of accidents to the subjects in which they inhere, with the result that only ousiai are genuine beings or beings kath' hauta—the sort of things metaphysicians discuss, as opposed to the accidental unities which they dismiss. In that section, I argued that we can see a consensus develop among the commentators: the categories categorize essences, and accidents are also genuine beings or natures (beings kath' hauto in the Essence Sense).

In this section, I discuss a third consensus, one that will have a notable impact on how Avicenna and Aquinas are going to think of the categories: “Not being in a subject,” or “to be kath’ hauto” (in the Subject Sense) is completive (i.e. constitutive) of ousia. The third consensus concerns directly the phrase “to be kath’ hauto” and its application to ousia as a description or (quasi) differentia. In fact, there are a range of possibilities for what to call “to be kath’ hauto”: differentia and definition, description, property or proprium, concomitant, and completer. The issues involved and the various terms are discussed below.

My goal is to show that “not being in a subject” or “to be kath’ hauto” is used as a (quasi) differentia by which the category of substance is distinguished from the category
of accidents. First, I lay out evidence from the commentary literature—I use Simplicius—of “to be kath’ hauto” used as almost a synonym of “not being in a subject.” Second, we shall see how the commentary literature, specifically Ammonius, who is followed by Philoponus, raise the issue of definition: is “not being in a subject” a definition of substance? Third, I review the rather extensive discussion, drawn from the commentaries of Ammonius, Philoponus, and Simplicius, including Simplicius’s Archytas, as to how to characterize “not being in a subject.” The phrase is treated as a property, concomitant, and completer of substance, by which substance is distinguished from the categories of the accidents.

To Be kath’ hauto and Not Being in a Subject. Let’s begin with a practical equivalence that we will see adopted in subsequent chapters: the equivalence of the phrase “to be through itself” and “not to be in a subject.” As we have already seen, there is a sense of “being kath’ hauto” attributable to Aristotle that signifies that substance, unlike accidents, is not in a subject. This is called the Subject Sense of “being kath’ hauto,” as was discussed in Chapter I. Thus, it is not a stretch of the imagination to recognize that “being kath’ hauto” is equivalent to saying “not being in a subject.”

Indeed, this idea is found in the commentators. Simplicius tells us that “‘not in a subject’ expresses nothing other than that it [some x] is its own ‘the very [x] that it is’ (hoper estin heautou)—or, it is a completive part of such a thing—and that [it is] a subject.”21 Subsequently, he says “Given [substance’s] being (ousa) through itself (kath’

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21 Simplicius, In Cat. 5 p. 94, Ins. 36-37: οὐδὲν γὰρ ἄλλο λέγει τὸ μὴ ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ ἢ ὅτι αὐτὸ ὁπερ ἐστὶν ἐαυτοῦ ἐστὶν ἢ μέρος ἐστὶ συμπληρωτοκόν τοῦ τοιοῦτου, καὶ ὅτι ὑποκειμένον ἐστίν[.] (“For ‘not in a subject’ only means either that it is what it is of itself or that it is a completive part of such a thing, and that it is a subject”; Simplicius, On Aristotle Categories 5-6, trans. Frans A.J. de Haas and Barrie Fleet [New York: Bloomsbury, 2001], 37.)
It does not have being [to einaí] in another."²² From this statement we could infer: to be through itself belongs to what has “not being in a subject.”

Is “Not Being in a Subject” the Definition of Substance? Ammonius. Let us now turn to the central question: is “not being in a subject” a definition of substance? To answer the question, recall the decisive relevant passage of Categories 5. There we find Aristotle saying: “it is common to every substance not to be in a subject.” ²³ While it is true that Aristotle says this, is it clear that Aristotle intends to offer a definition of substance here? The text is inconclusive, but Ammonius reads it as decisive.²⁴ As Ammonius puts it: Aristotle here intends to define substance: ton horismon tēs ousias apodounai bouletai.²⁵ However, Ammonius is also very clear that a proper definition of substance cannot be given since there is no higher genus than substance into which it might fall. Thus, argues Ammonius, Aristotle uses a property, idion, of substance, which is like a definition. For, as Ammonius says, paraphrasing Aristotle’s Topics,²⁶ “just as a definition pertains to only and all those things of which it is the definition, and is convertible with the defined, likewise does the idion pertain to all and only those things

²² Ibid., 95, Ins 4-5.
²³ Aristotle, Categories 3a21-22: οὐκ ἴδιον δὲ οὐσίας τούτων, ἀλλ’ ἔδει δὲ καὶ ἡ διαφορά τὸν τὸν ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ ἕστιν· τὸ γὰρ πεζόν καὶ τὸ δίπουν καθ’ ὑποκειμένου καθ’ ὑποκειμένου λέγεται τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ δὲ σώματι ἕστιν, —οὐ γὰρ ἐν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ ἐστὶ τὸ δίπουν ὦδε τὸ πεζόν. (“But this is not a property of substance, but the difference is also one of those things which is not in a subject; for, ‘ambulatory’ and ‘bipedal’ are said of the subject that is human, but they are not in a subject—for, neither ambulatory nor bipedal is in the human.”)
²⁴ In what follows, I present Ammonius’s argument concerning whether “not being in a subject” is the definition of substance. As is perhaps to be expected, Philoponus and Simplicius follow Ammonius in their commentaries. Dexippus also discusses this matter in his commentary, but I focus here on Ammonius, who clearly thinks that Aristotle intends to give a definition of substance in Cat. 5 (see below). See Dexippus, In Cat. p. 47, Ins. 28-31; Simplicius, In Cat. p. 97, Ins. 24-26; Philoponus, In Cat. p. 64, Ins. 9-10.
²⁵ Ammonius, In Cat. p. 44, Ins. 6-8: Διελὼν τὴν οὐσίαν εἴς τε τὴν πρώτην καὶ τὴν δεύτεραν καὶ παραβαλὼν αὐτάς πρὸς ἄλλας, νῦν εὐτάκτως ποιῶν τὸν ὀρισμὸν τῆς οὐσίας ἀποδοῦναι βούλεται. (“Having divided substance into primary and secondary, and having compared these to one another, he proceeds in good order and now wants to give a definition of substance”; trans. Cohen and Matthews, 54.)
²⁶ Aristotle, Topics 1.5, 102a18-19: Ἰδοὺ δ’ ἐστὶν δὴ μὴ δηλοῖ μὲν τὸ τὸν ὀρισμὸν τῆς οὐσίας ἀποδοῦναι. (“A property is that which does not reveal the essence [of a thing], but pertains to it alone and is convertible with the thing.”)
of which it is the definition, and they are convertible with each other.”\(^{27}\) On Ammonius’s reading, Aristotle does not give a definition of substance, but rather an idion of substance which, because substance plays the unique role of the most general category (genos genikōtaton), may be used as a definition of substance. However, as Ammonius notes later on in his commentary, Aristotle denies that “not being in a subject” pertains to all and only substance since it also pertains to the differentia. It would follow, therefore, that “not being in a subject” (to mē en hypokeimenō einai) cannot serve as a definition of substance because it cannot serve as an idion of substance.\(^{28}\) Despite this, Ammonius, for whom the differentia is also a substance (and an intelligible Form), recognizes “not being in a subject” as an idion of substance—though he explains that Aristotle denies as much because the differentia is beyond the consideration of the Categories. So, for the purpose of the Categories, an introductory work on sensible substances, the challenging classification of the intelligible substances, such as the differentiae, is not considered.\(^{29}\) Philoponus gives very much the same reasoning.\(^{30}\)

As Ammonius goes on to explain, Aristotle, having shown that “to be not in a


\(^{28}\) Ammonius, In Cat. p. 44, Ins. 15-18: οὐ παραδίδωσι δὲ εὐθὺς τὰ ἀρέσκοντα αὐτῷ, ἀλλὰ πρῶτον τοῦτο λέγει τῆς οὐσίας ἰδιόν τὸ μὴ ἐν υποκειμένῳ εἶναι, ὃ πάσῃ μὲν ἁρμόζει, οὐ μόνῃ δὲ, ἀλλὰ καὶ ταῖς διαφοραῖς· δεῖ δὲ τὸ ἰδιόν μόνῳ καὶ παντὶ υπάρχειν. (“This, then, is the reason he wants to give a proprium of substance. But he does not immediately produce an answer acceptable to him; rather, he first says that not being in a subject is a proprium of substance. This fits every substance, but not only substance - it fits differentiae, too, whereas a proprium must belong to all and only”; trans. Cohen and Matthews, 55.)

\(^{29}\) Ammonius, In Cat. p. 46, Ins. 5-10: διὰ ταύτην οὖν τὴν αἰτίαν ἐπείν ὁ Ἀριστοτέλης ὅτι οὐκ ἰδιόν τῆς οὐσίας υπάρχει τούτῳ, οὐχ ὡσεὶ δὲ πάσης ἐπείν, ἀλλὰ τῆς συνθέτου. εἰκότως δὲ τούτῳ· υπάρχει γὰρ οὐ μόνον τῇ συνθέτῳ, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῇ ἁπλῇ, τούτῳ ἐστὶ ταῖς διαφοραῖς, τῷ λογικῷ καὶ τῷ ἀλόγῳ. καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ἑδοξεῖν ἀφορίζειν τὰς διαφορὰς τῶν οὐσίων. (“It is for this reason, therefore, that Aristotle says that this [sc. not being in a subject] is ‘not a proprium of substance’. He did not mean every substance, absolutely, but composite substance. And that was reasonable. For [not being in a subject] belongs not only to the composite, but also to the simple, i.e. to differentiae, to rational and irrational. And that is why he seemed to be distinguishing differentiae from substances”; trans. Cohen and Matthews, 56.)

subject” is not an idion of substance, proceeds to other candidates as defining characteristics of substance. All of the following are considered, until only the last is seen as the defining characteristic of substance: “being said synonymously of everything of which they are said,” “signifying a tode ti,” “not having a contrary,” “not admitting of more or less,” and “being receptive of contraries while remaining one and the same.”

“Not Being in a Subject” as Distinguishing Substance from Accidents:

Terminology in the Commentary Literature. Here I review several clarifications regarding the terminology for the Subject Sense of “not being in a subject: Ammonius on the property-concomitant distinction; Simplicius on Archytas’s account of substance and what a property is; Simplicius and Porphyry on completers (symplērōtika); finally, after a review and analysis, I take up a curious passage in Simplicius on non-being as the contrary of substance.

Ammonius on the Property-Concomitant Distinction. In the previous discussion, Ammonius’s shift in vocabulary is noteworthy. Instead of calling the members of this list “idia” of substance, he calls them “parakolouthēmata,” or “concomitants,” of substance. Subsequently Ammonius reserves the term “idion” for the defining characteristic: “being receptive of contraries while remaining one and the same”; all of the other characteristics, by contrast, including “to be not in a subject,” are considered parakolouthēmata.31 Again, Philoponus follows Ammonius in this use of “parakolouthēma.” Now, Ammonius does not offer any explanation of how the terms “idion” and “parakolouthēma” differ, though we may look to Porphyry for help. An idion may be used in the place of a proper definition since both idia and definitions are convertible with that of which they are predicated. However, this convertibility does not appear to figure into what a

31 Ammonius, In Cat. p. 51, ln. 5.
parakolouthēma is. Porphyry tells us that a parakolouthēma states, not what a thing is, but rather what follows necessarily from that thing. The example of a parakolouthēma that we find in Porphyry is the predicate “being said of something else.” According to Porphyry, “being said of something else” is a parakolouthēma of a relative, but it is not the definition of a relative because the terms do not convert. Every relative is of something else, but it is not the case that everything that is of something else is a relative. For example, a quality is of something else (namely, of the substance in which it inheres), but it does not follow that all qualities are in the category of relatives (pace Andronicus of Rhodes, who reduces the ten categories to two: the category of substance as the “through itself” and the rest of the categories of accidents as the “relative”). Given Porphyry’s account, Ammonius’s classification of “not being in a subject” as a parakolouthēma makes sense. Since everything that is a substance is not in a subject, though it is not the case that everything that is not in a subject is a substance, it follows that “not being in a subject” is not an idion of substance. It does, however, appear to follow necessarily from being a substance that it is not in a subject since substances are those things which do not need a subject in order to be: they are themselves subjects.

Simplicius on Archytas’s Account of Substance and What a Property Is. Above we saw in Simplicius how Archytas’s articulates the ten categories by appeal to “a property in accord with the concept” that the category evokes. What property (idiotēta), then, does substance evoke? According to Simplicius’s report, Archytas used the phrase “whatever [items] underlie through themselves” (hosa kath’ hauta upheştēken—seemingly equivalent to “[to whatever belongs] not being in a subject”),32 as a description

32 Simplicius’s vocabulary for “to be through itself” (to kath’ hauto einaí) and for “subsistence through
Sustatikōn kath' 'eauto hupostasis (ibid. 94, 3), particulars individual substance by its being per se (kath' heautēn ousē). Although Simplicius thereby affirms that an item's "being kath' hauto" is a phrase that pertains especially to substance, it should be noted that he does not take it to be a definition of substance (and that, in fact, "being" is here a verbal participle, not a noun). Moreover, Simplicius uses the locution "to be through itself" in the context of explaining Archytas's view that substance is characterized by being that which underlies. It appears, then, that Simplicius applies "to be through itself" to things in the Subject Sense as characteristic of Aristotle's phrase "what underlies through itself." As he puts it, it is true that "to be in itself (to kath' 'autēn einai) belongs (huparchei) as essential (ousiodes) to substance (ousia)."
Though Ammonius did not call “not being in a subject” a property, Simplicius, affirming the view of Archytas, seems to have no qualms about calling “not being in a subject” a property. Is Simplicius, then, inconsistent with Ammonius? Perhaps not.

Simplicius follows Porphyry in saying that “idion” is said in many senses: where “F” signifies a general term, an “idion” may be (1) what pertains to all Fs but not to Fs alone; (2) what pertains to Fs only but not to all Fs; or (3) what pertains to all and only Fs. Simplicius tells us that (3) is the proper sense of “idion.” It is clear from his disambiguation that Simplicius intends to call “not being in a subject” or “to be kath’ hauto” an idion in the first sense. Further, Simplicius does not appear to be wedded to the term “idion” when talking about the phrase “not being in a subject” or “to be kath’ hauto.” For, later in his commentary, Simplicius refers to the phrase “to be kath’ hauto” as a “symplērōtikōn” of ousia rather than an “idion.” Let’s turn to this characterization.

Simplicius and Porphyry on completers (symplērōtika). Simplicius’s term “symplērōtikōn” is significant because “symplērōtikōn,” as a “completer” of ousia, gives the idea that somehow “not being in a subject” is constitutive of the essence of the ousia. The term “symplērōtikōn” is commonly used to describe the relationship between the differentia and the species. Porphyry writes in the Isagoge that the divisive differentiae (i.e. the differentiae that divide genera) come to be completers (symplērōtikai ginontai).

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36 Simplicius, In Cat. p. 93, Ins. 12-15: τριχῶς δὲ λέγεσθαι τὸ ἴδιον, τὸ μὲν παντὶ μὲν οὐ μόνῳ δὲ ὑπάρχον ὡς τὸ δίπουν τῷ ἄνθρωπῳ, τὸ δὲ μόνῳ μὲν οὐ παντὶ δὲ ὡς τῷ αὐτῷ τῷ γραμματικῷ, τὸ δὲ καὶ μόνῳ καὶ παντὶ, ὅπερ καὶ κυρίως ἐστίν ἴδιον, ὡς τῷ ἄνθρωπῳ τῷ γελαστικῷ. (“For the proprium [idion] is said in three ways: (1) what belongs to all but not to it alone, as two-footed belongs to human being; (2) what belongs to it alone but not to all, as grammatical belongs to the same [i.e. human being]; (3) what belongs to it alone and to all, which is indeed a proprium in the strict sense, as being capable of laughter belongs to human being”; trans. de Haas and Fleet, 36.) Simplicius’s list here diverges slightly from Porphyry’s, who distinguishes four senses of “idion”: (1) what pertains to all Fs but not only Fs; (2) what pertains to only Fs but not all Fs; (3) what pertains to all and only Fs sometimes; (4) what pertains to all and only Fs all of the time. See Porphyry, Isagoge 12, 13-20.

37 Though mostly used when discussing the differentia, “symplērōtikōn” is used to talk about every level of predication—thus, the species completes the genus, the differentia completes the species, and the individual completes the species. See A. C. Lloyd, The Anatomy of Neoplatonism (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 86.
and constitutives (sustatikai) of species with the result that the differentiae animate and sensitive, together with the genus ousia, produce or complete (apetelesan) animal.

Elsewhere, Porphyry writes that the removal of symplērōtika—e.g. a differentia—destroys the subject. It is for this reason that Porphyry calls the differentia an essential (or “substantial”) quality (poiotēs ousiōdēs). Porphyry infers that, since differentiae are completers and “substantial” parts of ousiai, differentiae fall under the definition of ousia (remember that they are intelligibles). Porphyry is also clear that, not only are differentiae ousiai, but so too are any symplērōtika. He tells us that differentiae reveal the nature of the substance, whereas accidents do not.

However, I do not want to give the impression that “symplērōtikōn” is used only of the differentia. In fact, the term gets applied to a variety of phenomena including heat as a completer of fire and white as a completer of snow. The relationship between fire

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38 Porphyry, In Cat. p. 95, Ins. 22-33: Οὐσιώδεις εἰσίν ποιότητες αἱ συμπληρωτικαὶ τῶν οὐσιῶν. Συμπληρωτικὰ δὲ εἰσίν ἐκεῖνα, ἣταν ἀπογινόμενα φθείρει τὰ ὑποκείμενα. ἂ δὲ γινόμενα καὶ ἀπογινόμενα οὐ φθείρει, οὐκ ἂν εἰπή συμπληρωτικὴ. Ὁ συμπληρωτικὸς δὲ εἰσὶν ἐκεῖνοι ἃ πρόσεστι τῷ τερμῷ ὦδατι, πρόσεστι δὲ καὶ τῷ πυρὶ ἀλλὰ τῷ μὲν ὦδατι οὐκ οὐσιώδες πρόσεστι τῷ υδάτι ὥς τὸ μείζον ἄρθετον, ἀρθείσης γὰρ τῆς θερμότητος ψυχρὸν γίνομεν τὸ υδάτι. Τῷ δὲ πυρὶ οὐσιώδους πρόσεστι τῷ θερμῷ· ζῶον τὸ δὲ θερμὸν φθείρει τὸ πῦρ. Καὶ αἱ διαφοραὶ οὖν σχεδὸν τοιαῦται εἰσίν ὡς ποιότητες οὐσιώδεις· τὸ γὰρ λογικὸν ἐὰν ἀρθῇ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, φθείρεται, καὶ τὸ χερσαῖον ἐὰν ἀρθῇ αὐτοῦ, φθείρεται, καὶ τὸ θνητὸν ἐὰν ἀρθῇ αὐτοῦ, φθαρείη ἂν μεταβάλλων εἰς ἀθάνατον. Διὸ καὶ εἰς τὸν ὁρισμὸν τῆς οὐσίας παραλαμβάνεται ἡ διαφορὰ ὡς συμπληρωτικὴ οὖσα τῆς οὐσίας, τὰ συμπληρωτικὰ δὲ τῶν οὐσιῶν οὐσίαι. (“Essential qualities are those that are complements of substances. Complements [symplērōtika] are properties the loss of which destroys their subjects. Properties that can be gained and lost without the subject being destroyed would not be essential. For example, heat is a property of hot water as well as of fire. But it is not an essential property of water, for when the heat is removed the water is not destroyed by becoming cold. But it is an essential property of fire, for fire is destroyed if its heat is taken away. And differentiae are indeed like this: they are essential qualities. For if ‘rational’ is taken away from man, man is destroyed, and if ‘terrestrial’ is taken away from man, man is destroyed, and if ‘mortal’ is taken away from him, he is destroyed, and if ‘mortal’ is taken away from him, he is destroyed, i.e. if he changes into something immortal. Hence the differentia is included under the definition of substance, since it is a complement of substance, and the complements of substances are substances”; trans. Strange, 87.)

39 See Aristotle, Categories 3a29-32, where Aristotle leaves open the possibility that parts of ousiai are not en hypokeimenō in the technical sense that applies to accidents and, thus, that parts of ousiai are themselves ousiai.

40 Porphyry, In Cat. 95, 33-34; καὶ τὰ συμβεβηκότα μὲν οὐ δηλοῖ τὴν οὐσίαν, ἡ διαφορὰ δὲ δῆλον· ζῶον γὰρ ὄντος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ποιήν τι ζῶον, δηλοῦσιν αἱ διαφοραὶ· ἔσονται οὖν οὐσιώδεις ποιότητες. (“Also, accidents do not reveal the nature of a substance, but the differentia does. For man is an animal, and the differentiae reveal what sort of animal he is, so that they will be essential qualities”; trans. Strange, 87-88.)
and heat becomes a rather notable point of commentary for the tradition. For, Plotinus calls heat a “symplērōtikōn” and “energeia” of fire to emphasize that it is a constituent of the very nature of fire, though Plotinus also says that whether heat is a symplērōtikōn or a quality depends on the subject to which it is related. For, as a quality of fire, heat is a symplērōtikōn, but as a quality of the kettle, it is an accident. Plotinus’s view that a quality might be a symplērōtikōn in one case and an accident in another is taken up by Porphyry who, because he considers all symplērōtika to be ousiai, suggests that heat is sometimes an ousia and other times an accident. We will discuss this issue in greater detail in the next chapter on Avicenna, so I will save most of my commentary for this later treatment. Suffice it to say here that this Plotinian-Porphyrian view inspired a great deal of controversy and discussion in the commentary literature, which has been thoroughly documented by Concetta Luna.44

41 For more on Plotinus’s use of “energeia,” see Paul Kalligas, “From ‘Energeia’ to Energy: Plotinus and the Formation of the Concept of Energy,” Hermathena, no. 192 (2012): 45-64, at 51-54. It should be noted that Plotinus’s view does not appear to be entirely consistent throughout the Enneads. For in this early treatise, Plotinus reserves the language of “quality” exclusively for accidents, such that the heat of a fire would not be considered a quality because it is internal and constitutive. However, later in the Enneads, Plotinus recognizes a sense in which a completive feature might be called a quality. See Plotinus, Enneads 6.1.10. Lavaud suggests that Plotinus follows Aristotle in recognizing a sense of “quality” that might apply to completers. See also Laurent Lavaud, “The Primary Substance in Plotinus’ Metaphysics: a Little-Known Concept,” Phronesis 59 (2014): 369-384, at 376.

42 Plotinus, Enneads 2.6.1, 29-40: Ἀλλ’ εἰ καὶ τὸ ὀρθομένον λευκὸν ἐπὶ τοῦ ψιμυθίου συμπληρωτικόν εἶ οὗτος, ἀλλ’ ἐπὶ τοῦ ψιμυθίου· καὶ τοῦ πυρὸς δὲ ἡ θερμότης. Ἀλλ’ εἰ τις λέγει τὴν πυρότητα τὴν οὐσίαν εἶναι καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ ψιμυθίου τὸ ἀνάλογον; Ἀλλ’ δὲ τοῦ ὀρθομένου πυρὸς [πυρότητος] ἡ θερμότης συμπληρόθηκα καὶ ἡ λευκότης ἐπὶ τοῦ ἐπέρου. Αἱ οὗτοι δὲ τοῖς συμπληρώσουσι καὶ οὐ ποιότητες, καὶ οὐ συμπληρώσουσι καὶ[οὐ] ποιότητες. Καὶ ἄτοσκον οὖς συμπληρώσει λέγειν ἄλλον ἄλλο εἶναι, ἐν δὲ οἷς μὴ ἄλλο, τῆς αὐτῆς φύσεως οὕσες. (“But in the case of ceruse is the visible white also completing its essence? For in the case of the swan the visible white is not essence-completing, since a swan could become not-white. But in the case of ceruse it is essence-completing, as is heat in the case of fire. But what if someone claims that fieriness is the substantiality of fire and makes an analogous claim for the case of ceruse? Even so, the heat is completing the substantiality of the fieriness of visible fire, and the same holds for whiteness in the other case. So, the identical things are both substantiality-completers and not qualities, and qualities and not substantiality-completers. And it would be absurd to say that those things that complete substances are distinct from those things that do not, when in fact, their nature is identical”); trans. Gerson et al., 192.)


Review and Analysis. So, to sum up what we have found, “not being in as subject/to be kath’ hauto” is described by the commentators as a property, a concomitant, and a completer of ousia. It is proper to ousia because it pertains to every ousia, and, depending on where you fall on the issue of what a differentia is, you might be able to say that it pertains to only ousiai. Simplicius suggests as much, again affirming the view of Archytas and saying that if the differentia is something substantial (ousiōdēs), then the phrase “not being in (to mē einai en) a subject but being (einai) in virtue of itself” is a property of ousia with the category of ousia including differentiae.  

45 It is for this reason that the question of whether “not being in a subject/to be kath’ hauto” is a property of ousia is tied up with the question of whether differentiae are ousiai. According to the Ammonian school of commentators, like Ammonius himself, Philoponus, (and perhaps Simplicius) (for whom the differentia is an ousia), “not being in a subject/to be kath’ hauto” is a property of ousia (in the proper sense of “property”) because it applies both to composite, sensible ousia as well as the differentiae, which are considered by this school to be simple and intelligible ousiai. Thus, “not being in a subject/to be kath’ hauto” applies to all and only ousia—both composite and simple. According to the likes of Porphyry, Plotinus and Iamblichus (and perhaps Simplicius46), “not being in a subject/to

45 Simplicius, In Cat. p. 96, Ins. 24-30: μήποτε δὲ καὶ αὐτόθεν τῆς οὐσίας ἱδιόν τούτο τὸ μὴ εἶναι ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ, ἀλλὰ καθ’ ἑαυτὸ εἶναι· κἂν γὰρ κοινὸν ἦ αὐτὴ τούτο πρὸς τὴν διαφοράν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ διαφορά καθὸ οὐσιώδης ἐστὶν ἔχει τοῦτο. Διὸ καὶ Ἀρχύτας ἐν μὲν τοῖς κοινοῖς τίθησιν “τὸ καθ’ αὑτό ἦμεν, ἀλλὰ μὴ ἐξέρχονται, ὡσπερ γλαυκότατα καὶ χαροπότατα ὀφθαλμοῖς”, οἰκεῖον δὲ αὐτὸ καλεῖ τῆς οὐσίας, ὅτι καὶ τῇ διαφορᾷ ὡς οὐσία ὑπάρχει τοῦτο. (“For that to which ‘not being in a subject’ does not belong will not be a substance. So this is useful for knowing non-substances, but we shall not immediately know also what substance is, but we need a second lesson. But perhaps even this ‘not being in a subject’ does not belong in virtue of itself’ is immediately a property of substance. For even if this belonged to substance in common with the differentia, still the differentia would have this property inasmuch as it is substantial”; trans. de Haas and Fleet, 39.)

46 Luna, Commentaire sur les Catégories d’Aristote, 242, places Simplicius among his colleagues in the Alexandrian school on this issue, suggesting that Simplicius “semble toutefois confirmer son hostilité à la these d’une réalité intermédiaire entre l’essence et l’accident et son penchant pour une interprétation
be *kath’ hauto*” is not a property of *ousia* because it also applies to differentiae which are something between substance and quality. For Porphyry, the differentia is a substantial quality and, according to Iamblichus, it is something between *ousia* and accident. Luna demarcates these positions as follows: on the one hand, we can solve the issue of the differentia by saying that it is something between *ousia* and accident; we can also give an account maintaining but also assuaging that tension, or, on the other hand, we must decide between *ousia* and accident; the best evidence points towards the differentia being an *ousia* (because it is a part of the composite *ousia*). Thus, as a completer, concomitant, and property of *ousia*, “not being in a subject/ to be *kath’ hauto*” occupies the role of being a constitutive part of *ousiai*, which necessarily pertains to *ousiai*. That being said, it is not the very essence of *ousia* such that it is the definition of *ousia*. Rather, it is either quasi-differentia of *ousia* or something that could be used to indicate what it is to be an *ousia*. This is exactly how Simplicius uses the term “not being in a subject/ to be *kath’ hauto*” in an interesting text where he refutes the view of Plotinus.

Non-Being Cannot Be the Contrary of Substance as Being through Itself: A Case Study in Sumplērōtika. According to Plotinus, Aristotle failed to prove that *ousia* necessarily does not have a contrary at *Categories* 3b24-32; instead, Aristotle gave only an inductive argument for the conclusion, failing to prove that, in principle, there is no

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47 See Luna, *Commentaire sur les Catégories d’Aristote*, 254-255.
48 For a broader discussion of this text and the issue of the necessary existence of evil and its identification with matter in the Neoplatonists, see Jan Opsomer, “Proclus vs. Plotinus on Matter (“De mal. Subs.” 30-7),” *Phronesis* 46 no. 2 (2001): 154-188.
Plotinus’s real goal in discussing this topic is not to criticize Aristotle, but instead to make sense of Plato, who claims in the *Timaeus* that evils exist by necessity, that there must be something contrary to the Good, and that evil occupies the mortal realm. Thus, Plotinus offers an explanation of how evil might come from a first principle, which is Goodness itself. Plotinus begins his reasoning by equating the Good with Substance, such that if there is a contrary to the Good (which, of course, evil is), then it follows that there must be also contrary to Substance. Plotinus goes on to suggest that those things are most assuredly contraries which are most distant from each other and complements of each other. Thus, since the Good is Substance, divine, measured, and limited, the complementary and most distant thing is the non-substance, non-measured and unlimited—namely, matter. In what way is the evil that is matter necessary? In the manner in which it is a logical necessity that, within a series of processions from a single point, there must be some furthest procession. This procession furthest removed from good is matter.

Simplicius, in responding to Plotinus, focuses on what Aristotle, according to Plotinus, failed to do: to prove that not having a contrary is universally and necessarily true of *ousia*. Simplicius begins his refutation by noting that he aims to prove universally

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49 Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.8.6.27-30: Ἀλλ' εἰ οὐσία τἀγαθόν, πῶς ἐστιν αὐτῷ τι ἐναντίον; ἢ τῷ ἐπέκεινα οὐσίας; Τὸ μὲν οὖν μὴ εἶναι μηδὲν οὐσία ἐναντίον ἐπὶ τῶν καθ' ἕκαστα οὐσιῶν ἐστι πιστὸν τῇ ἐπαγωγῇ δεδειγμένον· ὅλως δὲ οὐσίᾳ οὐκ ἐστι δεδειγμένον. (“But if the Good is Substance, or transcends Substance, how could there be a contrary of it? That there is no contrary substance in the case of a particular substance has been shown securely by induction, but this has not been shown generally for substance”; trans. Gerson et al., 115.)

50 Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.8.7.17-23: Ἐπεὶ γὰρ οὐ μόνον τὸ ἀγαθόν, ἀνάγκη τῇ ἐκβάσει τῇ παρ' αὐτό, ἢ, εἰ οὕτω τις ἐθέλοι λέγειν, τῇ ἀεὶ ὑποβάσει καὶ ἀποστάσει, τὸ ἐσχατον, καὶ μεθ' ὧν ἐτι γενέσθαι ὁτιοῦν, τοῦτο εἶναι τὸ κακόν. Εξ ἀνάγκης δὲ εἶναι τὸ μετὰ τὸ πρῶτον, ὡστε καὶ τὸ ἐσχατον· τοῦτο δὲ ἢ ὑλὴ μηδὲν ἐτι ἐχουσα αὐτοῦ. Καὶ αὕτη ἢ ἄνάγκη τοῦ κακοῦ. (“Since the Good is not alone, there is necessarily in the procession which comes from it – or, if one wants, in the eternal descent and removal from it – a last point, and after this it would not be possible for anything else to come to be; and this is evil. That which comes after the first necessarily exists, so that the last must necessarily exist, too. But this is matter which has nothing more of the Good. And this is the necessity of evil”; trans. Gerson et al., 117.)
of substance that it is impossible for it to have a contrary. Thus, in order to make his proof universal, he must take a per se attribute and completer (symplērōtikōn) of substance and prove that, based on that per se attribute and completer, it would be impossible for there to be a contrary of ousia. What per se attribute and completer does he settle on? Simplicius writes, “if it pertains essentially (ousiōdes hyparkei) to ousia to be through itself (to kath’ hautēn einai), and not to have a contrary is present in it according to its essence (kath’ ousian), in this way it will be true of some and every ousia.” Simplicius’s point seems to be this: it can be proved that there is no contrary to ousia universally because we can take some property and completer of ousia—which, because it is a property and completer of ousia pertains to each and every ousia—and demonstrate from that, because of that property, it is impossible for there to be a contrary to ousia.

Simplicius then presents us with an extended reductio ad absurdum to show that, if ousia has a contrary, that contrary will have the property of not being kath’ hauto—i.e. non-being will be its property and completer—and the absurdities follow from there. For, if ousia is being, and whatever the contrary of ousia is non-being or non-ousia, then either we must say that non-being is some existent thing, such that it could be contrary to being, or that it does not exist. If it does not exist, then there is no contrary to ousia.

Obviously, Plotinus would not want to go that route, so he must say that non-being is an existent thing. If Plotinus goes this latter route, then non-being must participate in ousia in some manner on account of the fact that it exists. If this were the case, then it is not

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51 Simplicius, In Cat. 5, p. 109, Ins. 2-4: καὶ τῇ οὐσίᾳ τοίνυν εἴπερ τὸ καθ’ αὑτὴν οὐσιῶδες ὑπάρχει, καὶ τὸ μηδεμίαν ἔχειν ἐναντίωσιν ἔν αὐτῇ κατ’ οὐσίαν ὑπάρχει καὶ οὕτως τὸ ἐπὶ τινός καὶ ἐπὶ πάσης οὐσίας ἄληθες ἔσται. (“So given that to exist in itself is essential [ousiades] to substance, ‘not to have a contrary’ will also belong to it essentially [kat’ ousian] and in this way it will be true of each and every substance”; trans. de Haas and Fleet, 52-53.)
clear how being and non-being are contraries given that non-being participates in *ousia*.

The reductio continues: perhaps Plotinus could say that non-being transcends *ousia* such that it does not participate in *ousia*. If so, then *ousia* and non-*ousia* are not in the same genus. If this is the case, then it is not possible for them to be contraries; for, in order to be contraries, the two must be within the same genus. So, it would appear that Plotinus must grant that *ousia* and non-*ousia* share a genus. But, if they are of the same genus, then either they are both principles of that genus or one came from the other. If they are both principles of the genus, then we again run into the problem of their sharing nothing in common such that they are not contraries. Plotinus could say here that that non-*ousia* comes from *ousia*, but if he goes this route then he has failed to do what he set out to do: to explain how evil, which he equates with non-*ousia*, comes from *ousia*. Thus, even to attempt to give an account of how it is possible that *ousia* and non-*ousia* share a genus, Plotinus must say that they are both principles of the genus. But if they are both first, then they are not opposed. Simplicius’s *reductio* continues from here, but I think we have sufficiently demonstrated the point: because *ousia* is *kath’ hauto*, whatever is the contrary of *ousia* will be non-being and a series of absurdities follow this view.

What we find in this text is a commentator putting the phrase “to be *kath’ hauto***” to use in order to solve a philosophical problem in a rather interesting way. Simplicius makes use of “to be *kath’ hauto***” as a quasi-differentia such that if *ousia* were to have a contrary, then the contrary of “being *kath’ hauto***” would also apply to it. It is remarkable that for much of Simplicius’s reasoning, the contrary of “being *kath’ hauto***” appears to be “not being *kath’ hauto***” rather than “being not *kath’ hauto***.” This makes it clear that Simplicius is not here using the term “being *kath’ hauto***” to signify “not being in a
subject”—rather, he appears to have in mind something more existential. This should neither surprise us nor make us think that “not being in a subject” has nothing to do with “being kath’ hauto” here: for, the context of Simplicius’s discussion clearly concerns intelligible ousia, and we have already seen, Neoplatonic authors connect the ideas of “not being in a subject” with “being always settled in itself” found in Porphyry (see above). “Not being in a subject” applies to sensible ousia on account of their independent existence, which is an imperfect sign of the greater independent existence of intelligible ousiai. Thus, this text does not serve as evidence to contradict my claim that, for the commentators, “not being in a subject” and “to be kath’ hauto” may be used equivalently of sensible ousiai. Let us cap off this discussion by reviewing the consensus view that appears to have developed among the commentators.

(CC3) “Not being in a subject,” or “to be kath’ hauto” (in the Subject Sense) is completive (i.e. constitutive) of ousia.

This consensus comes out of the fifth chapter of Aristotle’s Categories where he lays out several potential candidates for an account of what an ousia is, but he ultimately rejects “not being in a subject” as a candidate for the definition of ousia because it is not unique to ousia.

Observe, however, that this language of “property,” “concomitant,” and “completer” poses a problem for the late antique commentators. All of the commentators are well aware that the categories are called “beings” homonymously and, thus, the categories cannot be like species of a larger genus, namely, being. Yet, when the commentators are pressed to articulate just what “not being in a subject/ kath’ hauto” is in relation to substance, they all treat it as something akin to a differentia which
characterizes substance and distinguishes it from the other categories of accidents. We can see now that the late antique Greek commentators struggle to articulate how “not being in a subject” can divide being and distinguish the category of substance from the categories of the accidents without falling into a (quasi) genus and differentia scheme for thinking of the categories. It is certainly the case that all of these authors recognized that being is not a genus and is not univocally common to all of the categories. As a result, all of these authors recognized that “being not in subject” cannot be a differentia in any proper sense. I do not mean to suggest otherwise. What I do point out is that the terminology for describing what “not being in a subject” is in relation to substance runs into limitations. For, the Greek commentators do not offer us a way of thinking about how “not being in a subject” constitutes substance and divides it from other like things in a manner that is not like a differentia. To borrow an idea from the Neoplatonic scholar A. C. Lloyd, the necessity of “not being in a subject/ kath’ hauto” in relation to substance is different from the necessity of animality to human or rationality to human. “Not being in a subject/ kath’ hauto” does not fit Aristotle’s genus-species logic very neatly.52

5. Conclusion

Let us conclude this chapter with a review of the consensuses I have adumbrated here.

(CC1) Aristotle’s Categories provides a limited ontological analysis: the ousiai and accidents discussed in the Categories are the sensible, composite ousiai and

52 Lloyd says, rather, that differentiae scarcely fit, though I add that “not being in a subject/ kath’ hauto” suffers the same awkwardness in Aristotle’s logic; A. C. Lloyd, “Neoplatonic Logic and Aristotelian Logic – 1,” Phronesis 1 no. 1 (1955): 58-72, at 70: “The point is, again, that two-footedness is not a kind of animality, so that it is, rather, an extrinsic and therefore accidental determination of it. […] True, the doctrine of ‘proper’ differentiae, οίκείαις διαφορὰς χρῆσθαι, is a denial that they are accidents. But is it tenable within the genus-species logic? It leaves them extrinsic and yet intrinsic. The necessity of animality to man is that of the participation of the species in the genus: the necessity of two-footedness to man must therefore be another kind of necessity. But what kind? It can only be the nominal necessity of existential fact, derivable from the instances of universals, not from the universals themselves.”
accidents, not the intelligible, divine ousia or the simple principles of the sensible, composite ousiai.

(CC2) The categories categorize essences variously related to ousia.

(CC3) “Not being in a subject,” or “to be kath’ hauto” (in the Subject Sense) is a completive (i.e. constitutive) property that follows from the essence of an ousia. When we take these three consensuses together, we get the following picture of the categories: the categories are categories of the essences of sensible, composite things. Some essences are characterized by the completer and property of not being in a subject and, by contrast, others are characterized by to be in a subject. Now, since “not being in a subject” is a completer and property of ousia, but not the very essence or definition of ousia, we can already begin to see the structure of something added to (or following from, completing, etc.) essence in the late antique commentators’ reading of the categories. “Not being in a subject” is something that follows from and completes the essence of a thing in the category of ousia. Moreover, “not being in a subject” is an essential feature of being an ousia such that “not being in a subject” distinguishes ousiai from accidents. Accordingly, it is an essential feature about accidents that they are in subjects. And, of course, this claim presupposes that accidents have essences and thus can have essential features.

Thus, essence is something common to all of the categories, but not synonymously so—both ousiai and accidents have essences (i.e. they are determinate, intelligible patterns), but their essences have different properties and completers by virtue of which they are distinguished. Thus, when we think about what the categories are, we must think about both the fact that they categorize essences and that they do so by means
of the properties and completers which follow upon those essences. Here is another, important sense in which the categories categorize composite essences: the essences categorized in the categories have properties and completers that follow from their essences.

In the next chapter, we will see these consensuses in the thought of Avicenna, for whom to read and understand the categories in this way was part of the accepted tradition of falsafa. The first and third consensuses will be found explicitly in Avicenna’s thinking about the categories and about how the First relates to the categories. The second consensus will be found explicitly in Avicenna’s commentary on the Categories. As I shall argue in the next chapter, the structure and nature of the categories that we have found throughout the commentary tradition will be second-nature to Avicenna, and Avicenna discovers the real distinction between essence and existence by reflecting on this structure.
Chapter IV: Avicenna and the (Quasi) Definition of Substance: The Discovery of the Real Distinction between Essence and Existence in the Categories

1. Preliminaries

In the previous chapter I outlined several important consensuses in the commentary tradition on Aristotle’s *Categories*. I argued that throughout the commentary tradition we could discern three important theses:

(CC1) The categories are a limited ontological analysis concerning only sensible and composite being.

(CC2) The categories are categories of essences or natures.

(CC3) “Being not in a subject/kath’ hauto” is like a property, concomitant, and completer of *ousia*, which follows from the essence of the *ousia*.

At the end of the last chapter, I promised to show that these three theses play an important role in contributing to Avicenna’s discovery of the real distinction between essence and existence. In this chapter, I intend to make good on that promise.

At the same time, some preliminary points need to be made before we turn to the texts of the Persian polymath. The first point regards vocabulary. In the previous chapters it was appropriate to retain a set of philosophical terminology in Greek (e.g. “*ousia,*” “*kath’ hauto,*” “*en hypokeimenō,*” etc.). In turning to the Arabic and Latin philosophical worlds, however, I replace the Greek with a translation where the primary language is not indispensable to understanding the argument or the text. Thus, for Aristotle’s and the commentators’ “being *kath’ hauto,*” I use the phrase “being through itself,” as it captures what is being expressed by the Arabic “*wujūd/mawjūd bi-dhati-hi/bi-nafsi-hi,*” and by the Latin “*esselens per se.*” Similarly, unless otherwise noted, I will treat “being through itself” and “being not in a subject” as semantically equivalent. Despite some possible
objections to using “substance” as a translation for “ousia.” I will be using it for the Arabic “jawhar” and, of course, the Latin “substantia.”

Second, as in previous chapters, I maintain the convention of noting that we are discussing a “(quasi) definition” of substance and accidents in the following chapters. This locution reminds my reader that for all of the authors we have discussed, substance, as the most general category, cannot be defined by anything more general. Thus, according to the standard Aristotelian genus-species method of definition, there is no more universal genus under which substance falls. Thus, I will be scrupulous in adding “(quasi)” when I discuss the definition of substance to acknowledge the fact that what we are giving is no technical definition, but instead a sort of description, as Ammonius says.

As in the case of previous authors, my primary focus in Avicenna is on the phrase “being through itself/not in a subject” as it relates to substance. I do not offer a full account of how Avicenna is influenced by the late antique commentary tradition in general, given the availability and the quality of current accounts. Because our discussion focuses on “being through itself/not in a subject” and its relationship to substance and the category of substance, the next section (Section 2) takes up the texts of Avicenna where such topics will be discussed. Our first concern is Avicenna’s broad view of the categories and the general structure that he attributes to each. Then, we direct our attention directly at the issue of how to define substance and what constitutes being in a category. Section 3 shows that Avicenna’s positions are in line with the commentary tradition, and it summarizes his argumentation regarding the

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1 See Owens, The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics, 138-151.
essence-existence distinction. In Section 4, I show that Avicenna must hold a real or extramental distinction, which I present as his “Categories Argument.” Section 5 addresses Averroes’s most famous criticism of Avicenna’s essence-existence distinction. I argue that, given what we have learned from Avicenna’s texts on the categories, substance, essence, and existence, Averroes’s objection fails to refute Avicenna’s position.

2. Avicenna and “Being not in a Subject” as a (Quasi) Definition of Substance

*Being per se Is Divided according to Substance and Accident.* For the most part, our discussion of the (quasi) definition of substance will concern the phrase “being not in a subject” since Avicenna prefers it to “being through itself.” Before turning to the significance of that phrase, however, let us pause for a moment on Avicenna’s use of the phrase “being through itself.” We find this phrase early on in the *Kitāb al-Shifā’: Ilāhīyyāt* 2.1. I draw this text to our attention in order to remind you that, as we saw in the previous two chapters, because of the way that Aristotle divided the senses of being first into “*kata sumbebēkos* being” and “*kath’ hauto* being,” and included within *kath’ hauto* being all of the categories, it makes sense to think of all of the categories, including those of accidents, as comprising essences. This is how Avicenna understands the categories in his own work.

[F1: Avicenna, *Kitāb al-Shifā’: Ilāhīyyāt* 2.1 (57)]

فكول : إن الوجود للشيء قد يكون بالذات

We say: the being of a thing is [1] *per se*—

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3 It is well established that for Avicenna, the categories are a metaphysical and not a mere logical doctrine; see Bertolacci, “The ‘Ontologization’ of Logic: Metaphysical Themes in Avicenna’s Reworking of the Organon,” in *Methods and Methodologies: Aristotelian Logic East and West, 500-1500*, ed. Margaret Cameron and John Marenbon (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 27-51, at 37.

e.g. the being of a human *qua* human—or

[2] accidental—e.g. the being of Zayd *qua* white. And the things that are accidental are unlimited. But now let us leave behind this [topic] and take up [the topic of] being (mawjudi) and the being (wujūd) that is through itself. Now, the most primary division of beings through themselves is substance. For, being [through itself is divided] into two divisions: the first of the two is [a] a being (mawjud) in another thing—and that other is a thing having achieved subsistence and species in itself—

[b] with respect to a being (wujūd) [that is] not like the being of a part of it [the other],

[c] without allowing its separation from the thing. And this is a being (mawjud) in a subject. The second [division of being] is a being (mawjud) without its inhering in one of the things of its description [namely,

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5 “Being” for Avicenna, as for Aristotle, is said in many senses. This chapter will clarify “being” in the sense of essence versus “being in act.” Avicenna’s vocabulary rarely indicates what sense he intends. Normally, I translate “mawjud” as “being” or “a being.” But where clarity requires it, I will sometimes translate it as “an existent” to indicate that the intended sense is “a being in act.” Similarly, I translate wujūd as “being” except where clarity requires “existence” to indicate “being in act.” Translations of Avicenna routinely use “existent” and “existence.” But were these translations used exclusively, it would be difficult to disclose Avicenna’s thought on the topics of this chapter.
another subject], such that it is not in a subject at all. This is substance.

In this text, Avicenna divides being through itself into (1) the beings which are in things not as parts (accidents) and (2) those which are not in things at all (substances). This passage bears a resemblance to Aristotle’s *Meta. Δ.7* in that both accidents and substances are grouped together as beings through themselves (*al-mawjūdāt bi-l-dhāt*).

As I have argued, the result for Aristotle and the commentary tradition is that the categories categorize things having essences—i.e. they are discrete, intelligible patterns in nature. And we find precisely this way of thinking in Avicenna who writes in his commentary on the *Categories* that “the categories are categories of essences” (*wa al-maqūlāt hiya maqūlāt dhawāt*). ⁶ This is the most explicit expression of the view that I have defended from Chapter 2 onward.

Now, “being not in a subject” is used in this text to distinguish substances from accidents. Thus, on my reading, both substances and accidents have in common that they are things having essences, but they are distinguished by virtue of being either in a subject or not in a subject. If we think of (quasi) defining substance and accident by way of an Aristotelian genus-difference structure, then we can see here in Avicenna’s thinking that the correct definition of the genus of substance will have as its common, (quasi) genus term: “a thing that is the possessor of a determinate essence”; and as its (quasi) differentia term: “being not in a subject.”

Avicenna’s presentation of the categories as a division of being is highly suggestive of Aristotle’s *Meta. Δ.7* where a sense of “being” is common to all of the

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categories. This sense must be “being through itself” in the Essence Sense; for “being through itself” in the Subject Sense, in both Aristotle and Avicenna here, distinguishes the category of substance from the categories of the accidents.

“Being Not in a Subject” Is not the Definition of Substance. In other texts, Avicenna is doing something quite different from al-Māriyya, and Said Zayid (Cairo: al-
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er texts discussed below indicate that there is a real distinction in the categories that requires a


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Recall that in Chapter II we found in Aristotle two different senses of the phrase “being kath’ hauto”: (1) as it signifies a discrete, intelligible pattern in nature and includes all of the ten categories (the Essence Sense); and (2) as it signifies a substance that is not in need of a subject in order to be (the Subject Sense. For “essence” as a sense of “being” in Avicenna, see Amos Bertolacci, “The Distinction of Essence and Existence in Avicenna’s Metaphysics: The Text and Its Context,” in Islamic Philosophy, Science, Culture, and Religion: Studies in Honor of Dimitri Gutas, ed. Felicitas Opwis and David Reisman (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2012), 257-288, at 267-269. Bertolacci ascribes Avicenna’s treatment of essence as a sense of “being” to his familiarity with the philosophical traditions in Greek and Arabic, specifically, with Aristotle’s Meta. Γ.2, together with al-Kindī and Ibn Adī. I would add that Meta. Δ.7 is a clear source, and that Avicenna may have learned to prioritize Meta. Δ.7 as a global text from al-Fārābī. For Al-Fārābī on “essence” as a sense of “being,” see al-Fārābī, Kitāb al-Hurūf, ed. Muhsin Mahdi (Beirut: Dar al-Mashreq, 1969), 115-117; and Stephen Menn, “Al-Fārābī’s Kitāb al-Hurūf and His Analysis of the Senses of Being,” Arabic Sciences and Philosophy 18, no. 1 [March 2008]: 59-77. In his Kitāb al-Hurūf, al-Fārābī outlines three senses of being: “being” as said of the particular (al-mushār ‘ilay-hī) things in the categories, “being” as essence or whatness, and “being” as truth. As al-Fārābī discusses these different senses of being, he ultimately ends up speaking of only two senses of “being”: “being” as “essence” and “being” as “truth.” It could very well be the case that Avicenna’s “thing” and “being” in Sh. II. 1.5 are to be understood as the same as al-Fārābī’s two senses of being, with “thing” signifying “essence” and “being” signifying “truth.” This is how Stephen Menn reads Avicenna’s Shīfā’: Ilāhīyyāt 1.5; Stephen Menn, “Avicenna’s Metaphysics,” in Interpreting Avicenna: Critical Essays, ed. Peter Adamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 143-169, at 153. This reading would require us to understand Avicenna’s terms “muthabbat” and “muḥaṣal” in more a more eridical than existential sense—e.g. “muthabbat” emphasizes not that a thing is established among existing things, but rather that it is affirmed to be. Bertolacci, on the other hand, gives a more existential reading of Sh. II. 1.5 with the result that Avicenna is doing something quite different from al-Fārābī. Rather than focus on Sh. II. 1.5 to settle this issue, other texts discussed below indicate that there is a real distinction in the categories that requires a sense of wujūd as “actuality” that is not reducible to either essence or veridicality.

An objector might say: “surely if you have refrained from assigning to the First the name ‘substance,’ you do not pretend to refrain from assigning to him its meaning. This is because [he is a] being (mawjud) not in a subject, and this meaning is the substance with which you put him in a genus classifying him.”

In this text, Avicenna answers a possible objector who is concerned that Avicenna is trying to have his cake and eat it too. According to Avicenna, the First is a being not in a subject, yet Avicenna does not call the First a substance. But, since “being not in a subject” is what it is to be a substance, then it must follow that the First is a substance. To this, Avicenna replies that “being not in a subject” is not how he has (quasi) defined substance.

We answer: this is not the meaning of substance which is his [the First’s] genus. Rather, that meaning [which we propose] is a thing that is the possessor of a determinate whatness [i.e. essence] whose being (wujūd) is not in a subject, like body or soul. And the indication that if one does not mean by “substance” this [namely, “a thing having a determinate whatness whose
being is not in a subject”), then it is not a

genus at all, is that what is signified by the

utterance “being” (mawjūd) does not

require its generic-ness. The negation

which adheres to it [i.e. “not being in a

subject”] adds to it with respect to being

only a separateness relation. And neither is

there in this meaning an established thing

acquired beyond being (wujūd), nor is it the

meaning for a thing in itself, but rather it is

only relative. Thus, the only affirmative

meaning in [the phrase] “a being not in a

subject” that allows that it belongs to the

possessor, is “a being”; and beyond it, the

negative, added content is external to the

identity which belongs to the thing. And,

this meaning, if it is taken in this way, is

not a genus.

Now concerning this point, namely, that “being not in a subject” is not the definition of

substance, there is a subtlety to which we must attend. Avicenna says that “being not in a

subject” is not the definition of the genus of substance. Although it is not clear what this

specification amounts to from Avicenna’s explanation here, it is very likely that

Avicenna is making room for calling the First a substance without including the First
within the genus (or category) of substance. In the Metaphysics of the Shīfāʾ 8.7, for example, Avicenna recognizes that if one calls the First a substance, one must mean by this only that the First is not in a subject. This does not seem to be a problem. What is a problem, however, is inferring that because “being not in a subject” is said of the First, humans, and horses, the First must be like a human or a horse, and the First must share “being not in a subject” in common with sensible substances.

Given this clarification, let us return to the doctrine Avicenna presents in T3[b]. Avicenna tells us that “being not in a subject” cannot be the definition of the “genus” (read “category”) of substance. Avicenna’s reasoning here is obscure, but he appears to be worried about a particular kind of misunderstanding concerning “a being not in a subject.” Avicenna treats the phrase “a being not in a subject” as though it is being used as an Aristotelian genus-difference definition such that “a being” (mawjud) is the genus term of the definition and “not in a subject” would be the difference term. This is clear when Avicenna tells us that the problem with the phrase “a being not in a subject” as a definition of substance is that “a being” is not a genus (or, literally, “a being does not require generic-ness”). The problem with “not in a subject,” Avicenna tells us, is that it is a negative and relative term that does not tell us what a substance is, but rather what a substance is not (namely, an accident). Thus, we cannot use “a being not in a subject” as a (quasi) definition for the genus of substance.

What is Avicenna’s solution? Avicenna remarks that the (quasi) definition of the genus of substance is “a thing that is the possessor of a determinate essence whose being is not in a subject.” At first glance, it is not clear precisely what improvement is achieved by this definition. Avicenna has dropped the phrase “a being (mawjud) not in a subject,”

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10 Avicenna, Kitāb al-Shīfāʾ: Ilāhīyāt 8.7 (367, ll. 16-17).
but he keeps “being (wujūd)” and—moves it into the (quasi) differentia position. In the (quasi) genus position, Avicenna has placed “a thing that is the possessor of a determinate essence.” Avicenna said that “a being” is not a genus, but it is not clear that “a thing having a determinate essence” is any better. After all, “thing” for Avicenna means “essence,” and if “a being” cannot be a genus because it is not said univocally, then “thing having a determinate essence” is apparently going to suffer the same fate. 11

We can make sense of Avicenna’s discussion when we observe that Avicenna is doing two things here: (1) he is explaining what it takes to be a genus at all; and (2) he is not getting rid of the phrase “being (wujūd) not in a subject” because it does serve an important role in distinguishing the kinds of essences that fall in the category of substance from the essences that fall in the accidental categories. For this reason, although it is not the (quasi) definition of substance, it is a part of the (quasi) definition. “Being not in a subject,” as we saw above in [T1], is only the (quasi) difference that distinguishes substances from accidents. “A being not in a subject” does not capture the full sense of what it is to be a substance, but only what it is to be a substance rather than an accident.

To see (1), we need to look at Avicenna’s commentary on the Isagōgē and recall some of the important teachings there about genera. Now, Porphyry famously suggests that being cannot be the genus of which the ten categories are species because “being” (to on) is said equivocally of the ten categories. 12 For, Porphyry defines a genus in the Isagōgē as a predicate which is said of many species univocally. In order for “being” to be a genus, it would have to be said univocally, and the ten categories would have to be

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11 Recall that according to Aristotle, Meta. Z.4, 1030a17-26, “tī estī,” or “essence,” is not said of substances and accidents univocally.
12 Porphyry, Isagōgē 6, ll. 5-11.
species of being.

In his commentary on the *Isagôgê*, Avicenna notes the same requirement for genera, namely, that in order to be considered a genus by the logician, a genus must have a single intelligible nature which is related to many things participating in it.\(^\text{13}\)

Unfortunately, in this commentary, a discussion of being as a genus is missing. Still, Avicenna’s point is enough to help us in our purposes. He does not here intend to suggest that essence is a common genus for all of the categories. Rather, he suggests that since the categories are genera, they must be categories of many individuals within the genus which have some essence in common. Section [T2c] confirms this reading:

\[^\text{T2c}\] You also already learned in the Logic that if we say, “every A,” for example, we mean “everything characterized by A,” even if it has an essence other than A-ness.

Thus, in the definition of substance, the meaning of “the being (mawjud) not in a subject” is “the thing called ‘a being not in a subject,’” on account of the fact that “a being not in a subject” is predicated of it, though it is a whatness in itself, e.g. a human, a stone, or a tree. This is the way one must conceive of substance so as to be a genus.

According to Avicenna in [c], we have learned in the Logic (presumably the Qiyās section of the Mantiq of the Shifā')\textsuperscript{14} that, in a universal description like “every A,” one must understand the proposition to signify “every B that is A.” Thus, to say “every substance is a being not in a subject,” one must understand the proposition to signify “every substance is a thing that is a being not in a subject,” thereby rendering the description as a predication. Now, it is important to think of substance in this way, Avicenna tells us, so as to be a genus. For, to be in the category of substance, not only must the description “being not in a subject” apply to you and me, but also you and I must be some determinate thing to which the description “being not in a subject” applies. For, things in the category of substance are determinate sorts of things like humans, dogs, cats, etc. This may seem like a pedantic point to make, but it is an important one: for, a genus brings together the many under one intelligibility. Thus, when we are talking about the genus of substance, we must emphasize not only the intelligibility that unites the many into one, but also the distinctness of the many being united. Thus, a substance is not just that which is a being not in a subject, but it is “a thing that is the possessor of a determine essence whose being is not in a subject.” This formulation makes clear and explicit the internal structure of the category as a genus: it makes explicit both the diversity and determinateness of the individual sorts in the category, and the intelligibility that unites them.

To see why this point is important for the general argument that Avicenna is making, it is helpful to understand the effect of this semantic analysis of the proposition

“every A” that Avicenna offers. Avicenna says in [T2c] that we should analyze propositions of the form “every A” to read “every B that is characterized by A” or “Every B that is A.” What is the significance of this analysis? Avicenna seems eager to reject the following argument:

P1 Substance belongs to every being not in a subject

P2 Being not in a subject belongs to the First.

C1 Substance belongs to the First.

If we left the argument there, it would be difficult to avoid the conclusion. But, if we correct the phrase “being not in a subject” in P1 as Avicenna has directed, then we get a different argument:

P1 Substance belongs to everything possessing a determinate essence for which to be is to be not in a subject.

P2 Being a thing possessing a determinate essence for whom to be is not to be in a subject belongs to the First.

C1 Substance belongs to the First.

When we look at the argument in this way, it is clear that Avicenna would find fault with P2 because it suggests that the First is a composite thing of whose essence “being not in a subject.” As Avicenna makes clear in the Metaphysics of the Shifā’ 8.4, there is no other predication that can be added to the essence of the First. For, the essence of the First is none other than Necessary Being and any addition to Necessary Being requires that such a unity of essence and addition creates a composite and contingent being (since the being of the First would depend on many parts).

The major points to retain from segment [T2c], in my view, are the following:
first of all, we have clearly on display Avicenna’s view that the categories are categories of things having essences. It is because these things have determinate essences that they are able to comprise a many which shares in one and the same intelligible. Second, “being not in a subject” is not the definition of substance, but rather only a part of the definition of substance. For, “being not in a subject” tells us only how essences in the category of substance differ from essences in the categories of the accidents. Instead, “being not in a subject” is something predicated of the essence of the thing in the category.

Despite our exegesis, there is yet some mystery over the above text: what should we make of the fact that Avicenna seems to draw a distinction between the essence of a thing in a category and the predicate “being not in a subject?” Moreover, what are we to make of Avicenna’s concluding paragraph, as follows?

[T2d] The proof that between these two things [namely, the definition of substance which is a genus and the definition which is not] there is a difference, and that one of the two is a genus but not the other, is that you would say of some individual person whose existence is unknown that he is undoubtedly something whose being (wujūd) is not in a subject, and you would not say that he is undoubtedly a being [or existent (mawjud)] now in a subject.
What does the fact that one would say of an unknown substance that it is a being not in a subject, but not an actual, here-and-now being not in a subject have to do with the definition of substance? We can, fortunately, address both of these questions at the same time by looking at another set of texts.

“The Being” in “Being not in a Subject” Cannot Signify “Being in Act.” Avicenna concludes [T3] above by saying [T3d] that the description “being not in a subject” is predicated of all substances—even the substances about whose existence one is ignorant. Avicenna does not explain how this relates to his previous reasoning about the (quasi) definition of substance. Fortunately, Avicenna explains this line of reasoning in detail elsewhere.

[T4: Avicenna, al-Ishārāt wa al-Tanbīhāt: Ilāhīyāt ch. 25 (51-52)]

ربما ظُنَّ أنَّ معنى الموجود لا في الموضوع يعم الأوَّل وغيره عموم الجنس، فيقع تحت جنس الجوهر. وهذا خطأ؛ فإنَّ الموجود لا في موضوع الذي هو كالرسم للجوهر ليس معنى به الموجود بالفعل بوجوداً لا في موضوع، حتى يكون من عرف أنَّ زيداً هو في نفسه جوهر، عرف منه أنه موجود بالفعل، أصلاً؛ فضلا عن

[T4a] Perhaps one thinks that the meaning “the being (mawjud) not in a subject” extends to the First and to everything else as a genus, so that he [the First] falls into the genus of substance. But this is an error: for, by “the being not in a subject,” which is like a description of substance, is not meant a being in an act as to being (wujūd) not in a subject, such that one knowing that Zayd is in himself a substance knows that

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he [Zayd] is a being in act—absolutely not—or, moreover, [such that one knows] about the status of that being (wujūd). But this is the meaning that, as if it were a description, applies to substance, and in which a species of substance participates (according to [its] potency), as one participates in a genus: it is a whatness and a reality, but one whose being is not in a subject. And this description pertains to [e.g.] Zayd and Amr according to their essence, not by a cause. And concerning the being (mawjud) in act which is a part of [the phrase] “a being in act in a subject,” this is had by virtue of a cause which is a part of its being as ‘a being in act not in a subject,’ and thus it [namely, being in act not in a subject] belongs to it by a cause. But then what is the state of the composite from this and the additional meaning?

Here we see Avicenna recognize and caution against a possible misunderstanding: when we say that a substance is “a being not in a subject” and that “being not in a subject” is a necessary, essential fact about substances that belongs necessarily to their essence, it
should not be thought that “being” here means “being in actuality” such that by virtue of knowing that $x$ is a substance, one also knows that $x$ is an actually existing substance. Avicenna is clearly aware of the possibility for misunderstanding when the term “being” is found in the (quasi) definition of the genus of substance. Since “being” is a homonymous term, in order for it to be of any use in the (quasi) definition of the category of substance, we have to know what we mean by calling the category of substance a category of being. As Avicenna makes clear here and in [T3d], we do not mean by “beings” “beings in act” or “actual beings.”

Avicenna recognizes explicitly that taking “being” in the (quasi) definition of substance as “being in act” leads one to infer that something actually exists from the fact that it is a substance, but he does not here fully spell out the reasoning behind why this would be problematic. After all, is it not the case that the substantial form is the principle of act for a thing? Is it so wrong to assume that if $x$ is a substance, then $x$ is an actual thing? There are several reasons that could be motivating Avicenna here: first of all, if you can infer that $x$ is an actual existent from the fact that $x$ is a substance, then you must say that the category of substance comprises only beings in actuality or actual beings. If this is the case, then the category of substance would not and cannot include potential substances—which directly contradicts the words of Aristotle.\textsuperscript{16} Avicenna also mentions that “being” in the sense of “actuality” is something that pertains to substances not by virtue of themselves, but by virtue of a cause, whereas “being not in a subject” is said of a substance by virtue of itself and not by virtue of a cause. The important difference here is

\textsuperscript{16} Aristotle, \textit{Metaphysics} Δ.7 1017b1-9: ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν οὐσιῶν: καὶ γὰρ Ἐρμῆν ἐν τῷ λίθῳ φαμέν εἶναι, καὶ τὸ ἡμίσι τῆς γραμμῆς, καὶ σῖτον τὸν μὴπο ἁδρόν. πότε δὲ δυνατὸν καὶ πότε οὔπω, ἐν ἄλλοις διοριστέον. “[I]t is similar in the case of substance: for, we also say that Hermes is in the stone; that the half of the line [is in the line]; and that that which is not yet ripe is corn. But when [a thing] is potential and [when it is] not yet, we must distinguish in other [treatments].”
that “being not in a subject” in the sense of “actually being not in a subject” is something added to the essence and predicated of it as something external. So, in one sense, “being not in a subject” is a constitutional property of substance and, in another sense, “being in act not in a subject” is not a constitutional property of substance. In [T4b], Avicenna distinguishes between a constitutional property and a concomitant, clearly indicating that “actually being not in a subject” is a concomitant rather than a constitutional property.

Avicenna explains here that “being” cannot be a genus for a thing because it is not receptive of “the addition of a negative meaning.” Avicenna apparently has in mind the way that the genus of substance is a genus among genera (i.e. a category among
categories): because it is distinguished from the other genera as that whose being is not in a subject. Unlike the genus of substance, which in some way is differentiated by a negative meaning, being cannot be differentiated by a negative meaning because, whatever differentia one attempts to apply to the genus of being will also be a being. Otherwise, the differentia itself is a non-being and, thus, is no differentia. It is because being cannot be a genus that being cannot also be a constitutional property of a thing—e.g. “being in act” is not part of what it is to be human or horse. So, Avicenna calls “being in act,” not a “constitutional property,” but rather one of the “concomitants” (lawâzîm) of substance.

We find both this distinction between constitutional property and concomitant as well as Avicenna’s argument regarding “being in act” in the categories in Avicenna’s commentary on the *Categories*.

[T5: Avicenna, *Kitâb al-Shifâ’: al-Maqûlât* 3.1 (92-93)]\(^{17}\)

Consider some person like Zayd when he is absent from you; or a species of substance with the ability of lapsing from the world (if in your view its lapsing is possible); or a species whose existence (wujûd) one doubts: then you know that its whatness, when it is an existent among individuals, is not in a subject. And, you know that this notion [that is, not being in a subject] is the

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primary constitution of its essence, since you know that it is a substance. But you do not know whether it is “a being not in a subject” among individuals in actuality — rather, perhaps in your view it [will be] nonexistent afterwards. Indeed, being in act (wujūd bi-fi‘l) in an individual not in a subject is not a constitution for the whatness of Zayd or for a thing that is a substance. Rather, it is an item that attends as a concomitant of the being (mawjud), which is not true for the whatness of things, as you have learned.

We find here the very same disambiguation of the sense of “being” that pertains to a substance by virtue of itself as in [T4]. Here, Avicenna argues that by virtue of knowing that some $x$ is a substance, one also knows that it pertains to the essence of $x$ not to be in a subject. However, it does not follow from this that one knows that $x$ actually exists.

Avicenna tells us here that “being not in a subject” is the primary constitution (muqawwim al-‘awul) of the substance.

The Distinction of Being and Essence in the Categories. We are beginning to see more clearly why the First cannot be in the category of substance and, more generally, we are beginning to see what it takes to be in a category at all. Avicenna sums up this argument perhaps most clearly in his Persian encyclopedia, the Dānīsh Nāma-i ‘alāi.
There, Avicenna argues that the Necessary Being is not in any category.

[T6: Avicenna, Metaphysics of the Dānish Nāma-i ʿalāi, ch. 25 (147-148)]

Substance is that which, when its reality (ḥaqīqat) has existence (wojūd), the whatness consists in the fact that its existence is not in a subject—[which does] not [mean] that it [already] has a realized (ḥāṣel) existence (wojūd) not in a subject. Accordingly, you have no doubt that the body is a substance, but you can ask whether such a body that is a substance is an existent (mawjūd), or not, so that you may ask whether or not its existence (wojūd) is in a subject. So, substance is that which has a whatness (māhiyyatī): such as corporeity, spirituality [namely, the soul’s whatness], humanity, and horseness. This whatness has this characteristic: as long as its thatness (ʿinniyyat) [or being] is not found in a subject, you cannot know whether it has thatness or not. Everything that is so has a whatness other than thatness [or being]. Thus, everything whose whatness is none other than its thatness is not a substance. […] The Necessary in Being is not a substance and, in brief, does not take part in any of the categories because the being (wojūd) of all of the categories is accidental and adjoined to the whatness, being outside of the whatness, [whereas] the being (wojūd) of the Necessary in Being is his very whatness.

Here we have perhaps the most explicit formulation as to why the First cannot be in any of the categories: for, to be in a category requires that there be diversity between one’s essence and one’s being or existence. Avicenna’s reasoning for making this claim seems

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to be connected with the argument we saw in [T5] and [T6] above: namely, that “being” in the sense of “actually existing here and now” does not pertain to substance in virtue of itself, and the primary constitution “being not in a subject,” which applies essentially to substance, does not entail that there actually exists here and now a substance not in a subject.

Avicenna says in [T6] that a diversity between essence and being or existence is necessary to be in the categories: “Everything whose whatness is none other than its being is not substance…the being (wujūd) of all of the categories is accidental and adjoined to the whatness.” For, as we have seen, the essences that the categories categorize are those essences which have in themselves a certain constitutive property (that is, either to be in a subject or to be not in a subject), which is realized for them only when they exist. Although it is certainly the case that “being not in a subject” is true of every substance merely in virtue of being a substance, it does not follow that this “being not in a subject” is realized (i.e., is a being in act not in a subject) for the substance by virtue of itself. Avicenna here introduces a new dimension to the composition we have found thus far in the categories. Not only are the categories composed of essence and constitutive property (either being in a subject or not being in a subject), but they are also composed of the essence and the actual realization of the constitutive property for that essence. Thus, there is a sort of composition of the essence of the thing and that which is beyond the essence of the thing, namely, its being or existence by which it is realized in the world, its being in act.

When looked at in this light, it is most certain that no such composition can exist in the First. For, were the First’s essence only realized or actualized when it is in a
subject, then the First would rely on some other thing for its being and, whatever this would be, it would have to coexist with the First. Thus, the First would not truly be first. In short, the First cannot have any extramental composition, and so it cannot be a substance since substance involves extramental composition: essence plus its realization as an existent.

3. Being in the Categories: Initial Conclusions

Avicenna’s Continuity with the Commentary Tradition. We should pause at this point to appreciate that we have by now seen in Avicenna all three of the commentator consensuses found in the Chapter 3. Let us recall:

(CC1) Aristotle’s Categories provides a limited ontological analysis: the ousiai and accidents discussed in the Categories are the sensible, composite ousiai and accidents, not the intelligible, divine ousia, or the simple principles of the sensible, composite ousiai.

CC1 is the primary motivation behind the doctrine that Avicenna is teaching regarding whether the First is a substance. As I showed above, Avicenna has no real qualms about calling the First a substance in the sense that the First is a being not in a subject. But, as Avicenna repeatedly clarifies, the problem arises from calling the First a substance among other substances—i.e., saying that the First is in the categories. We see this broad concern in [T6]: Avicenna concludes his argument by noting that the First is not only not in the category of substance, but also not in any of the categories. For, the First is beyond the very categorization scheme constituted by the categories. The very notion of a category requires a composition between the essence by virtue of which a thing is in the category and its constitutional property, which is realized for the essence when the
essence exists. This necessary composition of essence and realized constitutive property is why the First, who is entirely simple, cannot be in a category. So, in the case of the First, “being not in a subject” signifies only a negation, whereas in the case of the categories, it signifies a constitutional property (see [T5] above), or something that attaches to the essence (see [T4] above). Thus, Avicenna’s point is this: the First is not in the genus of substance because to be in the genus of substance requires that one have an essence to which “being not in a subject” belongs as something additional and outside of, or not identical with, the essence. Thus, to be in a category necessitates the composition of essence with “being not in a subject” as something like a property that constitutes the essence and that is realized for the essence only when the substance actually exists. This composition of essence and actual existence cannot pertain to the First. So, the reason categorial classification does not apply to the First is that the First is simple rather than composite, and this fits our CC1. I would add that the reason the First is not in a category is not because the categories are categories of essences and the First has no essence. The claim that the First has no essence in Avicenna has been the subject of some dispute in the literature.19 [T4] clearly implies that Avicenna’s First does have an essence—but that

19 See John Rosheger, “Is God a ‘What’? Avicenna, William of Auvergne, and Aquinas on the Divine Essence,” in Medieval Philosophy and the Classical Tradition: In Islam, Judaism and Christianity, ed. John Inglis (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2002), 233-249, at 245, n. 25. Rosheger remarks that the consensus in the literature gravitates toward the First’s having an essence that is nothing other than being. Armand Maurer, in his translation of Aquinas’s De ente et essentiae, notes that when Thomas mentions that some philosophers deny that God has an essence, he has in mind Avicenna and William of Auvergne; Thomas Aquinas, On Being and Essence trans. Armand Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1968), 60 fn. 2. E.M. Macierowski has a helpful survey of texts in support of the claim that the First’s essence is being; Edward M. Macierowski, “Does God Have a Quiddity According to Avicenna?” The Thomist 52, no. 1 (1988): 79–87. See also R. Acar, Talking about God and Talking about Creation. Avicenna’s and Thomas Aquinas’ Positions (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 81-3. Bertolacci, in a recent study, observes that the text of Avicenna’s Kitāb al-Shīfāʾ 8.4 supports both the broad claim that the First has no essence and the more nuanced claim that the First has no essence other than existence. See Amos Bertolacci, “God’s Existence and Essence: The Liber de causis and the School Discussions in the Metaphysics of Avicenna,” in Reading Proclus and the Book of Causes ed. Dragos Calma, vol. 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 254-258.
its essence is nothing other than its necessary being. For, as Avicenna says, necessary being plays the role for the First that essence plays for other things. Moreover, this implication coheres with Avicenna’s claim in [T4] that “being not in a subject” cannot be predicated of the First’s essence like an addition: necessary being (as an essence) is totalizing and simple—it admits of no further additions as do other essences (e.g. the essence “humanity”).

The second consensus is also found in Avicenna’s thought:

(CC2) The categories categorize essences variously related to ousia.

We find CC2 in Avicenna’s own formulation of “being bi-dhati-hi” in [T1], as well as in [T2] where we are told that “being” (mawjud) is common to the categories. Furthermore, as I have argued, we can take “being” (mawjud) in the sense of “essence” here given that “a thing having an essence” serves as a (quasi) genus term in the definition of substance for Avicenna in [T3]-[T6]. As for the specification “variously related to ousia” that forms part of this consensus, it is clear from the very definition of substance and accidents that they are related to substance in various ways. For, substances simply are their own subjects, whereas accidents are in subjects which are substances. But we do find other texts where this point is made more explicitly. Avicenna, Maqūlāt of the Shifā’ states:

[T7: Avicenna, Kitāb al-Shifā’: Maqūlāt 1.2 (10)]

فأما ما ليس على سبيل التواطؤ فإن جميعه قد يقال إنه باتفاق الاسم، وينقسم إلى أقسام ثلاثة: وذلك لأنه إذا أن يكون المعنى فيها واحدا في نفسه، وإن اختلف من جهة

Concerning that which is not [expressed] by way of univocity, it is may be said in general that it is [expressed] by coincidence of word [namely, by homonymy], and it is classified into three divisions. For, either
[1] the notion in them [the homonymous terms] is one in itself yet differs in another respect, or [2] it is not one but there is some resemblance between the two, or [3] it is not one and there is also no resemblance\(^{20}\) between the two. And [as for those for] which the notion in them is one but differs beyond that, an example is the notion “being” (\(wujūd\)): for, it [being] is one in many things, but it differs in them because \(mawjud\) is not in them according to one form in every way because \(mawjud\) belongs to some before and to others after. The being (\(wujūd\)) for substance is before the being (\(wujūd\)) for the rest which follow it [substance].

Avicenna here explains that “being” is not said univocally, but rather is said according to a notion that is one in itself but that nevertheless differs in certain respects. For, “being” is said of both substances and accidents but, we may say, according to priority and posteriority: substance is first of all called a being (\(mawjud\)) whereas accidents are beings because of and after substance. Avicenna says, it is worth noting, that both substances

\(^{20}\) I follow Bertolacci in translating this term as “resemblance,” though “analogy” might be appropriate as well; Bertolacci, “The ‘Ontologization’ of Logic,” 42. There is a great deal of dispute on how to translate these terms and whether, ultimately, Avicenna’s view of being is analogical, univocal, or equivocal. For a bibliography of the issue, see Daniel De Haan, “The Doctrine of the Analogy of Being in Avicenna’s Metaphysics of the Healing,” The Review of Metaphysics 69 no. 2 (2015): 261-286, at 267 fn. 19.
and accidents are called being according to the same notion (maʿana). Thus, there is one notion of “being” that pertains to substances and accidents, but it differs in respect of priority and posteriority.\(^{21}\) So although essence is common to all of the categories because the categories are precisely categories of essences, “essence” is not said univocally of the categories.

The third commentator consensus was as follows:

(CC3) “Being not in a subject,” or “being kathʾ hauto” (in the Subject Sense) is a completive (i.e. constitutive) property that pertains necessarily to ousia.

We saw CC3 clearly reflected in the texts of Avicenna above. In both [T4] and [T5] Avicenna says that “being not in a subject” is a property or constitution of substance. In other words, “being not in a subject” is something that constitutes the essence of a substance [T5]. Moreover, thanks to the research of Fedor Benevich, there is good reason to think that Avicenna strengthened the essential connection between the essence of a substance and its being not in a subject compared to the commentators. This is one of the ways that Avicenna distinguishes himself from certain contemporaries and from the commentary tradition in general. Recall that Porphyry and Plotinus held that one and the same thing might in some cases be a substance and in other cases an accident—e.g. the heat which is essential to fire and the heat which is an accident of the tea kettle.\(^{22}\) Recall also that Porphyry treated anything that contributed to the substance a thing (e.g. the differentia) as itself a substance.\(^{23}\) Benevich has recently argued that Avicenna, following Yahyā Ibn ‘Adī, targets these Porphyrian and Ammonian views, which were standard in


\(^{22}\) See Chapter III above, p. 95.

\(^{23}\) See Chapter III above, p. 94-95.
the Baghdad school of Aristotelianism.\textsuperscript{24} According to Avicenna, it is not possible for some $x$ to be a substance in one instance and an accident in another instance; for, it pertains to the very essence of a thing that it be either a substance or an accident. Indeed, the constitutive properties “being in a subject” and “being not in a subject” pertain necessarily to the essence. Thus, whenever there is an essence that is a substance, there is a thing that is not in a subject. Likewise, whenever there is an essence that is an accident, there is a thing that is in a subject. It is therefore impossible that being in a subject should ever pertain to the essence of a substance.

Avicenna thus strengthened the connection between “being not in a subject” and substance beyond just the “substantial quality” of Plotinus and Porphyry. In contrast, Avicenna aligns himself significantly, I conclude, with Simplicius’s view that “being not in a subject” is a constitutive property of the essence. It does not follow that Avicenna simply followed the Ammonian school in every respect. According to Avicenna, those who endorsed the Ammonian view made the mistake of confusing “substance” with “substantial,” with the result that, because heat is something that contributes to the substance of heat, heat must also be a substance. But, says Avicenna, it does not follow that something is a substance merely because it is a substantial property of fire.

Avicenna’s whole discussion of fire and heat suggests that he was well acquainted with Simplicius’s commentary on the \textit{Categories}. For, Avicenna’s word “\textit{muqawwim}” (constitutive) is a translation for the Greek “\textit{symplērōtikon}” in Avicenna’s \textit{Madkhal} of the \textit{Shifā‘}.\textsuperscript{25} Where Plotinus, Porphyry, and Simplicius called heat a \textit{symplērōtikon} of fire, Avicenna calls it a \textit{muqawwim}.

\textsuperscript{24} Fedor Benevich, “Fire and Heat: Yahyā B. ‘Adī and Avicenna on the Essentiality of Being Substance or Accident,” \textit{Arabic Sciences and Philosophy} 27, no. 2 (2017): 254-266.

\textsuperscript{25} See Avicenna, \textit{The Healing}, Logic: \textit{Isagoge}, 164.
Avicenna and the Essence-Existence Distinction. We may now see how Avicenna, considering the fact that the categories are categories of composite essences from which either “being in a subject” or “being not in a subject” follows, discovers, in effect, the distinction between essence and existence. For, the essences that the categories categorize are composite essences to which belong a certain constitutive property. For substances, it necessarily pertains to the essences in the category of substance to be not in a subject, and this entails that the substance is itself a subject. But to say that “being not in a subject” or “being itself a subject” is essential to substance is ambiguous. For, if one says that necessarily every substance is itself a subject, and by “is a subject” is intended “being a concrete, particular thing now existing and now serving as a subject to accidents,” then it would follow that it is necessarily the case that every substance is a particular thing now existing and now serving as a subject to accidents. If this is how one understands the necessary relationship between ‘being a substance’ and ‘not being in a subject’, then it would follow that necessarily every substance as such actually exists by virtue of itself. As it would turn out, every substance would be necessarily through itself, in which case every substance would be characterized by what, for Avicenna, principally characterizes the First: per se necessary being.

But, as Avicenna makes clear in [T4], “actually existing” is something that is said of substance not by virtue of itself, but instead by virtue of a cause. For, it is surely not the case that only actually existing substances can be called ‘substance’. After all, Aristotle himself suggests that not every substance is an actual being in his Meta. Δ.7 where he says that even the category of substance is divided by act and potency.26 Given the impossible consequences that all substances are in act and that every substance is as

26 See fn. 17 above.
necessary as the First, we must distinguish the sense in which “being not in a subject” is essential and constitutive of substance from the sense in which “being not in a subject” signifies that something is at present an actually existing subject. Avicenna makes such a distinction by arguing that the “being” in “being not in a subject” cannot signify actual being.

We can present the argument thus far as follows:

(1) “Being not in a subject” belongs to substance necessarily and essentially.

(1.1) For, “Being not in a subject” is a constitutional property of substance.

(1.2) Every constitutional property is belongs to its essence necessarily and essentially.

(2) If the “being” in “being not in a subject” signifies actual being, then “actually being not in a subject” would be said of substance necessarily and essentially.

(3) But, “actually being not in a subject” is not said necessarily and essentially of substance.

(3.1) For, if “actually being not in a subject” is said necessarily and essentially of substance, then every substance would actually exist and would be per se necessary just as is the First.

(3.2) But many substances do not exist and can cease to exist, and, as Avicenna argues, there can be only one per se Necessary Being.  

(4) The “being” in “being not in a subject” does not signify actual being.

(5) “Actually being not in a subject” is not a constitutional property of substance.

This conclusion at line (5) forces us to infer that actual being is something outside of, added to, and distinct from the essence of a substance. Given the catastrophic

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27 See, for example, Avicenna, Kitāb al-Shifā’ Ilāhīyāt 8.3 (342, ln. 1):“But we begin and we say: if we say [that something is] the first efficient principle—rather, the first principle absolutely—then it is necessary that it is one.”
consequences which might be inferred from misunderstanding the composition of essence and constitutional property “being not in a subject,” Avicenna offers an argument to prove that being in actuality cannot be a constitutional property of a substance. In other words, by correctly understanding the composition of essence and constitutional property, one may also correctly understand the composition of essence and being in actuality in the categories.

This same line of reasoning can now be seen to involve not only a mere conceptual distinction between “being as essence” in “being not in a subject,” but also an extramental distinction. After all, something outside substance, defined as ‘an essence for which being is not in a subject’, must make substances actually exist: something outside, or accidental and adjoined to, their essence \([T6]\). Quick reflection reveals why such an item cannot be in the category of accident: the definition of the accidents similarly does not contain ‘actually being or existing’ under their quasi differentia ‘being in a subject’. The substantial essence forms a “composite” (murakab—see \([T4]\)) with what is “additional”: that by which \(x\) actually exists is. This line of reasoning may be laid out in what I call Avicenna’s “Categories Argument” for the extramental distinction between being in act and essence, as follows:

1. “Actually being not in a subject” (\(wujūd bi-fi’l\)) does not belong to substance necessarily and essentially.

1.1 Otherwise, every substance would exist necessarily of itself just as

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\[28\] This line of argumentation illustrates Avicenna’s general strategy regarding the distinction between being and essence; see Bertolacci, “The Distinction between Essence and Existence,” 282: “[t]he distinction of essence and existence...is argued for by pointing at the extraneousness of existence in each of its possible manifestations (particular, universal, extra-mental or mental, potential or actual) with regard to ‘essence,’ ‘definition,’ and ‘quiddity’. It is important to notice that in this regard Avicenna does not say that essence is independent from existence tout court, but only from the given manifestations that this latter can assume.”
does the First.

(2) Substances that actually exist must have in them that whereby they actually exist (*wujūd bi-fi’l*), which cannot belong to any category as such.

(3) Therefore actually existing substances are composed of their essence and that whereby they actually exist (*wujūd bi-fi’l*).

4. Avicenna, Averroes, and the Extramental Distinction between Being and Essence

In the previous section, I outlined Avicenna’s view of the categories and how essence and existence relate to the categories. I have shown that essence, for Avicenna, is common to all of the categories (though not univocally so), and that essences in the categories are sorted into their proper category according as they either have the constitutional property “being in a subject” or “being not in a subject.” These constitutional properties pertain necessarily to the essence of the substance or accident, but this fact, as we have seen, does not entail that actual existence in or not in a subject follows necessarily from the essence of the substance or accident. This insight leads Avicenna, I have argued, to the discovery of the extramental distinction between being and essence in the categories. The sense of “being” that is distinct from essence is “being in actuality” (*wujūd bi-fi’l*): such being does not pertain to an essence necessarily and by virtue of itself.

Avicenna’s view that there is a sense of “being” that is external and accidental to essence has garnered him a great deal of criticism, none more well-known than Averroes’s. For, according to Averroes, Avicenna’s single greatest metaphysical blunder was in presenting “being” or “existence” as something accidental to essence. We find his criticism stated well in his *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*. 
And, as for this man [namely, al-Ghazālî], he based the discussion of these matters on the doctrine of Avicenna, and it is a false doctrine. For, he believed that existence (‘anniyya) is a thing as an existent (mawjud) thing in addition to the whatness outside the soul, and it is an accident in them [namely, in things]. And, [further, he believed that] if one assumed that it is a condition in the being (wujūd) of a whatness, then if existence (‘anniyya) is for the being (wujūd) of the Necessary Being a condition in His essence, the Necessary Being would be composed of a condition and a ‘conditioned,’ and so He is ‘possible’ [or, contingent] with respect to being (wujūd). Also, according to Avicenna, that whose being (wujūd) is an addition to its essence, [that thing] has a cause [...]

Averroes explains here that al-Ghazālî based his discussion of being on the doctrine of

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Avicenna, which Averroes endeavors to show is erroneous. For, according to Averroes, Avicenna held the view that being (ʿanniya)\(^{30}\) is something added to the whatness of a thing from the outside and enters into composition (murakab) with the whatness. Observe that Averroes undoubtedly ascribes to Avicenna and al-Ghazālī alike an extramental distinction between essence and its “condition,” being (wujūd), which is said to be something additional with which substantial essence is composed (see [T4]). Otherwise, Averroes’s refutation, from a presumed real composition in the First, would completely miss its target.

Averroes worries that Avicenna has made “being” something like a categorial accident which enters into a real composition with essence. But, as Averroes argues, no good Aristotelian account of “being” would recognize a sense of “being” that is a categorial accident. He writes:

[T8b] The “being” (wujūd) that he [al-Ghazālī] uses here is not the “being” that indicates the essences of things, namely, that which is like the genus for them, and [it is] not [the sense of “being” that indicates that a thing is outside the soul. For, the term “being” (mawjud) expresses

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two notions, the first of which is “truth,” and the other stands opposite non-being. This [latter] is what is divided into the ten genera, and it is like a genus for them. And, this [sense of “being”] is prior to the beings of second intention. [By this sense of “being”] I mean the items that are outside of the mind, and this [sense] is said of the ten categories according to priority and posteriority. In this sense we say of substance that it is a being through itself (bi-dhati-hi), and in the case of accident, that it is a being by its being (wujūd) in a being through itself.

Following al-Fārābī, Averroes outlines only two senses of being as relevant to the issue:

(1) “being” in the sense of “essence,” which is had by various things in the categories according to priority and posteriority (CC2 is simply standard doctrine in al-Fārābī and Averroes—doctrine that the two of them present as thoroughly and genuinely Aristotelian); and (2) “being” in the sense of “true.”

Now, Averroes tells us that “being” in the sense of “essence” pertains to those things that have the accidents of the categories, which is the sense of purity in which the nature (maqārah) is had by the objects of the categories.


32 For “being” as “true” in the Arabic philosophical tradition, see Menn, “Fārābī in the Reception of Avicenna’s Metaphysics,” 66-69.
objects which are outside of the soul (i.e. they are not mere fictions or hallucinations) and, following Aristotle, which are in the categories. This sense of “being” is not said univocally of all of the categories, but instead according to priority and posteriority. Accordingly, although this sense of “being” is common to all of the categories, it is merely “like a genus” (ka-gins) for the categories.

Concerning the other sense of “being,” Averroes writes:

[T8c] And concerning the “being” that [is said] in the sense of “truth,” all of the categories participate in it alike. “Being” (mawjud) that is in the sense of “truth” is a notion in minds, and it is a thing outside of the soul according as what is in the soul is in accord with it [what is outside]. This knowledge [of “being” as “true”] is prior to the knowledge of the whatness of a thing; I mean, one does not search for knowledge of a thing’s whatness until one knows that it is an existent (mawjud). As for the whatness which is prior to the understanding of the being (mawjud) in our minds, it is not a whatness in reality but only an explanation of the meaning of some terms. So, if one understands that this...
meaning is a being (mawjud) outside of the soul, then one understands that it is an essence and a definition […]

Averroes distinguishes “being” in the sense of “essence,” which is found in the categories, from the second sense of “being”: “being” as “truth.” Unlike the former sense of “being” that signifies extramental essences in the categories that are beings according to priority and posteriority, “being” as “truth” is said univocally of every category and is a notion in the mind. For, Averroes tells us, all of the categories participate in it alike [T8b].

What does this bisemous account of “being” have to do with existence? The important point for Averroes is that one need not posit a sense of “being” that is accidental to essence, as Avicenna would have it, in order to account for existence. So, then, where does existence fall in the proper, Aristotelian analysis of “being?” Averroes tells us that it is to be found in “being” as “truth.” For Averroes [T8c], “being” in the sense of “truth” comes before in the order of knowledge “being” in the sense of “essence.” This claim refers to Aristotle’s Posterior Analytics 2.1 where Aristotle tells us that there are four questions about which we ask in a science: the “is it?” and the “what is it?” questions; and the “is it the case that?” and “why is it the case that?” questions. According to Aristotle, the “is it?” question, which asks whether a thing exists or not, is asked before the “what is it?” question. For, to ask the “what is it?” question is to turn to the investigation of the essence of a thing (i.e. what makes it to be what it is), and it makes no sense to investigate the essence of a thing if we have not first determined that it

33 Aristotle, Posterior Analytics 89b23-90a3.
exists. How can one explore what makes it be what it is when one does not even know whether there is something to explore? “Is the Loch Ness monster animal or fish?” should not be asked until one is sure that there is or was such a monster. Thus, Averroes is following Aristotelian scientific methodology when he says that the question whether a thing exists must first be investigated before one can investigate its essence.

What is intriguing here, which has been studied in detail by Menn, is the connection between the “is it?” question of Aristotle’s *Apo. 2.1* and the sense of “being” as “truth” in Aristotle’s *Meta. Δ.7*. The idea seems to be something like this: when one affirms that a proposition is true, one affirm that the state of affairs outside of one’s mind accurately accords with the proposition in one’s mind. Thus, Averroes says T8[c], “‘Being’ (mawjud) in the sense of “truth” is a notion in minds, and it is a thing outside of the soul according as what is in the soul is in accord with it [what is outside of the soul].” Now, when we first affirm the proposition that a given thing exists, observes Averroes, it is important to remember that we do not yet know the essence of the thing. For, the answer to the “is it?” question is prior to the answer of the “what is it?” question.

But how am I supposed to affirm whether such an *x* exists if I do not know *something* of what *x* is? Averroes, following Aristotle, tells us that one does not know the essence of the thing, but rather merely an “explanation of the meaning of some terms,” which has been come to be called a nominal definition. A nominal definition does not tell us what a thing is, but rather what we signify when we use a certain word. So, before we go about investigating some phenomenon *x*, we can first get clear about what

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34 Menn finds this connection in al-Fārābī; Stephen Menn, “Al-Fārābī’s Kitāb al-Ḥurūf and His Analysis of the Senses of Being,” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 18, no. 1 (2008): 59–97. Though we have not yet included him in the conversation yet, this same doctrine has been studied in the works of St. Thomas by Lawrence Dewan as well. See Lawrence Dewan, “Which Esse Gives the Answer to the Question ‘Is It?’ for St. Thomas,” *Doctor Communis* 3 (2002): 80–97.

35 Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* 2.7-8, 92b26-93b14.
our terms signify. For example, if zoologists looking to study a certain animal about which they know nothing other than that it is a relatively small, four-legged, furry, living thing, reported to be rummaging through outdoor rubbish bins at night, they could settle on this description as a nominal definition for the term “raccoon.” This description is hardly a scientifically adequate definition (for, it does not distinguish the racoon from other nocturnal omnivores like opossums), but it does help us to focus in on the same phenomena such that an investigation can begin.

The nominal definition is precisely what Averroes has in mind in [T8c]: when we answer the “is it?” question, we use a cursory account of the phenomenon to establish reference to that phenomenon. The result is that we can say “there is an $x$ that matches the description $P.$” Thus, the “is” of “truth” that answers the “is it?” question affirms: it is that case that $x$ exists. We know that a given thing exists when we can affirm that the description that we have contrived (i.e. in our minds) matches a phenomenon in extramental reality. The nominal definition may not be the final say on the matter—in fact, since it is the starting point of an investigation, it is, in all likelihood, not going to be the final account of what the thing is—but it is enough to establish that something in extramental reality is referred to by a certain description or concept I have in my mind.

On this account, one need not posit a sense of “being” or “existence” that signifies an accident, as Avicenna is purported to have done. For, when we say that “$x$ exists,” we do not predicate existence as something attaching to $x$ (e.g., as we do in the proposition “$x$ is green”). Rather, the proposition “$x$ exists” should be analyzed as “there is an $x$ which has the description $P,$” or “there is such an $S$ as $P.$” This is how Averroes is able to account for existential propositions without appealing to “exists” as an accidental
addition. The benefits of this account are clear: whereas existence as an accident is nowhere to be found in Aristotle’s own analysis of “being,” Averroes’s analysis is clearly grounded in Aristotle. Moreover, we might even have contemporary inclinations towards Averroes’s analysis: the majority of philosophers after Kant are suspicious of “is” or “exists” as a predicate, and such a view is avoided on Averroes’s analysis.36

Now that I have brought out what can be said in Averroes’s defense, let me do the same for Avicenna by laying out his teaching. Many have come to Avicenna’s defense over this issue and many have done so by investigating in what sense Avicenna calls existence an “accident.” The general strategy has been to deny that Avicenna’s “being” that is accidental to the essence is literally a categorial accident. On this view, the key to understanding Avicenna, and therefore to understanding where Averroes goes wrong, is understanding in what sense being could be “accidental” to essence.37 Others have conceded the point to Averroes, suggesting that Avicenna agrees with Averroes’s bisemous account of “being” and that Avicenna never intended a real distinction between being and essence.38


38 See Avicenna, Avicenna’s Deliverance: Logic, trans. Asad Q. Ahmed (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011), 97: “Among questions is that [whereby] affirmation or negation—in sum, assent—is granted. It is either the question “whether” in an absolute sense, such as our statement, ‘Does God exist?’ and ‘Does the void exist?’ [By this question,] one finds out only the state of a thing as existing or failing to exist in an absolute sense. As for the question ‘whether’ in a qualified sense, well it is like our statement, ‘Is God the creator of man?’ and ‘Is the body created?’ [By this] one finds out whether a thing exists or fails to exist in
But what is striking is that Avicenna should have no reason to think of Averroes’s Aristotelian distinction between “being” in the sense of “truth” and “being” as “essence” as an impediment to his real distinction. Avicenna’s reasoning helps us see why. In the argument of [T4], we found Avicenna disambiguating the term “being” in the locution “being not in a subject” in order to show that “being” cannot signify “being in actuality” in the same locution. Otherwise, to be an actual, presently existing subject would pertain to substances by virtue of themselves because “being not in a subject” is a constitutional property of substance essentially said of substance. Two impossibilities would ensue: first, all substances of necessity actually exist and so there can be no substances in potency to existence or non-existence; second, all substances are as necessary by virtue of themselves as is the First. Since these consequences are absurd, Avicenna concludes that being in actuality is something outside of the essence of substance that pertains to substances by virtue of a cause. For Avicenna, the sense of “being” that is distinct from essence is “being in act.” And yet, this sense of “being” is not found in Averroes’s criticism. According to Averroes, there are only two senses of “being” that pertain to this discussion: “being” in the sense of “essence” and “being” in the sense of “truth.” So, where Avicenna includes “actuality” or “being in act” in his consideration of existence, Averroes finds no room for it. There is no doubt that Averroes’s account is more parsimonious, but is it more Aristotelian by neglecting “being in act?” Averroes’s criticism is not so much a refutation as a dismissal of Avicenna’s reading.

But this fact raises an important, if not the important, question: why include a certain state.” In addition to Rahman’s “instance view,” the logical and methodological are emphasized by Caterina Belo, “Essence and Existence in Avicenna and Averroes,” Al-Qantara 30 no. 2 (2009): 403-26, at 412-417. On Belo’s view, Avicenna uses two different senses of existence, one logical and the other metaphysical. In the logical sense, “existence” is a primary concept to which no other concept is more prior, but in the metaphysical sense, when causality is taken into account, “existence” is something that is bestowed upon essence and, thus, is subordinated to essence.
“being in act” in this account at all? After all, does Averroes’s account not include everything one needs through his treatment of the “is it?” question? In this treatment, Averroes needs only extramental objects that fall into one of the ten categories and minds that make judgements about those objects. Why include actuality, and where? Recall that for Aristotle act and potency divide all of the categories, and that the fourth sense of “being” is being as divided by act and potency. Accordingly, observes Avicenna, it does not follow that something is an actual, existent substance merely from the fact that it is a substance. In other words, being in act and being in potency are not in the definition of substance and accident, but are something additional needed to account for reality.

Averroes took his own account of the nominal definition and of the “is it?” question as a refutation of Avicenna’s view. But, I argue, how we account for answering the “is it?” question is not all that is at stake in the issue over the essence-existence distinction, as the reasoning in the Categories Argument shows concerning essences after we know what they are: after they are defined as in the category of substance. It is commonly known that thylacines do not exist. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to ask whether the thylacine still exists, and it is quite possible to give an answer to this question. To ask whether there are any existing thylacines is not to ask for a nominal definition of the thylacine since what a thylacine is is already known. The answer to the question “does the thylacine exist” is not the answer to the first scientific question by which we establish reference to a term. Reference is already established. The essence is already known. So, the answer to the question “does the thylacine exist” pertains to something other than the “is it?” question regarding the nominal definition. The answer concerns the fact that by the definition of its essence, thylacine does not necessarily exist.
So, if thylacines exist, they actually are because of something additional to their definable essence. If they do not exist, it may nonetheless be affirmed that they potentially exist (unlike centaurs). Existence claims, then, are not limited, pace Averroes, to those prior to the discovery of an essence, and it appears arbitrary to reduce them to the same.

Moreover, in existence claims regarding a known essence, “being” is really distinct from “essence,” as I have shown, in a way that cannot be inferred prior to answering the question “what is x?”39 “It is the case that there are mermaids,” can be held, given that mermaids turn out to be dugongs. But whether “being” as “truth” is more than conceptually distinct from “mermaid” does not, methodologically, arise until we know what mermaid really is (dugong). Avicenna, as it were, draws out the need for being in act (wujūd bi-fi ‘l) to account for affirmations about the status of things whose essence is known. Avicenna can agree with Averroes that questions prior to the knowledge of essence belong merely to being in the sense of truth. Still, questions after such knowledge remain unaccounted for on Averroes’s analysis alone, whereas Aristotle gives us grounds in Meta. Δ.7 for a sense of being that permits their answer: being as divided by act and potency.

39 It is beyond the scope of this study to treat the relation of “being in act” to substance. But for an important defense of the view that existence is an inseparable concomitant that flows necessarily from essence, see Bertolacci, “The Distinction between Essence and Existence,” 270-271.
Chapter V: Thomas Aquinas, Modi Essendi, and the Categories

1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I argued that the three “commentator consensuses” discussed in Chapter 3 can be found in the works of Avicenna. Avicenna’s thinking about substance, the categories, and the locution “being not in a subject” is all indebted to the late antique commentary tradition, with which Avicenna was in dialogue and in which Avicenna is a participant. Of special note is Avicenna’s description of “being not in a subject” as a constitutional property of substance: “being not in a subject” pertains to substance by virtue of itself and necessarily. Avicenna’s language of “being not in a subject” as a “constitutional property” (muqawwim) is suggestive of a Porphyrian or Simplician heritage.

However, concerning the locution “being not in a subject,” Avicenna introduces a novel analysis of the sense of “being” in the locution “being not in a subject.” Avicenna argues that the “being” in “being not in a subject” cannot mean “actually being not in a subject.” Otherwise, since “being not in a subject” pertains to substance by virtue of itself and necessarily, if “being” signifies “actually being,” then it would follow that one could know that some substance x actually exists merely by knowing that x is a substance. Avicenna’s recognition that the locution “being not in a subject” is ambiguous and warrants disambiguation helps us to see how thinking about the structure of the categories provides an occasion to discover the real distinction. It is because substances are necessarily and essentially those things that are not in subjects that one must say that “being not in a subject” cannot signify “actually being not in a subject.” Otherwise, one must grant that every substance is essentially in act by virtue of itself, as is the divine
being. And so, that by which a thing is in act (its \textit{wujūd bi-fi’l}) must be really distinct from the essence by virtue of which a thing is in a category. I have called this line of reasoning Avicenna’s Categories Argument.

In the following two chapters, I shall direct my attention to the Italian theologian and Dominican friar Thomas Aquinas. I shall explore this theme of the (quasi) definition of substance to see how he used this Avicennian insight into the structure of the categories to craft his own “Genus Argument,” or, better, “Categories Argument.” But before we direct our attention to Aquinas’s Genus Argument, I want to investigate in greater detail Aquinas’s own view of the structure and nature of the categories. I shall argue that Aquinas’s view of the nature and structure of the categories displays the influence of the late antique commentary tradition though Aquinas also distinguishes himself from this tradition by thinking of the categories as “modes of being.” We will see that Thomas is concerned about considering “being not in a subject” or “being in a subject” as if they are differentiae or accidental additions that divide being, just as a genus divided into species or qualified by some accident beyond being. This worry is not unfounded; for, as we saw in Chapter 3 and again in Chapter 4, much of the commentators’ language concerning “being not in a subject” is also applied to the differentia. Recall that “\textit{symplerotikon}” and “\textit{parakolouthema}” are terms often used to describe the differentia. In fact, as we saw in Chapter 3, the issue of whether “being not in a subject” is a (quasi) definition for substance is intimately tied to the question of whether differentiae are substances. Thus, in the commentators and in Avicenna there is a certain similarity between “being (not) in a subject” and the differentia which Aquinas seeks to avoid or downplay.
Now, before we delve into the topic of the nature and structure of the categories in Aquinas, let me clarify a possible issue: as I endeavored to disambiguate in Chapter 2 and discussed in Chapter 3, the phrases “being not in a subject” and “being through itself” tend to be used synonymously. That being said, whereas Avicenna clearly prefers the phrase “being not in a subject” to describe the constitutive property that essentially pertains to substance, Thomas generally prefers the phrase “being per se.” This is going to make our task difficult because we will look at texts where “being per se” is said commonly of all the categories a lá Aristotle’s Meta. Δ.7 and then other texts where “being per se” is said of substance alone and signifies that substance is not in a subject. Thus, the issue of the ambiguity of this phrase “being through itself,” as in Chapter 2, returns in this chapter, and where necessary I will endeavor to disambiguate.

2. Thomas Aquinas’s Avicennian (Quasi) Definition of Substance: Texts and Variations

As discussed in Chapter 1, it is well established in the literature that Thomas has an Avicennian (quasi) definition of substance. As Gilson showed in 1974, Aquinas does not consider “being per se” to be the (quasi) definition of substance, but instead, under Avicenna’s influence,¹ he maintains that “being per se” is only in the (quasi) differentia position of the (quasi) definition of substance. In the (quasi) genus place, one must, for Aquinas, affirm something positive, namely, an essence, to which “being per se” belongs. According to Gilson, this new definition of substance rests at the very heart of Avicenna’s (and, thus, Thomas’s) metaphysics.² My purpose is to show that Gilson was

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¹ As Gilson notes at the conclusion of the article, between the metaphysics of Aristotle and Aquinas lies the metaphysics of Avicenna, which acts as a kind of filter: Gilson, “Quasi Definitio Substantiae,” 125.
² Gilson, “Quasi Definitio Substantiae,” 116: “Thomas answers that this [that God is in the genus of substance] is not so because, according to Avicenna, the words “that which is not in a subject” are not the definition of substance. Assuming the equivalence of “not to be in a subject” and to be an “ens per se,” Avicenna and Thomas observe that “being is no genus.” Their reason for saying so reaches the deepest layers of Avicenna’s ontology, to wit: his very notion of being.”
more right than he knew. On the one hand, I show how Aquinas’s new, Avicennian (quasi) definition is connected to other, central doctrines in his metaphysics. On the other, just as in the case of the previous chapter for Avicenna, I bring out what this new (quasi) definition of substance tells us not only about substance, but about the internal structure of the categories generally.

Among the texts where Thomas reflects on the (quasi) definition of substance, the earliest belongs to his Sentences commentary. In discussing the question of whether God is in the category of substance, Aquinas raises the following objection: since to be a substance is to be not in a subject—i.e. to be a being per se—and since “a being per se” belongs most fittingly to God, it follows that God is in the category of substance. To this objection, Aquinas responds:

[T1: Aquinas, Super Sententiis 1 d. 8 q. 4 a. 2 ad 2 (222-223)]

Ista definitio, secundum Avicennam, non potest esse substantiae: substantia est quae non est in subjecto. Ens enim non est genus. Haec autem negatio “non in subjecto” nihil ponit; unde hoc quod dicho, ens non est in subjecto, non dicit aliquod genus: quia in quolibet genere oportet significare quidditatem aliquam, ut dictum est, de cujus intellectu non est esse. Ens autem non dicit quidditatem, sed solum understanding there is no being (esse).

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actum essendi, cum sit principium ipsum; “Being” (ens), moreover, does not express
et ideo non sequitur: est non in subjecto, quiddity, but only the act of being (actus
ergo est in genere substantiae. Sed oportet essendi), since it [the act of being] is [its]
addi: est habens quidditatem quam principle. And so [this inference] does not
consequitur esse non in subjecto; ergo est follow: if x is not in a subject, then x is in
in genere substantiae. Sed hoc Deo non the category of substance. Rather, it is
convenit, ut dictum est. requisite to add: [if x] is a thing having a

just as we saw in the previous chapter, Thomas adopts Avicenna’s analysis of the phrase
“being not in a subject” into a definition comprising a (quasi) genus and a (quasi)
differentia term. The problem with the phrase “being not in a subject” as a definition of
substance is, as we well know, that “being” cannot be a genus and that the “not in a
subject” does not posit any positive differentia outside of being. Thomas tells us that it is
requisite to affirm a determinate essence (or quiddity) in the (quasi) genus term in the
(quasi) definition. So, what should that (quasi) genus term be? Aquinas writes in Book 2:
[T2: Aquinas, Sent. 2 d. 3 q. 1 a. 5 co. (99-100)]

Respondeo dicendum, quod secundum I respond: it should be said that, according
Avicennam, ubi supra, omne id quod to Avicenna, everything that has esse other

4 Thomas Aquinas, Scriptum super libros Sententiarum Magistri Petri Lombardi Episcopi Parisiensis ed.
habet esse aliud a sua quidditate, oportet than its quiddity, must be in a genus; and
quod sit in genere; et ita oportet quod so it is requisite that all of the angels are
omnes angeli ponantur in praedicamento placed in the category of substance as
omnes angeli ponantur in praedicamento substantiae, prout est praedicamentum, such, since according to Avicenna, it is a
cum secundum Avicennam, sit res thing (res) having a quiddity to which is
quidditatem habens, cui debeatur esse per owed being (esse) through itself, not in
se, non in alio, scilicet quod sit aliud a another—namely, that it [i.e. esse] is other
quidditate ipsa[.] than the quiddity itself.

Thus, we find Thomas adding the same (quasi) genus term to the (quasi) definition “a thing having a quiddity.”

Now, there are two important things to notice that are apparently unique to Thomas. Whereas Avicenna’s expression of his (quasi) definition of substance is fairly consistent, namely, “a thing having a quiddity whose being is not in a subject,” Aquinas’s phrasing is comparatively variable and often emphasizes the fact that “being not in a subject” is something owed to (debetur), acquired by (acquiritur), or suited to (convenit) substance. We can see some of this variation in a passage from Book 4:

[T3: Aquinas, Sent. 4 d. 12 q. 1 a. 1 qc. 1 ad 2 (vol. 4: 499)]

Ad secundum dicendum, quod sicut To the second [argument] it should be said
probat Avicenna in sua Metaph., per se that, just as Avicenna proves in his
existere non est definitio substantiae: quia Metaphysics, to exist through itself is not
per hoc non demonstratur quidditas ejus, the definition of substance. For, its
sed ejus esse. Et sua quidditas non est quiddity is not exhibited by this [phrase],
suum esse; alias non posset esse genus, but [instead] its esse, and its quiddity is
quia esse non potest esse commune per modum generis, cum singula contenta in genere differant secundum esse. Sed definitio vel quasi definitio substantiae est res habens quidditatem, cui acquiritur esse vel debetur non in alio. Et similiter esse in subjecto non est definitio accidentis, sed e contrario res cui debetur esse in alio. Et hoc nunquam separatur ab aliquo accidente, nec separari potest; quia illi rei quae est accidens, secundum rationem suae quidditatis, semper debetur esse in alio.

Here we see Thomas explicitly applying the same analysis to accidents that he does to substance such that the proper (quasi) definition of substance and accident reflect that they share the (quasi) genus term “a thing having a quiddity” in common but differ with respect to the (quasi) differentia term “to which being (not) in a subject is owed.” Notice that Thomas has added something to the (quasi) definition: “being (not) in a subject” is
something that is “acquired” or is “owed” to a substance or accident. We found Avicenna
claim that actually being not in a subject is something which is “realized” or “acquired”
for substance, but this language was found in Avicenna’s Danesh Nama and Aquinas
would not have known it. Neither is the language of “being not in a subject” as “owed” to
substance found in Avicenna. Moreover, we do not find any such addition in either the
Latin translation from which St. Thomas would know the (quasi) definition of substance
or in the Metaphysica of al-Ghazālī, known to St. Thomas as Algazel, a student of
Avicenna.⁵

[T4: Avicenna, Philosophia Prima sive Scientia Divina, 8.4 (403)]⁶

Contra quod dico quod haec non est
intentio substantiae quam posuimus

Against this I say that this is not the notion
of substance that we have laid down as a
genus, immo intentio eius est quod est res
habens quidditatem stabilem, cuius esse

as a genus] is that it is a thing having a
stable quiddity whose to be (esse) is being
est esse quod non est in subiecto, corpore
(esse) that is not in a subject, like a body
vel anima.

or a soul.

[T5: al-Ghazālī, Metaphysics 2 (57-58)]⁷

Sicut enim convenerunt substantia nichil

Just as it is acknowledged that substance

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⁵ This Latin translation of al-Ghazālī’s Maqāṣid al-falāsifa—itself an interpretive translation of Avicenna’s
Dānesh Nāmeh—was understood to be intimately connected to Avicenna by Albertus Magnus and
Aquinas. See Jules Janssens, “al-Ġazālī’s Maqāṣid al-Falāsifa, Latin Translation of,” in Encyclopedia of
Medieval Philosophy: Philosophy between 500 and 1500 ed. Henrik Lagerlund (Dordrecht: Springer,

⁶ Avicenna. Philosophia Prima sive Scientia Divina V-X ed. Simone Van Riet (Louvain: E. Peeters, 1980),
403.

⁷ al-Ghazālī, Algazel’s Metaphysics: a Mediaeval Translation ed. J.T. Muckle (Toronto: Pontifical Institute
of Mediaeval Studies, 1933), 57-58.
est, nisi id quod res est, cuius esse non est
esse in subiecto, scilicet quod cum fuerit
non sit in subiecto, non quod habeat esse
apud se in effectu. […] Substancia ergo
dicitur certitudo rei, et id quod ipsa est,
cum acciderit ei esse in effectu non in
specie.

Therefore, substance is called the
certitude (certitudo) [or essence] of a
thing and “that which it is” being in act
occurs to it (acciderit ei) [and] is not in
[its] species

Observe that neither “debetur” nor “acquiritur” occur in either of these presentations of
the (quasi) definition of substance. [T4] presents us with a fairly familiar formulation,
and the Latin al-Ghazālī presents us with new but clearly Avicennian language in [T5]. It
would seem then that “debetur” and “acquiritur” are additions unique to Aquinas’s
(quasi) definition of substance.

We can see in Thomas’s Avicennian (quasi) definition a certain structure that is
found within the category of substance—and indeed all categories: things in the
categories include a quiddity by virtue of which they are in the category and the (quasi)
differentia term “being not in a subject” or “being per se” for substances and “being in a
subject” for accidents. Thomas tells us that “being not in a subject” and “being in a
subject” pertain to substance or accident necessarily (see [T3] above: “being in another”

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8 Gundissalinus’s and John of Spain’s Latin translation of al-Ghazālī exhibits Boethian language that
contrasts id quod est and esse (i.e. the whole substance or supposit and its form or essence). This distinction
was routinely adopted by the early Parisian masters and, of course, by Aquinas. See Roland-Gosselin 1926,
142-146, 160-199.
is not separable from the essence of the accident). As we saw in the previous chapter, Avicenna too put “being not in a subject” in the (quasi) differentia position in his (quasi) definition of substance. Moreover, we also saw in Avicenna that “being not in a subject” pertains necessarily and essentially to substance. This is because Avicenna, along with the late antique commentary tradition, thought of “being not in a subject” as constitutive and as a property of substance. In the following section, I shall investigate whether we find this way of thinking about “being not in a subject” or “being per se” in Aquinas.

3. The Structure of the Categories: Essence, Modes, and Acquired Being

Aquinas does refer to “being not in a subject” or “being per se” as a property of substance, but it is much more common to find him call “being per se” a “mode of being” of substance.

[T6: Aquinas, De veritate q. 1 a. 1 co. (5, Ins. 100-123)]

Illud autem quod primo intellectus concipit quasi notissimum, et in quod conceptiones omnes resolvit, est ens, ut Avicenna dicit in principio suae Metaphysicae; unde oportet quod omnes aliae conceptiones intellectus accipiantur ex additione ad ens. Sed enti non possunt

That which the intellect first conceives as if most known and into which it resolves all conceptions is being (ens), as Avicenna says in the beginning of his Metaphysics. Hence, it is requisite that all other conceptions of the intellect are taken by addition to being (ens). But it is not

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9 Thomas Aquinas, Quaestiones disputatæ de potentia, ed. P. Bazzi et al. (Turin: Marietti, 1953), https://www.corpusthomisticum.org/qdp8.html#60487: “Substantia vero quae est subjectum, duo habet propria: quorum primum est quod non indiget extrinseco fundamento in quo sustentetur, sed sustentatur in seipso; et ideo dicitur subsistere, quasi per se et non in alio existis. Aliud vero est quod est fundamentum accidentibus substentans ipsa; et pro tanto dicitur substare.” (But the substance which is a subject has two properties: the first of which is that it does not need an extrinsic foundation (fundamentum) in which it is sustained, rather it is sustained in itself. For this reason, it is said “to subsist,” as if existing through itself and not in another. The other [property] is that it is a foundation for substanding accidents, and, insofar as that is true, it is said “to substand.”)
addi aliqua quasi extranea per modum quo differentia additur generi vel accidens subiecto, quia quaelibet natura est essentialiter ens, unde probat etiam Philosophus in III Metaphysicae quod ens non potest esse genus; sed secundum hoc aliqua dicuntur addere super ens, in quantum exprimit modum ipsius entis qui nomine entis non exprimitur, quod dupliciter contingit. Uno modo ut modus expressus sit aliquis specialis modus entis; sunt enim diversi gradus entitatis secundum quos accipiuntur diversi modi essendi et iuxta hos modos accipiuntur diversa rerum genera: substantia enim non addit super ens aliquam differentiam, quae designet aliquam naturam superadditam enti sed nomine substantiae exprimitur specialis quidam modus essendi, scilicet per se ens, et ita est in aliis generibus.

possible that any items be added to being (ens) as if extraneous [to it], in the way that a differentia is added to a genus or an accident to a subject. For, every nature is essentially a being (ens). Hence the Philosopher also proves in Metaphysics 3 that being (ens) cannot be a genus. Accordingly, some items are said to be added to being (ens) insofar as they express a mode of being itself (ipsius entis) that the name ‘being’ (ens) does not express. This happens in two ways. In one way so that the mode expressed is some special mode of being; for, there are diverse grades of entity according to which diverse modes of being (modi essendi) are taken. The diverse genera of things are taken according to these modes; for, “substance” does not add some differentia that signifies some nature superadded to being (ens). Rather, the name “substance” expresses a certain special mode of being (modus essendi),
In this text, Thomas follows Avicenna in saying that, because every conception is based in and resolves into “being” (ens), the differentiation of being is not by means of some added nature (since, no such nature could be added that is not itself a being). Thus, the sort of differentiation of being that we see in the categories is a differentiation by means of modes rather than anything like a differentia or an accident. Thomas in his example tells us that the mode of being (modus essendi) that pertains to substance is “being per se” and, given what we know from the texts above, I think it is safe to infer that the mode of being proper to the categories of accidents is “being in alio” or “in subjecto.”

Moreover, both substances and accidents are beings essentially (“quia quaelibet natura est essentialiter ens”) and, thus, there is a sense in which “being” is said of all of the categories.

So why “modes of being”? As Thomas explains, if you think of the categories as a grouping under one intelligibility, such that they are like species of being, then they must be distinguished and diversified according to something which is not itself being. For, that which unites the categories cannot also be that which distinguishes them. However, you are bound to run into an issue if you go looking for some differentia or added accident that is outside of being by which to distinguish the categories. For, of course, whatever differentia or accident you come up with will also be a being—anything with determinate features is with respect to those features, thus anything you come up with by which to divide being will have to be as well. So, Thomas concludes, being cannot be divided as a genus into species. Instead, if one wishes to divide being into the categories,
one must use a different means from the familiar genus-species differentiation.

This new differentiation is that of “modes of being,” and Aquinas tells us that each of the categories signifies a unique grade of entity (gradus entitatis) from which the mode of being is taken. The mode of being proper to substance is “being per se.” As we have seen throughout this dissertation, the unique property of substance that distinguishes substance from the other categories is “being per se” in the Subject Sense, which signifies that substances are not in subjects because they are themselves subjects. Thomas agrees with the preceding late antique philosophical tradition on this use of “being per se” in the Subject Sense. However, whereas the late antique Greek thinkers thought of “being not in a subject” or “being per se” as a property, completer, or concomitant of substance, and whereas Avicenna thought of “being not in a subject” as a constitutional property, Aquinas is apparently unique in this tradition for introducing new terminology to describe “being not in a subject.”

At least, so it would seem. I think Thomas’s use of “modes of being” to describe “being not in a subject” and “being in a subject” is novel and, as I shall show below, solves a problem that plagued the commentary tradition up to Aquinas. But Aquinas would not have thought of his use of “modes” in this respect as a novel contribution. For, although Avicenna does not think of “being not in a subject” as a mode or envision the distinction of the categories as a distinction according to diverse modes of being, the Latin Avicenna does. Recall the first text we discussed in the previous chapter: there, Avicenna divided “being through itself” into the being which is in another thing and the being which is not in a subject at all. In the Arabic, Avicenna calls this distinction between the category of substance and the category of accidents “divisions” (qismayun).
But in the Latin translation, Avicenna is found calling the division of substance and accident “modes.”

\textit{Kitāb al-Shifā’: Ilāhīyāt} 2.1 \hspace{1cm} \textit{Liber de Philosophia Prima} 2.1 (65)

\begin{quote}
فأقدم أقسام الموجودات بالذات هو الجوهر، وذلك لأن الموجود على قسمين[...].
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Quod autem prius est ex omnibus divisionibus eorum quae sunt per essentiam, substantia est, quoniam esse duobus modis est.
\end{quote}

The first division of beings (\textit{mawjudāt}) through themselves is substance, and this is because being (\textit{mawjud}) [is divided] into two divisions…

To one reading Avicenna in Arabic, the language of “modes of being” as applied to the division of the categories is absent. But, to one reading Avicenna in Latin, it is clearly there. Thomas may not have understood his own description of the categories as diverse modes of being to be a novel addition to or improvement on the preceding commentary tradition. Even if the Angelic Doctor probably did not think of his use of “modes” in this respect as a novel contribution, it is indeed a novel contribution to the commentary tradition that provides a new way of thinking about the structure of essence.

\textit{The Categories as Modes of Being}. In Thomas’s \textit{Summa contra Gentiles} 1 (dated circa 1259, shortly after the \textit{De veritate}), we find this structure of essence as common to the categories and modes of being as distinguishing the categories. After having considered whether God is a substance (and, thus, the question of the definition of the genus of substance was discussed), Thomas takes up the question of whether God, as
being Itself, is the formal being for all things—i.e. that God is the formal cause for all things. Thomas presents several arguments against this proposition, but one is particularly noteworthy.

[T7: Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* 1 ch. 26 (81a9-b5)]

Res ad invicem non distinguuntur secundum quod habent esse: quia in hoc omnia conveniunt. Si ergo res differunt ad invicem, oportet quod vel ipsum esse specificetur per aliquas differentias additas, ita quod rebus diversis sit diversum esse secundum speciem: vel quod res differant per hoc quod ipsumesse diversis naturis secundum speciem convenit. Sed primum horum est impossibile: quia enti non potest fieri aliqua additio secundum modum quo differentia additur generi, ut dictum est. Relinquitur ergo quod res propter hoc differant quod habent diversas naturas, quibus acquiritur esse diversimode. Esse

Thomas has in mind here the view of the Almaricians—the followers of Almaric of Bena—who held a pantheistic view. Thomas discusses the view of Almaricians and other pantheists like David of Dinant in greater detail in other texts. See Aquinas, *ST* 1 q. 3 a. 8 co.

We find here the same doctrine as in [T6]: all things agrees insofar as they have being (esse), but they differ by virtue of their natures, which acquire being according to diverse modes. Thomas does not explicitly mention the categories here, but his argument is the same as in the above text: the “things” he mentions are all, in the broadest sense, beings and, thus, cannot be divided or distinguished according to added differences or accidents.

Moreover, in the preceding argument, Thomas argues that God cannot be the esse formale of all things because “this being [namely, esse formale] is divided by the being (esse) of substance and the being of an accident. But the divine being is neither the being of a substance nor the being of an accident…therefore it is impossible that God is this being by which each thing formally is.”¹² This passage confirms that this scheme of dividing things according as their essences or natures acquire being in diverse modes is the scheme of the categories. Thus, it is clear from these texts that the categories are not the result of the addition of differentiae to a genus or an accident to a substance. Rather,

¹² Ibid., a4-8: “Nam esse hoc dividitur per esse substantiae et esse accidentis. Divinum autem esse neque est esse substantiae neque esse accidentis, ut probatum est. Impossibile est igitur Deum esse illud esse quo formaliter unaequeae res est.” (For, this being [esse] is divided by the being of a substance and the being of an accident. But the divine being [esse] is neither the being of a substance nor the being of an accident as has been proved. So, it is impossible that God is that being [esse] by which each thing is formally.)
the categories are the result of seemingly three factors: (i) being that is contracted to (ii) diverse natures according to (iii) diverse modes or grades of being.

So, what are we to make of these modes or grades of being? The categories are diversified according to diverse modes of being. But just what is a mode of being? There has not been much research on “modes of being” in Aquinas. One notable exception is John Tomarchio’s 2001 study. There seems to be some consensus in the literature that a mode of being is a kind of limitation on an essence. For example, Joseph Owens and Francis Kovach both think of modes of being as the manner in which an essence is limited with respect to existence or being in act. Likewise, Jacques Maritain viewed subsistence as a mode of being which is the terminus or end goal of an essence which completes and prepares the essence to receive an act of being. So, in each of these accounts, the mode of being is recognized as a sort of limitation or demarcation of an essence with respect to its existence. In Tomarchio’s view, the modes of being are to the order of existence what species are to the order of essence. For, in the domain of essence, genera are diversified and contracted to diverse species whereas, in the domain

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14 See Joseph Owens, Joseph Owens, An Elementary Christian Metaphysics (Milwaukee, WI: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1963), 152 fn. 13: “The modes of being to which St. Thomas […] refers are finite essences in general, both accidental and substantial, insofar as essences are limitations of being. See also ibid., 358. “…all finite natures are modes of being.”
16 Jacques Maritain, Distinguish to Unite or The Degrees of Knowledge, trans. Gerald B. Phelan (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1959), 436-437: “In other words, to exercise the existence the essence must be completed by subsistence and thus become a supposit. […] The state which completes, or rather sur-completes the essence—not at all in the line of essence itself, but in relation to a completely other order, the existential order—and permits the essence (henceforth supposit) to exercise existence, is precisely subsistence.”
17 However, Owens and Maritain do not see eye-to-eye on what is doing the limiting and the delimiting. For Maritain, an essence has to be completed in order to exercise its existence—i.e. existence is something that an essence attains when all of its conditions are satisfied. Owens, on the other hand, rejects this manner of talking about completing an essence to prepare it for existence. Rather, existence is the completion of an essence because it is the principle of individuation and, thus, is the principle of demarcation and limitation.
of existence, being is diversified and contracted to diverse modes of being, as we saw above in [T6] and [T7].

We find that Thomas thinks of modes or grades of being as beings of different intensities: substances and accidents have in common that they are, but they differ with respect to what degree they are. We find Thomas speaking of being in terms of degrees in his commentary on the *Metaphysics*:

[18: In Metaphysicorum 4 lec. 1 (152 nos. 540-543)]

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\text{It must be known that the aforementioned modes of being (modi essendi) are able to be reduced to four. For, one of them, which is the weakest, is only “in reason,” namely, negation and privation—which we say is “in reason” because the reason engages with these [namely, with negations and privations] as if with certain beings, while it is affirming or negating something of them. […] Another is near to this in weakness according as generation, corruption, and motion are called “beings.” For, they have something mixed with privation and negation. For, motion is an imperfect act, as it is said in…}
\]
Here, Thomas gives us four modes of being, which are clearly graded according to strength and weakness as they are further from what is grounded in nature through itself,
namely, substance, to which each is related. The weakest grade of being is privation and negation because it is the absence or denial of a relationship to a substance. Generation and corruption are more strongly related to a substance, though they are still quite weak because, although they are in the process of becoming something, they are not yet that thing and, thus, Thomas says, there is an admixture of not-being in them. Accidents comprise the third grade of being which, unlike the previous two grades, is not mixed with non-being. In what sense are they not mixed with non-being? In the sense that accidents are what they are: they are not becoming something or the negation or lack of something. In other words, accidents are determinate essences. Now, Thomas makes clear here that they are not thereby beings to the same degree as substances because they still rely on substances, but this does not thereby introduce some mix of non-being into them. As I have argued from the beginning of this dissertation: accidents are per se beings and that means they have essences. Finally, Thomas concludes his outline of the grades of being with substance which is said to be the most perfect category because it has being (esse) that is solid and firm: substances exist through themselves and serve as the subject for other things.

We get this same picture of modes of being distinguishing relationships to subjects later on the commentary on the *Metaphysics* Δ.7. The text I have in mind is too long to cite here in block text, so I will instead work through it gradually. Thomas begins his discussion with his divisio textus wherein he explains that the Philosopher first distinguishes per accidens being from per se being and, then, distinguishes three modes of per se being. It should be noted that Thomas will use the phrase “secundum se” and
“per se” as synonyms in this text, as he makes clear. Thomas is quick to note here that the division between per accidens being and per se being is not the same distinction as that between accidents and substance because per se being in Aristotle’s text includes all of the categories—even the categories of accidents. Thus, Thomas says that per se being is divided into substance and accidents according to an “absolute consideration of being”—i.e. the substance and accidents are not considered as they relate to each other (namely, inhering or not inhering in a subject) but rather are considered as they are in their own natures.

After discussing ens per accidens, Thomas directs his attention towards ens per se. His divisio textus is worth noting: according to Thomas, Aristotle first distinguishes per se being from per accidens being and per se being is divided into three senses—ens extra animam, ens quod est tantum in mente, and then he divides being per potentiam et actum. Observe that Thomas here clearly associates the ten categories with extramental being—this point will be of great service to us when we consider Thomas’s Genus Argument.

Now, concerning these ten predicaments, Aquinas notes that being secundum se is common to all of the categories, and the categories diversify being not in the manner that a genus is diversified and contracted into diverse species. For, being cannot be a genus to which something outside of being is added so as to specify it. Thus, instead of being diversified according to diverse differentiae, being secundum se is diversified according

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19 Thomas Aquinas, In Meta. 5, lec. 9 (237, n. 885): “Primo distinguit ens in ens per se et per accidens. Secundo distinguat modos entis per accidens, ibi, secundum accidens quidem et cetera. Tertio modalis entis per se, ibi, secundum se vero.”
20 Ibid. Ens igitur dividitur in substantiam et accidens, secundum absolutam entis considerationem, sicut ipsa albedo in se considerata dicitur accidens, et homo substantia. […] Divisio vero entis in substantiam et accidens attendit secundum hoc quod aliquid in natura sua est vel substantia vel accidens.
to diverse modes of predication (*modi praedicandi*) which parallel and follow from diverse modes of being (*modi essendi*). This is the important structure in the categories for which we have been looking: a sense of being is common to all of the categories (*ens secundum se*) and is diversified according to diverse modes of being from which follow diverse modes of predicating. This structure is familiar to us: for, we are at this point well aware of the commentary tradition of thinking of being in the sense of “essence” or “nature” as common to all of the categories but diversified according to the constitutive properties “being not in a subject” and “being in a subject.”

But this is not where Thomas’s analysis ends. He goes into greater detail than we have seen thus far on the modes of predicating from which are derived all of the accidental categories. That is, Thomas does not treat the categories of the accidents as a monolithic set of nine “beings in a subject.” Rather, he explains in detail the various ways a predicate can relate to a subject, from which ways all of the accidental categories can be derived. Thomas tells us that the ten predicaments can be derived from three, more general ways or modes by which a predicate can relate to a subject: (I) when the predicate is that which the subject is, (II) when the predicate is taken, not from (I), but from what is internal to the subject, and (III) when the predicate is taken, not from (I)–(II), but from what is external to the subject. From these three ways in which a predicate relates to a subject, we can derive the ten predicaments. For, (I) signifies the category of (1)

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21 Ibid., 238 n. 890. Unde oportet, quod ens contrahatur ad diversa genera secundum diversum modum praedicandi, qui consequitur diversum modum essendi; quia “quoties ens dicitur” ideest quot modis aliquid praedicatur, “toties esse significatur,” ideest tot modis significatur aliquid esse. Et propter hoc ea in quae dividitur ens primo, dicuntur esse praedicamenta, quia distinguuntur secundum diversum modum praedicandi.

22 Ibid., n. 891. Uno modo cum est id quod est subiectum, ut cum dico, “Socrates est animal.” Nam Socrates est id quod est animal.

23 Ibid., n. 892. Secundo modo ut praedicatum sumatur secundum quod inst subiecto[.]

24 Ibid. Tertio modo ut praedicatum sumatur ab eo quod est extra subiectum[.]
substance since it signifies what something is. (II) can be further divided into things which are internal to the subject: if the predicate relates to the subject because it is something in the matter of the subject, then it is (2) quantity; if it is something in the form of the subject, then it is (3) quality; and if it is something relating to the subject because the subject relates to another then, then it is (4) relation. (III) can be further divided into things which are outside of the subject and do not measure the subject—this is (5) habitus; things which are outside of the subject and measure the subject with respect to time—this is (6) when; things which are outside of the subject and measure the subject with respect to place—this is (7) where; things which are outside of the subject and measure the subject with respect to the relative location of its parts—this is (8) position; things which are outside of the subject but issue from the subject as their principle—this is (9) action; and finally things which are outside of the subject but issue from the subject because the subject is the patient of them—this is (10) passion.

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation\textsuperscript{25} to say much more about the details of this derivation other than to remark, as we recall, that this analysis of the various ways in which a predicate relates to a subject of predication is meant to give us some insight into how the categories are derived. This fact entails that this analysis is meant to give us some insight into real, not merely logical, being. In a recent study, Gregory Doolan

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnote{Suffice to say, much has been written about the derivation of the categories in the secondary literature. For, famously, Kant criticized Aristotle saying that he had no principle for their derivation but, instead “rounded them up as he stumbled on them” arbitrarily and capriciously; Immanuel Kant, \textit{Critique of Pure Reason} trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 213. But when it comes to Aristotle’s medieval commentators like Thomas and Albert, there has been some recent and illuminating literature on just how systematic and principled this derivation was. See Gregory T. Doolan, “Aquin\'s Methodology for Deriving the Categories: Convergences with Albert’s \textit{Sufficientia Praedicamentorum},” \textit{Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale} 30 (2019): 655-656; Wippel, \textit{Metaphysical Thought}, 208-228; and Paul Symington, “Thomas Aquinas on Establishing the Identity of Aristotle’s \textit{Categories},” in \textit{Medieval Commentaries on Aristotle’s Categories} ed. Lloyd A. Newton (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 119-144.}
\end{footnotesize}
argued that we can make sense of how this logical analysis might lead to conclusions about real being when we understand Thomas’s *sufficientiae* as analyses of denominative, accidental predication.\textsuperscript{26} In such a predication, an accident is predicated of subject, e.g. “Socrates is white,” and in this way we call Socrates a white thing. In Thomas’s semantic theory, an affirmative proposition about positive terms in reality is true iff the form signified by the predicate term inheres in the supposit (i.e. a singular instance) of the subject term. Thus, when we think about the proposition “Socrates is white,” then on the inherence theory of predication, the correct semantic analysis is that the form signified by the term “white,” namely, whiteness, inheres in Socrates.\textsuperscript{27} As Doolan explains, since in denominative, accidental predications the predicate term signifies an accident that actually inheres in the supposit of the subject term, it is requisite that the form signified by the predicate term be of a different nature than the nature of the supposit of the subject term (e.g. the nature of whiteness is different than the nature of humanity in the case of “Socrates is white”). Thus, it is by virtue of whiteness actually inhering in Socrates that we call Socrates a white thing.

It is for this reason that accidental predications can be used to derive the categories. For, common, accidental predications reveal different essences or natures and the different ways in which they relate to the supposit of the subject term. When we consider the predication “Socrates is a white thing,” we recognize that Socrates is a white thing not by virtue of his own essence, but by the essence of whiteness inhering in him.


This leads the mind to consider the form “whiteness,” at which point one recognizes that
*per se* predicates may be applied to whiteness and, thus, whiteness is also an essence. As we saw above, by considering how these essences relate to a subject, we can derive the categories. Most importantly, Thomas’s methodology here does not concern the subject purely in the logical sense of “subject of sentence,” but also in its metaphysical sense of “primary substance.”

When we compare this account of the derivation of the modes of being of the accidents (in Aquinas’s *Commentary on Metaphysics Δ.7*) to the account of the four grades of being in the previous text [T8], we see a pattern in Thomas’s thought start to emerge: a mode of being varies according as an essence of a substance or accident is related to a subject. This allows us to make sense of how modes of being can come in differing intensities: for, the intensity or grade of the mode of being is stronger the more closely related the nature signified is to the subject (that is or would be in an unqualified sense in the world). Notice that this does not entail that qualities and quantities, which are in the subject, are more closely related to the subject than the other seven accidents which are outside of the subject. For, Thomas treats all of the categories of accidents as equally related to the subject and we can make sense of this only if we keep in mind the examples of things having a weaker relationship to the subject: namely, privations, negations, generation, and corruption. Though it is not the case that every accidental category shares

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28 Doolan, “Aquinas’s Methodology,” 678: “When Aquinas considers in his *sufficientiae* how predicate terms are said of subject terms, he is not merely concerned with a logical subject as such but, more precisely, with a metaphysical subject: what he terms in his *Metaphysics Commentary sufficientia* a ‘first substance.’ It is for this reason that he uses Socrates as an example of a subject, offering for analysis such propositions as ‘Socrates is an animal’ and ‘Socrates is shod’. The reason why he is looking to predications about a metaphysical subject to derive the categories is that, as Aquinas explains, “first substance...is a particular substance, of which everything is predicated”. In other words, Aquinas is highlighting that the paradigmatic case of predication entails a predication made of an actually existing, extramental subject. It is from such predications that we can draw conclusions about extramental being.
in how it relates to the subject, it must be the case that they share in not being mixed with non-being in the way that generation, corruption, privations, and negations are. This stable relationship with a stable subject seems to best characterize the categories of accidents and distinguish them from weaker modes of being.

*The States of Essence as Modes of Being.* While we are on the topic of modes of being and substance, there is a text well worth noting that helps solidify my point. In the *De Potentia* 9.2, Thomas reminds us that the division of substance into primary and secondary substances is not a division of genus into species. He writes:

[T9: Aquinas, *De Potentia* q. 9 a. 2 ad 6]

When substance is divided into primary and secondary, there is not a division of a genus into species, since nothing is contained under secondary substance which is not in [the division of] primary [substance], but there is a division of a genus according to diverse modes of being. For, a secondary substance signifies the nature of a genus according to itself absolutely; but the primary substance signifies it as individually subsistent. Hence it is more of a division of the analogous than of a genus. In this way, therefore, “person” is contained in
the genus of substance, albeit not as a species, but as determining a special mode of existing (*modum existendi*).

Even within the category of substance, we have another division of modes of being. The primary substance, which is the particular thing of a determinate nature (e.g. *this* horse), differs from the secondary substance, which is just the nature (e.g. horse), by virtue of diverse modes of being and not by a distinction of species. In other words, the primary and secondary substances are not different *sorts* of things; rather, they are the same sort of thing existing in different ways: “this horse” and “horse” signify the same *res significata* (i.e. the essence or nature) but do so by means of diverse *modi existendi*: one mode adds a way of existing, namely, as subsisting (individual); the other does not, but remains absolute.

This is not the only way in which the same nature can have different modes of being. For, when Thomas distinguishes the essence of a thing as it is in extramental reality and the essence as it is in the senses or the mind (as a universal), Thomas will call the difference between these a difference in mode of being (*modus essendi*).\(^{29}\) This suggests that Avicenna’s famous *triplex status essentiae* doctrine is also related to this line of thinking. For, in the *Metaphysics* of the *Kitāb al-Shifā*’ book 5, Avicenna tells us that the essence “horseness” is in and of itself neither something universal nor particular.

Rather, it is just what is contained in the definition of horseness. Thus, to be universal is a

\(^{29}\) Thomas Aquinas, *Sent.* 4 d. 49 q. 2 a. 1 co: “Ad hoc autem quod visus cognoscat albedinem, oportet quod recipiatur in eo similitudo albedinis secundum rationem suae speciei, quamvis non secundum eundem modum essendi : quia habet alterius modi esse forma in sensu, et in re extra animam. Si enim fuerit in oculo forma citrini, non dicetur videre albedinem; et similiter ad hoc quod intellectus intelligat aliquam quidditatem, oportet quod in eo fiat similitudo ejusdem rationis secundum speciem, quamvis forte non sit idem modus essendi utroque. Non enim forma existens in intellectu vel sensu, est principium cognitionis secundum modum essendi quem habet utroque, sed secundum rationem in qua communicat cum re exteriori.”
property which attaches to the essence of horseness and, likewise, to be an individual horse existing extramentally is also a property that attaches to the essence of the horse. But, in and of itself, horseness is only what pertains to horseness. Thomas explains that universality and particularity must be features that belong to the essence according to different modes of being because, if universality pertained to the essence as such, then it could never be individualized and, likewise, if individuality pertained to the essence, it could never be universalized. Thus, universality and particularity attach to the essence absolutely considered depending on whether it is in an individual thing or in the mind, but in and of itself, the essence has neither of these accidents.

Modes of Being: The Manner in which an Essence Relates to a Subject. We find more evidence for this way of thinking of modes of being as determinate relations of essences to subjects in Thomas’s earliest work. In this text, we find the very same structure of being as common to the categories and distinguished according to diverse, determinate relations of the essence to a subject, though here I will cite only the sections of the text that are relevant to our purpose here and I will divide them into four sections and discuss them in turn. In this text, Thomas answers the question “whether ‘substance,’ ‘subsistence,’ ‘essence,’ and ‘person’ are synonyms when they are said of God?”

[T10: Aquinas, *Sent.* 1 d. 23 q. 1 a. 1 co. (554-556)]

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30. *Avicenna, Liber de Philosophia Prima sive Scientia Divina,* 5.1 (228, 32-229,42): “Equinitas etenim habet definitionem quae non eget universalitate, sed est cui accidit universalitas. Unde ipsa equinitas non est aliquid nisi equinitas tantum; ispa enim in se nec est multa nec unum, nec est existens in his sensibilius nec in anima, nec est aliquid horum potentia vel effectu, ita ut hoc contineatur intra essentiam equinitatis, sed ex hoc quod est equinitas tantum. Unitas autem est proprietas quae, cum adiungitur equinitati, fit equinitas propter ipsam proprietatem unum. Similiter etiam equinitas habet praeter hanc multas alias proprietates accidentes sibi. Equinitas ergo, ex hoc quod in definitione eius convenient multa, est communis, sed ex hoc quod accipitur cum proprietatibus et accidentibus signatis, est singularis. Equinitas ergo in se est equinitas tantum.”

Respondeo dicendum, quod quatuor dicta nomina secundum significationem differunt; sed horum differentia differenter a diversis assignatur. [...] [T10a] I respond: it must be said that these four names differ by signification; but the differences between these are assigned differently by different [authors].

[Sed quia quodlibet horum nominum, praeter hoc nomen “persona,” inventur quandoque poni pro quo est, et quandoque poni pro quod est; ideo non videtur esse essentialis distinctio eorum secundum aliquem dictorum modorum. Ideo aliter dicendum est, secundum Boetium, ut sumatur differentia horum nominum, “essentia,” “subsistentia,” substantia” secundum significationem actuum a quibus mponuntur, scilicet esse, subsistere, substantare. Patet enim quod esse, commune quoddam est, et non determinat aliquem modum essendi; subsistere autem dicit determinatum modum essendi, prout scilicet aliquid est ens per se, non in alio, sicut accidens; substare autem idem est quod sub alio poni. Inde patet quod “esse” [...] [T10b] But because each of these nouns, aside from this noun “person,” is sometimes found as standing for “that by which it is” and other times standing for “that which is,” for this reason, the essential distinction among these does not seem to be in accord with any of the aforesaid modes. So, it should be said in a different way, following Boethius, that the difference among these nouns “essence,” “subsistence,” and “substance” is according to the signification of the acts from which [the noun] is imposed, namely, “to be,” “to subsist,” and “to substand.” For, it is clear that “to be” is something common and that it does not determine any mode of being (modum essendi); moreover, to subsist expresses a
dicit id quod est commune omnibus; sed “subsistere et substare” id quod est proprium primo praedicamento secundum duo quae sibi conveniunt; quod scilicet sit ens in se completum, et iterum quod omnibus aliis substernatur accidentibus, scilicet quae in substantia esse habent.

determinate mode of being, namely, according as something is a being per se, not in another as is an accident; to substand is the same thing as to be placed under another. From this it is clear that “to be” expresses that which is common to all of the categories (genera); but “to subsist” and “to substand” is that which is proper to the first category (praedicamentum) as two things that belong to it—that is, that which is a being (ens) complete in itself; and again that which underlies all other accidents, namely, what has being (esse) in a substance.

Thomas tells us that the words “essence,” “subsistence,” and “substance” are distinguished not according to their modes of signifying because all of these words can be used to signify in the concrete mode or in the abstract mode. Thus, “essence” can be said of that which is or that by which something is (e.g. Socrates may be called an essence and the humanity by virtue of which Socrates is human may be called an essence). Likewise, “subsistence” may be said of that which subsists and that by which something subsists; and “substance” may be said that which substands and that by which something substands. Thus, these terms are distinguished not according to concrete or abstract
modes, but rather by virtue of the acts which they name. For, “essence” is named after the act of being, “subsistence” is named after the act of subsisting, and “substance” is named after the act of substanding. Thomas also tells us that “to be” signifies something undetermined to a mode of being and common to all of the categories, whereas “to subsist” signifies the mode of being *per se* and thus primarily belongs to substances.

Here we find, again, the structure of being that is common to all of the categories and the categories distinguished according to diverse modes of being. Now, it is important to note that Thomas specifies “being *per se*” as the mode of being which “to subsist” signifies. This is why Thomas says that, whereas “to be” is something common to all of the categories, “to subsist” is something that pertains primarily to the category of substance. Let’s continue with the same passage:

Unde dico, quod “essentia” dicitur cujus actus est esse, “subsistentia” cujus actus est subsistere, “substantia” cujus actus est substare. [c.i] Hoc autem dicetur dupliciter, sicut in singulis patet. Esse enim est actus alicujus ut quod est, sicut calefacere est actus caloris. [c.ii] Sciendum est autem, quod si aliquid consequitur aliqua plura convenientia ad invicem, non potest denominari aliquid [T10c] Hence, I say that “essence” is said of that act which is to be (*esse*), “subsistence” that act which is to subsist, “substance” that act which is to substand. [c.i] This is said in two ways, as is clear in each case. For, to be is the act of something as that which is, just as to heat is the act of what heats; and [to be] belongs to something as that by which it is, namely, that by which it is denominated to be, just as to heat is the act of heat. [c.ii] It should be understood,
secundum alterum illorum, quamvis etiam
illud sit principium totius, sed per totum:
verbi gratia, sapor consequitur calidum et
humidum, prout aliquo modo conveniunt:
et quamvis calor sit principium saporis
sicut effectivum, non tamen aliquid
denominatur sapidum a calore, sed a
sapore qui complectitur simul calidum et
humidum aliquo modo convenientia.
Similiter dico, quodcum esse consequitur
compositionem materiae et formae,
quamvis forma sit principium esse, non
tamen denominatur aliquod ens a forma
sed a toto; et ideo essentia non dicit
formam tantum; sed in compositis ex
materia et forma, dicit totum; et hoc etiam
dicitur quidditas et natura rei; et ideo dicit
Boetius in praedicamentis quod usia
significat compositum ex materia et
forma. Sed ista natura sic considerata,
quamvis dicat compositum ex materia et
forma, non tamen ex hac materia
demonstrata determinatis accidentibus
then, that if something follows upon
several things that are in accord with each
other, it cannot be denominated something
in accord with any one of those, even
though that may even be the principle of
the whole, but [it must be denominated]
after the whole. For example, taste
follows heat and humidity according as
they agree in some manner: and although
heat is the principle of taste as effective
[of it], something is not called “tasty”
from “heat” but instead from “taste,”
which includes both heat and humidity in
some fitting combination. Likewise, I say
that since being (esse) follows the
composition of matter and form, although
the form is the principle of being (esse),
something is not called a being (ens) from
the form, but from the whole. And for this
reason “essence” does not express form
only, but in composites of matter and
form it expresses the whole. And this is
also called the “whatness” or “nature” of
substante, in qua individuatur forma; quia the thing. And so Boethius says that
hujusmodi compositum dicit hoc nomen “ousia” signifies the composite of matter
Socrates. Haec autem materia and form. But “nature,” considered in this
demonstrata, est sicut recipiens illam way, although it expresses what is
naturamcommunem. [c.iii] Et ideo natura composed of matter and form, does not
vel essentia significatur dupliciter: scilicet [express it as] from this matter, designated
ut pars, secundum quod natura communis by determinate accidents that it underlies,
sumitur cum praecisione cujuslibet ad in which a form is individuated; for, this
naturam communem non pertinentis; sic name “Socrates” expresses a composite of
enim materia demonstrata supervenit in such a kind. And this signate matter is, as
compositionem singularis demonstrati, it were, what receives that common
sicut hoc nomen humanitas, et sic non nature. [c.iii] And so “nature” or
praedicatur, nec est genus, nec est species, “essence” is signified in two ways: [1] as
sed ea formaliter denominatur homo; vel a part, insofar as the common nature is
significatur ut totum, secundum quod ea taken with precision from whatever does
quae ad naturam communem pertinent,
sine praecisione intelliguntur; sic enim not pertain to the common nature; for, in
includitur in potentia etiam materia this manner, signate matter enters into
(demonstrata in natura communi, et sic the composition of the
significatur hoc nomine homo, et signate singular; just as [occurs in the case
significatur ut quod est. Et utroque modo of] this word “humanity,” and in this way
invenitur hoc nomen essentia. Unde it is not predicated, either is it a genus or
quandoque dicimus Socratem esse a species, but [instead] it is that by which
the term] “human” is formally
essentiam quamdam; quandoque dicimus, quod essentia Socratis non est Socrates: et sic patet quod essentia quandoque dicit quo est, ut significatur nomine humanitatis; et quandoque quod est ut significatur hoc nomine homo.

denominated. Or, [2] [“nature” or “essence”] is signified as a whole, insofar as those things that pertain to the common nature are understood without precision; for, [under this consideration,] even the signate matter is included potentially in the common nature, and in this way human is signified by this name, and it is signified as “that which is.” This word “essence” is found in both of these modes [of signifying]. Hence, sometimes we say that Socrates is a certain essence, and sometimes we say that the essence of Socrates is not Socrates. In this way it is clear that sometimes “essence” expresses “that by which [x] is,” as is signified by this word “humanity,” and sometimes [essence expresses] “that which is,” as is signified by the word “human.”

This portion of the text is notably long and the argument is a bit difficult to follow, so I have attempted to divide it into more manageable parts. In c.i, Thomas tells us that “to be” is said in two ways: for, “to be” signifies the act of a thing as the act of what is (quod est) and as the act by which it is what it is (quo est). Thomas compares “to be” with “to
heat” here: just as “to heat” signifies, on the one hand, the act of heating which is the act of what heats, and, on the other hand, “to heat” signifies the act by which heat acts, so too does “to be” signify, on the one hand, the act of a being (the \(\text{actus entis} = \text{actus essendi}\)), and, on the other hand, “to be” signifies the being by which a thing is a being (the essence).

Without much explanation, Thomas jumps immediately into c.ii where he tells us that something that is constituted by many things gets its name from what has all of those things and not just from one of those things. Thus, although the sense of taste is the result of humidity and heat, one cannot call tasty simply the “hot” or “humid”—otherwise, wherever there is heat, there would be flavor, or, likewise, wherever there is humidity. Similarly, since in order “to be” a sensible substance, something must be composed of form and matter, one is not able to name a sensible substance as a whole “the formal” simply based on its form even though the form is the principle of being for the sensible substance. This is why the terms “essence,” “nature,” and “whatness” signify not only the form of a thing, but also a thing’s matter. For example, it is a stretch to call a disembodied human soul a human being precisely because what it is to be a human is to be a certain kind of animal with, therefore, a certain kind of body and bodily operation. Human beings simply are not disembodied souls (despite how frustrating this might be at times).

Thomas also explains that the matter that is signified in the term “essence” is not the particular matter of an individual. For, the term “human” signifies neither the flesh and bone of Socrates nor of Plato, but rather flesh and blood generally. If you wanted to signify the flesh and blood of Socrates, you should use the proper name “Socrates” rather
than the common name “human.” So, the terms “essence,” “nature,” and “whatness” that signify both form and matter can signify only the matter that is common to essence in question. Thus, the matter that belongs in the definition of “human” includes flesh, blood, and bones, etc., but does not signify the particular matter of any one human, e.g. the matter of Socrates or Plato. For this reason, in one sense the matter of a human being is in the very definition of a “human being” and, in another sense, the matter of a particular human being is not in the very definition of “human being.” Thomas concludes that, because of these two different ways of considering how matter relates to the definition, there are two ways we can signify the nature or essence: in one sense as the formal part that prescinds from the particular matter (e.g. Socrates’s or Plato’s matter), and thus signifies only that by which something is; and, in a second sense, without prescinding from the particular matter, and thus signifies “that which is” as a whole. For example, we can signify the essence or nature of a human either with the term “humanity” or “human.” In the first case, “humanity” signifies only that which is common to all humans and excludes the particular matter that is beyond the common humanity by which Socrates and Plato are humans. In the second case, “human” signifies the composite of form and matter and, thus, while signifying the common nature by virtue of which a human is a human, includes potentially, as it were, under its signification also the matter and attendant accidents that come with being a particular human. As a result, this bald thing can be called “human,” though not “humanity.”

Thomas concludes, following Aristotle’s *Meta.* Z.6, that because “essence” or “nature” is said in two ways, there is a sense it which it is true to say, for example, that Socrates is his very essence and, in another sense, that Socrates is not his very essence. In
the first sense, “essence” signifies the whole composite thing that is Socrates. Thus, in this sense, it is true to say that Socrates is his essence because his essence is simply “human,” and “to be Socrates” is to be human; this is a properly basic fact—we cannot ask “why is Socrates a human?” because there is no answer other than “he simply is—a human is what Socrates is.” But, in another sense, it is true to say that Socrates is not his own essence. For, while it is true that to be human is what Socrates is and that is all there is to it, it is not conversely true to say that to be Socrates is all there is to being a human. For, to be a human does not include those peculiarities that being Socrates includes: namely, being snub-nosed, being generally discolched, being able to drink you under the table, etc. In an important sense, Socrates is more than just a human—he is this unshod, wise, snub-nosed, gadfly of a human. These are mutually incompatible ways of using the word “essence,” but both manners of speaking are grounded in the metaphysical composition of things and, thus, both touch on something of the truth about essences.

So, let us just quickly review what we have learned thus far before we move on: the difference between words like “essence,” “substance,” and “subsistence” is in the act from which the name is imposed. “Essence” is named after the act of being. Now, “to be” is something indeterminate and common to all of the categories. Moreover, “to be” can signify either the act of something as what it is or it can signify that by which it is. “Essence” is based on the first of these. There are two ways of taking “essence:” first, as identical to a thing; second, as not identical—just as no part is identical with the whole of which it is a part.

Next, Thomas directs his attention towards “to subsist,” and there we find a similar analysis.
Similiter etiam subsistere est actus alicujus ut quod subsistit, vel ut quo subsistit. Cum autem subsistere dicat determinatum, et tota determinatio essendiconsequatur formam, quae terminus est, constat quod aliquid denominatur subsistens per primam formam, quae est in genere substantiae, sicut album per albedinem, et animatum per animam: et ideo in praedicamentis dicit Boetius quod usiosis vel subsistentia est forma accipiens subsistentiam, pro quo subsistitur. Si autem accipiatur subsistentia pro eo quod subsistit, sic propriie dicitur illud in quo per prius invenitur talis natura hoc modo essendi. Et cum per prius inveniatur in substantia, secundum quod substantia est; et deinceps in aliis, secundum quod propinquius se habent ad substantiam: constat quod nomen subsistentiae per prius convenit generibus et speciebus in genere substantiae, ut dicit Boetius, et individuis

[T10d] Similarly, “to subsist” is also the act of something as that which subsists or as that by which it subsists. Since “to subsist” expresses “a determinate being (esse),” and every determination of being (essendi) follows form, which is the terminus, there is agreement that something is denominated “subsistent” (subsistens) through the primary form, which is in the genus of substance, just as what is white (album) [is denominated white] through whiteness, and the animate [is denominated animate] through soul (anima). And so Boethius says that “ousiosis” (or “subsistentia”) is a form receiving [as it were] subsistence by which it subsists. If “subsistence” is taken for that which subsists, in this sense it is properly called that in which such a nature is primarily found in this mode of being (modus essendi). And since it is first of all found in substance insofar as it is substance, and after that in other [items]
non convenit habere tale esse, nisi inquantum sunt sub tali natura communi. Quamvis enim genera et species non subsistant nisi in individuis, quorum est esse, tamen determinatio essendi fit ex natura vel quidditate superiori. according as they are related in comparative proximity to substance, it is agreed that the word “subsistence” primarily belongs to the genera and species in the genus of substance, as Boethius says, and it belongs to individuals to have such being only insofar as they are under some such common nature. For, although genera and species do not subsist except in individuals, to which belongs being (esse), the determination of being (essendi) comes to be from the nature or the superior quiddity.

Thomas explains that, just as “essentia” can signify quod est or quo est, so too can “subsistentia” be taken in the sense of either “what subsists” or “that by which it subsists.” In the first case, “subsistence” is said primarily of those things in the category of substance because only substances have the determinate mode of being per se (i.e. not being in a subject). However, other items (accidents) might be called “subsistences” insofar as they relate to substance, which subsists. Now, in the sense of “that by which it subsists,” Thomas tells us that “to subsist” signifies “determinate being (esse)” or “a determinate mode of being” (see [T10b] above) and that “every determination follows form.” Thus, that by which a thing subsists is its form or common nature. This is what is
meant when it is said that an individual subsists “under a common nature”: for, the
determinate mode of being that a thing has is through the common nature. We are already
familiar with this idea, though in a different context: in the (quasi) definition of
substance, Thomas tells us that “being per se” is something that is owed or suited to the
essence of the substance. As we saw from [T10b] above, “being per se” is the
determinate mode of being proper to substance. Thus, we can see that this doctrine laid
out here is the same doctrine: the mode of being “being per se” befits the essence of a
substance and is had through the essence or form.

So, on the one hand, there is a sense in which the essence is not determined to a
mode of being by virtue of itself, but comes to have this determination. On the other
hand, there is a sense in which this determination is suited to the essence. Tomarchio
recognizes a sort of mutual relation between essence and mode of being as the mode of
being is not reducible to the essence because it pertains to a different order of causality,
but is yet “proportionate” to the essence. So the mode of ‘being per se’ pertains
properly to substance and the mode of ‘being in a subject’ pertains properly to accidents.
Though this is a fact about the essences of substances and accidents, it is an existential
fact: the mode of being is the condition of existence due to an essence by virtue of itself.
It is the “how a thing is when or if it is.”

The Relationship between Essence and Mode of Being. On this account, then, a
mode of being belongs properly to the essence. One should not find an essence without
its proper mode of being. That is true for the natural order. But even Thomas the
theologian uses the Avicennian doctrine to explain the exceptional case of the accidents
in the case of the Lord’s supper, the case of a miracle.

32 Tomarchio, “Aquinas’s Division of Being according to Modes of Existing,” 600.
Ad primum ergo dicendum, quod  inesse non dicit esse accidentis absolute, sed magis modum essendi qui sibi competit ex ordine ad causam proximam sui esse. Et quia remoto ordine accidentis ad causam proximam, adhuc potest remanere ordo ipsius ad causam primam, secundum quem modus ipsius essendi non est inesse, sed ab alio esse; ideo potest Deus facere quod sit accidens, et non insit: nec tamen esse accidentis ab accidente removebitur, sed modus essendi.

To the first it must be said that “to be in” does not signify the being (esse) of an accident absolutely, but rather the mode of being that belongs to it from the order of its being (esse) in relation to its proximate cause. For, when the order of the accident in relation to its proximate cause is removed, still its order to the First Cause is able to remain, thanks to which [cause] its mode of being (modus essendi) is not “to be in” (inesser) but “to be from another” (ab alio esse). For this reason, God is able to make it such that it is an accident and it does not inhere. However, the being (esse) of the accident will not be removed from the accident, but rather its mode of being.

In this text, Thomas tells us that “being in” (inesser) a subject is not the being (esse) of an accident, but it is rather the mode of being that belongs properly to an accident. This point is important to his argument because, if “being in” belonged to the very essence of an accident, then when God makes it such that the substance of the eucharist is changed while the accidents persist seemingly without a subject, it would
follow that God has made an accident not an accident, which is an obvious logical contradiction. But thanks to his Avicennian education, Thomas has a way around this issue: “being in” is not the very essence and definition of an accident. Rather, it is the mode of being proper to an accident. Reference to the mode of being is included in the definition of an accident, in the (quasi) differentia term, but it is not the entire definition, just as Avicenna has explained. Thus, inhering is not what it is to be an accident. For, as Thomas says, God does not remove the essence of the accident from itself, but the mode of being. And even in this case he does not give the accident the mode of being “being per se and not in a subject,” as if an accident had the mode of being of a substance; but rather he gives it a new mode of being: being “from another” (ab alio esse). For, even though the accidents of the blessed sacrament are no longer related to their standard proximate cause (namely, the substance), they are in this miraculous case subsistent through the very divine power itself.33

But this text is anomalous in that Thomas suggests that the mode of being in the accidents can be changed. Thomas is walking a thin line: he has to find a way to explain how it is the case that the accidents of the blessed sacrament are able to persist without their subject while yet remaining accidents. For, if Thomas admits that God has made the accidents into substances, and if substances and accidents are mutually exclusive, then

33 Thomas finds the justification for this claim in the Liber de causis, a Latin translation of the Kalām f-l-maḥd al-khayr, an Arabic translation/adaptation of Proclus’s Elements of Theology. The Liber de causis was standard reading in the arts curriculum of the universities of Thomas’s age. Thomas was the first author to recognize that the text was not written by Aristotle. See Thomas Aquinas, Sent. 4 d. 12 q. 1 a. 1 qc. 1 co.: “sicut dicitur prima propositione libri De causis, ‘causa prima est vehementioris impressionis supra causatum causae secundae quam ipsa causa secunda’. Unde quando causa secunda removet influentiam suam a causato, adhuc potest remanere influentia causae primae in causatum illud; sicut remoto rationali, remanet vivum, quo remoto remanet esse. Cum ergo causa prima accidentium et omnium existentium Deus sit; causa autem secunda accidentium sit substantia, quia accidentia ex principiis substantiae causantur; poterit Deus accidentia in esse conservare, remota etiam causa secunda, scilicet substantia.” For more on Thomas’s knowledge of the Liber de causis, see Richard Taylor, “Aquinas, the ‘Plotiniana Arabica’ and the Metaphysics of Being and Actuality,” Journal of the History of Ideas 59 no. 2 (1998): 217-239.
God seems to have done something not just miraculous, but also impossible. For, making an accident to be the sort of thing to which existing in a subject is not due is as incoherent as making the number three not prime—if it is not prime, then it cannot be three and, likewise, if it is the sort of thing to which to be not in a subject is due, then it cannot be an accident.

In response, Thomas emphasizes that the accidents of the blessed sacrament remain accidents, and his argument for this view, surprisingly, relies on the intimate connection between the essence and the mode of being.

[T12: Aquinas, *Sent.* 4 d. 12 q. 1 a. 1 qc. 1 ad 3 (499-500)]

Ad tertium dicendum quod sicut ab accidentibus in hoc sacramento removetur esse in subjecto, ita convenit eis non esse in subjecto. Unde non ponitur aliquid medium inter affirmationem et negationem. Nec tamen sequitur quod definition alicui conveniat cui non convenit definitum; quia non esse in substantia non est definitio substantiae, ut substantia non est definitio substantiae, ut medium inter affirmationem et negationem. Hence, some middle between affirmation and negation is not posited [as the objector alleges seems needed to avoid contradiction]. Nevertheless, it does not follow that the definition belongs to

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34 Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones de quolibet*, in *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita* (Commissio Leonina: Rome, 1996), q. 3 ad 2 (99, 78-95): “Ad secundum dicendum, quod secundum Avicennam in sua Metaph., esse non potest poni in definitione alicuius generis et speciei, quia omnia particularia unuiuntur in definitione generis vel speciei, cum tamen genus vel species non sit secundum unum esse in omnibus. Et ideo haec non est vera definitio substantiae: substantia est quod per se est; vel: accidens est quod est in alio. Sed est circumlocutio verae descriptionis, quae talis intelligitur: substantia est res cuius naturae debetur esse non in alio; accidens vero est res, cuius naturae debetur esse in alio. Unde patet quod, quamvis accidens miraculo sit non in subiecto, non tamen pertinet a definitionem subsidiæ; non enim per hoc eius naturae debetur esse non in alio; nec egreditur definitionem accidentis, quia adhuc natura eius remanet talis ut ei debatur esse in alio.”
dictum est, sed habere quidditatem cui tale esse competat. Et hoc non convenit eis ex ratione suae quidditatis, sed divina virtute. something to which the defined does not belong because “not to be in a substance” is not the definition of substance, as was said, but “to have a quiddity to which such being is suited” (competat) [is the definition of substance], and this [namely, to have a quiddity to which it belongs not to be in a substance] does not belong to them [namely, the accidents] from the ratio of their quiddity, but by divine power.

The reason that these accidents are not turned into substances at the consecration is that they never attain to the definition of a substance. The (quasi) definition of substance, Thomas tells us, is to be an essence to which is suited the mode of being not in a subject. But, in the case of the accidents of the blessed sacrament, they have the same definition as before, to be an essence to which the mode of being in a subject is suited, whereas they have the mode of being not in a subject through the divine power which conserves them. So it is true that the accidents in the blessed sacrament are not in a subject, but they do not have this mode because they are accidents, but rather because God conserves them. Not only is this Thomas’s standard treatment of the issue of the eucharistic accidents, but this is also his standard treatment of the relationship between essence and mode of being generally. We have seen above in §1 that Thomas is consistent about saying that the mode of being is “owed to” or “belongs” to the essence. Moreover, we saw in T10 the
view that subsistence (i.e. having a determinate mode of being) is had through the primary form/common nature. In the case of accidents, the mode of being in the natural order is in and through the subject. But anything that happens through a secondary cause can happen through the primary cause alone. Hence, the extention of the bread continues without the substance of the bread. But the extension’s existence is no longer “through the bread” but is now from God alone through a miracle. The being of the accident is the same—it remains the sort of thing to which being in a subject belongs—but the mode of being is different by subtraction.

So, what are we to make of this text where Thomas says that God can and does remove the mode of being from accidents in the eucharist when, elsewhere, he denies that “being (esse) in a subject” can be removed?35 A coherent account of this statement can be given, but in order to do that we need to make a distinction: when Thomas says that “being in a subject” is removed from the accident, he means, first, that the actual substance in which that accident is existing is removed, not that the essential disposition36 of accidents to inhere in subjects is removed. What is removed in this case is not the disposition to “being in a subject” generally, we might say, but rather actually being in this very subject here and now. This is precisely why the situation is miraculous and not a paradox: God does not make the accident a substance (for, such is impossible), but he removes the subject in which the accidents of the bread and wine actually inhere, while

35 See [T3] above: “Et similiter esse in subjecto non est definitio accidentis, sed e contrario res cui debetur esse in alio. Et hoc nunquam separat ab aliquo accidente, nec separat potest; quia illi rei quae est accidens, secundum rationem suae quidditatis, semper debetur esse in alio.” (“And, likewise, to be in a subject is not the definition of an accident, but, on the contrary, it is ‘a thing to which to be in another is owed.’ This is never separated from some accident, nor is it able to be separated because it pertains to that thing which is an accident, according to the ratio of its quiddity, always to be owed “being (esse) in another.”)

36 For “being in a subject” as like a disposition of accidents, see Gyula Klima, “Natural Necessity and Eucharistic Theology in the late 13th century,” https://faculty.fordham.edu/klima/EUCHARIST.HTM.
continuing to hold the accidents in existence.

We can see the distinction with an example: it pertains essentially to every human to have some body, but it does not pertain essentially to every human to have Socrates’s body (even Theaetetus merely resembled Socrates). In this sense, we could say that human nature demands, or is owed, a body, but not any body in particular. So too with this case of “being in a subject” and accidents: the essence of an accident demands, or is owed, a subject, but it is not owed any subject in particular. It belongs to the essence of an accident to be in a subject generally, but not in Socrates in particular.

So, when Thomas speaks of the mode of being in a subject being removed from an accident or changed, we should understand Thomas to mean that the subject in particular is removed—i.e. this or that actual bread and wine prior to consecration—and, thus, “actually being in this particular subject” is removed from the accident. This seems to be what Thomas is referring to when he mentions the accident’s “proximate cause”: the proximate cause of an accident is not just any subject or subjects in general, but a particular subject, and this is what Thomas holds is removed. Though Thomas’s choice of wording (“removed”) at the end of the text is a bit regrettable, I think it is clear enough in the text that a mode of being for the eucharistic accidents has not been removed, but merely changed. It is not as though the eucharistic accidents, after consecration, have no mode of being of which to speak. The eucharistic accidents undergo a change in their mode of being—they do not lose it. Why would this result in a change in the mode of being? Recall that the mode of being is proportionate to, is due to substance and accident in virtue of their definitions: being in or not in a subject. If the subject is removed, so is the mode of being that was through the subject. A different mode of being is present: to
be from (alone), not through.

Perhaps an alternative explanation would be to say: substance is by definition an essence to which the mode of being “being through itself” is due. Accidents that persist never attain the mode of being “being through itself.” If they had that, their persistence would not be miraculous (but it would involve a contradiction: they would be essences to which being through itself belongs). All of this discussion indicates a key point that addresses Tomarchio’s claim that modes of being stand to existence as species stands to essence. I submit that modes of being are instead adverbial. They modulate the act by which something is, they do not determine its essential content. Thus, for a mode of being to be lost is not for being to be lost, as if there must be a substantial change in being. An adverbial character or modulation of being is affected: the being of accidents is no longer in and through, it is merely from (miraculously).

But, it might be objected, since the subject in which the eucharistic accidents inhere is removed, and a mode of being is a relation to a subject, then how is it not the case that, since the relation to the subject is removed, so too is the mode of being (not just the “being in this subject,” but “being in a subject” simpliciter) removed? This is no mere change from one relation to another—rather, this is the removal of a relatum. If one removes a relatum, does one not thereby remove the relation? Thus, is not the mode of being removed? My response is that the eucharistic accidents now are identical with their subject—i.e. they are themselves subjects—and, as we saw in *In Meta.* 5 1. 9, identity with a subject is considered among the ways of relating to a subject. Note well that this does not entail that, because they are identical with their subjects, they are therefore substances. For, as we have already seen, Thomas says that, in order to be a substance,
one must be not in a subject *through your essence*. Since the eucharistic accidents are
themselves subjects after consecration but because of the divine power and not because of
their essences, they do not attain to the definition of substance and, thus, remain accidents
despite being not in a subject.

So, there are two important things I think we should note: first, there is a
difference between being owed being in a subject and being owed being in *this particular*
subject. One is always true of an accident because the accident always has this
disposition towards being in a subject and the other is not because the essence of an
accident has no disposition to be in a particular subject. If we take “being in a subject” in
this latter sense, then it is possible for “being in a subject” to be removed from the
accident, but in the first former sense it is impossible.

The second point is that Thomas’s Avicennian (quasi) definition of substance and
accident make use of a broader metaphysical doctrine found in Thomas: the universal
role of essence or form as that through which a thing has being.37 In denying that
eucharistic accidents become substances because they are not in a subject, Thomas makes
it very clear that the fundamental insight to be found in the Avicennian (quasi) definition
of substance is that being a substance is not the same thing as having the mode of being
not in a subject, and this is part of a larger insight about what it means to be in a category:
namely, having a determinate mode of being is not the same thing as being in a category,
as being a substance or accident.

I think we can see this insight rather clearly if we ask this question: why is it the

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37See Lawrence Dewan, “St. Thomas, Metaphysical Procedure, and the Formal Cause,” in *Form and
2006), 169-171; Lawrence Dewan, “St. Thomas, Metaphysics, and Formal Causality,” in *Form and Being:
138-139.
case that negation, privation, generation, and corruption are not among the categories?

After all, Thomas says that the categories are diversified according to diverse grades or
development of being, and privation, negation, generation, and corruption are all grades or
modes of being. So, why are they not considered among the categories? Why do we not
talk about e.g. the eleventh category of privation? I have already offered an answer to this
question above: it is because a privation does not have an essence. Likewise, a negation
does not have an essence. Generation and corruption too are not things having essences,
but rather are processes that things having essences undergo.

So, when we think about what it takes to be in a category, it cannot just be that
one has a determinate mode of being. For, otherwise, not only would it be the case that
being not in a subject would be sufficient for the eucharistic accidents to be in the
category of substance, but so too would privations, negations, corruption, and generation
have to be categories or be in categories as well. But, as it stands, having the mode of
being not in a subject is not sufficient grounds for being in the category of substance, and
further, having any mode of being is not sufficient grounds for being in a category.

Rather, the things in the categories are those things that have determinate essences and the
mode of being that, at least in the natural order, pertains to them according to their
essences.

4. Conclusion

Unlike the preceding commentary tradition that thought of “being not in a
subject” as something akin to a property, concomitant, or completer of substance,
Thomas Aquinas gives an account of “being not in a subject” as a mode of being. I have
argued in Chapter 5 that we should think of a mode of a being as the adverbial way in
which the act of being or existence belongs to the essence that it actualizes. The categories express diverse modes of being precisely because these modes are diverse ways in which substances and accidents exist, when they actually exist.

Are there any benefits to thinking of “being not in a subject” and “being in a subject” as a mode of being rather than as a property, concomitant, or completer? Aquinas’s view avoids an issue that has plagued the commentary tradition from the beginning. As we saw in Chapter 3, the commentators thought of the categories as a division of being rather than, say, a division of substance. Moreover, the commentators were in agreement that being is not a genus and cannot be divided as is a genus—namely, into species according to diverse differentiae. So, it is of paramount importance that, if we think of the categories as a division of being and of the categories as distinct from each other according as substance is not in a subject and the accidents are in a subject, then we must not think of “being not in a subject” and “being in a subject” as anything like differentiae. Otherwise, the categories would be like species of being and being would be a genus.

Despite the importance of avoiding describing “being not in a subject” as like a differentia, the commentators continually struggled to find the language to do this. For, the term “completer,” when not used of “being not in a subject,” was primarily used of the differentia. Avicenna too struggled to find language unrelated to the differentia: his term “constitutional property” is also used of the differentia. Aquinas’s use of “modes of being,” unlike the language of “completer” or “constitutional property,” is not connected to the differentia. Aquinas’s understanding of the categories as modes of being reveals a way of dividing common being into the various categories without recourse to a
differentia dividing a genus. Of course, there still are quasi-differentiae, so to speak, in the categories: to be due a certain mode of being, whether in a subject or through itself. But the separation of the orders of existence from essence, and the primacy of the order of existence with mode of being eases the tension in speaking of being as a (quasi) genus. Being (ens) for Thomas is divided into ten essences distinguished according to ten modulations of an act of being by which the essences are actualized and perfected.
Chapter VI: Aquinas’s Categories Argument for the Real Distinction between Being and Essence

1. Introduction

As we saw in the previous chapter, Thomas’s Avicennian (quasi) definition of substance tells us a great deal about what it means to be in a category: what is in the categories are items having essences to which are owed a determinate mode of being (modus essendi) by which they have being in act (esse in actu). For substances, the mode of being proper to them, is being (esse) not in a subject or being per se. For accidents, the proper mode of being is “being in a subject.” Thomas uses the phrase “mode of being” of things other than substances and accidents: he uses it to talk about privations, negations, generation, corruption, and the state of the essence in particulars and in the mind. I have argued that all of these uses of “mode of being” have in common that they signify ways that essences relate to a subject: substances are subjects; accidents are in subjects; generation and corruption are the processes towards and away from a subject; privations and negations are the lack of something in a subject; and the states of the essence are the essence relative to an extramental subject and the mind as a subject. The essence in itself is not related to a subject and, thus, does not have in itself properly a mode of being (except by negation)—it contains only what pertains to the essence. Since being (ens) is not a genus, it cannot be divided by differentiae that are formal additions to being (ens). For this reason, Thomas divides the categories according to modes of being that are not formal additions, but instead are modulations of an act of being by which essences are actualized and perfected (e.g. “not being in a subject” is not a formal addition to substance, but is how a substance has its act of being or actus essendi).

A crucial detail of this account is that having the mode of being not in a subject
does not make something a substance and, likewise, having the mode of being in a subject does not make something an accident. As Thomas explains, the reason for this is that, in order for \( x \) to belong to the category of substance, \( x \) must have a disposition \textit{in its essence} for the mode of actually being “not in a subject”; and for \( x \) to be in a category of an accident, \( x \) must have a disposition \textit{in its essence} for the mode of actually being “in a subject,” in some way. This is precisely the reason why the eucharistic accidents are not substances—namely, because they have the mode of being “not in a subject” thanks to God’s special causal intervention and not because of a disposition in their essences for actually being not in a subject.

This is not the only place in Aquinas’s corpus where the question of what it takes to be a substance or to be in the category of substance comes up. We find Thomas considering this question in one of his earliest and central arguments for the real distinction between essence and being, the Genus Argument. In this chapter, I draw out the Avicennian character of this argument. Then I show how this character can be used to answer objections against the argument. Few Thomists defend the Genus Argument; almost all regard it as fallacious. Without knowing the Avicennian background, the argument will inevitably be misread as merely logical, and as drawing a faulty inference from the genus-member relation. I respond to some characteristic instances of the objections against the Genus Argument.

2. The Genus Argument Presented

Seven instances of the Genus Argument in Thomas’s corpus have been identified,\(^1\), and they all argue along similar lines:

\[ (1) \text{If the essence by virtue of which the members of a genus are in a genus is} \]

\(^1\) Twetten, “Really Distinguishing Essence from \textit{Esse},” 57-58.
identical with their being (esse), then there is one common being for all members of a genus.

(2) But, it is not the case that there is one common being for all members of a genus.

(3) Therefore, it is not the case that the essence by virtue of which the members of a genus are in a genus is identical with their being.

Let us take a look at some examples:

[T1: Aquinas, De ente et essentia ch. 5 (378, 3-14)]

Aliquid enim est sicut Deus cuius essentia est ipsummet suum esse; et ideo inueniuntur aliqui philosophi dicentes quod Deus non habet quiditatem uel essentiam, quia essentia sua non est aliud quam esse eius. Et ex hoc sequitur quod ipse non sit in genere; quia omne quod est in genere oportet quod habeat quiditatem preter esse suum, cum quiditas uel natura generis aut speciei non distinguatur secundum rationem nature in illis quorum est genus uel species, sed esse est diuersum in diuersis.

For, there is a thing, namely, God, whose essence is his very own being (esse); and so some philosophers are found saying that God does not have a quiddity or essence because his essence is not other than his being. And it follows from this that He is not in a genus because it is requisite that everything that is in a genus have a quiddity beyond (preter) its being since the quiddity or nature of the genus and the species is not distinguished according to the ratio of the nature in those things of whose genus or species it is, but rather being (esse) is diverse in diverse things.
In this very clear presentation of the Genus Argument, we may observe that it
applies equally to species. The argument is also found at a high point in a mature work.
In considering the nature of God in the Summa theologiae, it is natural to ask whether
God is in a genus. Aquinas answers,

[T2: Aquinas, Summa theologiae 1 q. 3 a. 5 co. (44, a19-b5)]

Tertio, quia omnia quae sunt in genere uno, communicant in quidditate vel essentia generis, quod praedicatur de eis in eo quod quid est. Differunt autem secundum esse: non enim idem est esse hominis et equi, nec huius hominis et illius hominis. Et sic oportet quod quaecumque sunt in genere, different in eis esse et quod quid est, idest essentia. In Deo autem non differt, ut ostensum est. Unde manifestum est quod Deus non est in genere sicut species.

Third, [God is not in a genus] because all [items] that are in one genus share in the quiddity or essence of the genus, which [genus] is predicated of them “in the ‘what [x] is’” [that is, in a quidditative manner]. But, they differ according to being (esse): for, the being of a human is not the same as the being of a horse, nor[is the being] of this human [the same as the being of] that human. And in this way, it is requisite that as regards whatever things are in a genus, being (esse) and “that which it is”—that is, essence—differ in them. But in God they do not differ, as has been shown. Hence it is clear that God is not in a genus as [is] a species.

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2 Thomas Aquinas, Pars prima Summae theologiae a Quaestione I ad Quaestionem XLIX, in Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera omnia iussu impensaque Leonis XIII P.M. Edita (Polyglotta S.C. de Propaganda Fide: Rome, 1888), 40.
A similar question is asked in the *Summa contra gentiles* ca. 1259, and Aquinas answers:

[T3: Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* 1 ch. 25 (76)]

Quicquid est in genere secundum esse differt ab aliis quae in eodem genere sunt: alias genus de pluribus non praedicaretur. Oportet autem omnia quae sunt in eodem genere, in quidditate generis convenire: quia de omnibus genus in quod quid est praedicatur. Esse igitur cuiuslibet existentis est praeter generis quidditatem

Whatever is in a genus differs from other things that are in the same genus in regards to being (*esse*): otherwise, the genus would not be predicated of many things. But it is requisite that all things that are in the same genus agree in the quiddity of the genus: because the genus is predicated of all things “in the ‘what it is,’” [that is, in a quidditative manner]. Therefore, the being (*esse*) of each existent [item] (*existentis*) in a genus is beyond (*praeter*) the quiddity of the genus.

Perhaps the actual existence that is in question in the members of a genus is most evident in the last line of the last passage: “Therefore, the being (*esse*) of each existent [item] (*existentis*) in a genus is beyond (*praeter*) the quiddity of the genus.”

We might recognize Avicenna’s influence in these passages only insofar as both Avicenna and Aquinas affirm the necessity of there being a distinction between being and essence for things in a genus. What stands out at a glance is how different Aquinas’s reasoning is from Avicenna’s. In Chapter 4, we saw Avicenna argue that “being in act”
cannot belong to a substance necessarily and essentially; and so, that whereby a substance actually exists must enter into composition with the essence whereby a substance is in the category of substance. But this does not appear to be Aquinas’s reasoning at all. Aquinas does not here invoke the Avicennian definition of substance. Instead, Aquinas reasons to the conclusion that there must be a distinction between esse and essence because things that are in a genus share one essence, but do not share one being or esse. Whereas Avicenna’s argument concerns the sense of “being” in the locution “being not in a subject,” Aquinas does not appear to be concerned with “being not in a subject” or the sense of “being” operative in the locution (a part of the definition).

Moreover, unlike Avicenna’s explicit mention of the categories in his Dānesh Nāmeh, Thomas overwhelmingly uses the term “genus” rather than “category” in his argumentation. This has led some commentators to infer that Thomas is attempting to make a logical point and then, somehow, move to a metaphysical point; many have expressed confusion about how this move is meant to work. In the texts that I shall discuss below, I show that we can safely gloss “genus” or “genera” as “category” and “categories” when Thomas’s background in Avicenna is taken into consideration.

It is imperative, then, first of all, to examine the seeming dissimilarity between what I have called Avicenna’s Categories Argument and Aquinas’s Genus Argument. I argue that Thomas’s Genus Argument is not so different from Avicenna’s Categories Argument when read in the right light, so to speak. I then direct my attention to the version of the Genus Argument that we find in Thomas’s De veritate. This text is well-

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known in the literature and appears to be Thomas’s most metaphysically robust formulation of the argument— that is, it most clearly affirms a real composition of essence and being in the category of substance (as in Avicenna’s reasoning). As I show below, this text opens up onto perhaps the most complete presentation of Aquinas’s conception of substance as regards the distinction between being and essence.

3. Avicennian Themes in Aquinas’s Genus Argument

Let us begin by reviewing Avicenna’s Categories Argument for the real distinction between being and essence. Avicenna’s Categories Argument goes like this:

(1)“Actually being” (wujūd b-fi’l) not in a subject does not belong to substance necessarily and essentially.

(1.1) Otherwise, every substance would exist necessarily of itself just as does the First.

(2) Substances that actually exist must have in them that whereby they actually exist (wujūd b-fi’l), which cannot belong to any category as such.

(3) Therefore, actually existing substances are composed of their essence and that whereby they actually exist (wujūd b-fi’l).

Avicenna argues that “being not in a subject” is a constitutional property of substance that pertains necessarily and essentially to substance qua substance. However, it does not follow from the fact that substances are essentially and necessarily beings not in subjects that said substances actually exist. Otherwise, simply by knowing that some substance x is a substance, one would also know that x actually exists. Since this consequence is absurd, it follows that “being” in the sense of “being in act” does not pertain to substance necessarily and essentially as does “being not in a subject.” For, “being in act” is not a
constitutional property of substance, but instead something external to the essence of the substance and had by virtue of a cause. Therefore, actually existing substances are composed of their essence and that whereby they actually exist.

As we saw above in [T1]-[T3], Aquinas does not appear to follow this same line of reasoning in his Genus Argument. Whereas Avicenna’s Categories Argument infers a real composition of essence and that whereby a thing actually exists from the fact that being in act is not a constitutional property of essences in the categories, Aquinas’s Genus Argument infers the same conclusion from the fact that essence and being in act cannot be identical. For, otherwise, things in a common genus would share not only a quiddity but also a common being. This is obviously absurd: for, a genus is precisely a collection of a plurality of beings sharing in a common nature.

Are these arguments at all related? They certainly share the same conclusion, but do they share any other important principles? When we examine an early presentation of the Genus Argument, the influence of Avicenna’s reasoning on Aquinas’s Genus Argument starts to emerge. In the following article from the Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard, Aquinas answers the question “whether God is in the category of substance?” He responds by saying that there are four reasons why God is not in the category of substance. Here is the third:

[T4: Aquinas, Sent. 1 d. 8 q. 4 a. 2 co. 2 (222)]

Omne quod est in genere, habet quidditatem differentem ab esse, sicut homo; humanitati enim ex hoc quod est humanitas, non debetur esse in actu; Everything that is in a genus has a quiddity that differs from [its] being (esse), e.g. a human; for, to humanity is not owed being in act (esse in actu) from
potest enim cogitari humanitas et tamen the fact that it is humanity; for, it is
ignorari an aliquis homo sit. Et ratio hujus possible for humanity to be thought and it
est, quia commune, quod praedicatur de still be unknown whether some human is.
his quae sunt in genere, praedicat And the reason for this is that the common
quidditatem, cum genus et species [term] that is predicated of those [things]
praeidicentur in eo quod quid est. Illi that are in a genus predicates the quiddity,
autem quidditati non debetur esse nisi per since genus and species are predicated “in
hoc quod suscepta est in hoc vel in illo. Et the ‘what it is’” [or quidditatively].
dero quidditas generis vel speciei non Moreover, quiddity being (esse) is not
communicatur secundum unum esse owed to the except through the fact that it
omnibus, sed solum secundum unam [the quiddity] is received in this or in that.
rationem communem. Unde constat quod For this reason, the quiddity of a genus or
esse suum non est quidditas sua. In Deo species is not made common according to
autem esse suum est quidditas sua: aliter one being (esse) for all, but only
enim accideret quidditati, et ita esset according to one common notion. Hence,
acquisitum sibi ab alio, et non haberet it is agreed that [a quiddity’s] being (esse)
esse per essentiam suam. Et ideo Deo non is not its quiddity. But in God, his being is
potest esse in aliquo genere. his essence—for, otherwise, [being]
would be accidental to [his] quiddity, and so it would be acquired by Him from
another and He would not have being through his essence. And, for this reason,
God is not able to be in any genus.
The text above is the third reason Aquinas gives that God is not in the category of substance, and he credits this argument to Avicenna (“[t]ertia ratio subtilior est Avicennae...”). According to this third argument, God cannot be in the category of substance because whatever is in the category of substance must have being (esse) distinct from its essence, and no such distinction is to be found in God. [T4] constitutes Aquinas’s explanation for why it is the case that whatever is in the category of substance must have being distinct from its essence. So, despite Aquinas’s use of the term “genus” here, which can suggest merely the logician’s use of “genus,” the context of the article tells us that the genera he has in mind are the categories or praedicamenta. For, the categories are called “genera” insofar as they are a collection of diverse things sharing some common feature. By discussing “genus” in an article ultimately aiming at proving a conclusion about real being (i.e. the categories), Thomas’s conclusion must not pertain to genus qua genus (i.e. genus qua a product of the intellect reflecting on its own operation in relation to many species or particulars, having only a remote foundation in reality). Thomas’s conclusion pertains, instead, to the foundation in reality that makes a genus a genus (i.e. the sharing in a common feature).

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4 Aquinas is well known for his disambiguation of analogous terms such as “ens,” although he does not subsequently flag them with ens-1 and ens-2. Despite the disambiguation in De ente 3, “universal,” “genus” and “species” remain among the most confusing terms in Aquinas’s text, just as they are in our own philosophical discourse. Sometimes “universal” and “genus” signify what can be said of a subject as a predicatable (that is, they signify “essence in itself” or “absolutely considered” in the language of De ente 3)—as is expressly said of “genus and species” here in [T4]; sometimes they are used in the strict sense of De ente 3 for the unity in relation to many members (whether species or particulars) that is formed by the mind and that exists only there. Accordingly, sometimes in English “universal” is synonymous with “general,” sometimes it refers to a “one-over-the-many” that can only be in an immaterial realm (whether in the mind only or in a Platonic state). Below in note 10 we shall see an example of a great Aquinas scholar thrown off by Aquinas’s use of “universal” as equivalent to “essence absolutely considered at the comparatively general level,” an example of which would be the most general categories. See Aquinas, In Meta. 7 lec. 13.

5 See, in addition to De ente 3, Aquinas, De potentia q. 1 a. 1 ad 10, and Sent. 1 d. 2 q. 2 a. 3 co.
For those familiar with Aquinas’s arguments for the distinction between being and essence, [T4] may be surprising. It is standard in the catalogues of Aquinas’s arguments for the “real distinction” to distinguish Aquinas’s *Intellectus essentiae* Argument from his Genus Argument. But here in [T4] we apparently find both the *Intellectus essentiae* Argument (from the fact that the thought of an essence does not contain the thought of its *esse* or existence) and the Genus Argument presented as one argument. Moreover, Aquinas tells us that the reason why it is possible to know a quiddity without knowing whether it actually exists (this being the principal reason for concluding an essence-being distinction in the *Intellectus essentiae* Argument) is precisely the reasoning of the Genus Argument. So, according to Aquinas in [T4], the *Intellectus essentiae* Argument works because the Genus Argument works. The reason that *esse* is not in the understanding of essence is that the ratio of the essence in any genus cannot include *esse*.

Now, regarding the Genus Argument in [T4], we find the standard argumentation that we saw in [T1]-[T3]: being and essence cannot be identical for those things in a genus; otherwise, those things sharing in the essence by virtue of which they are in the same genus also share in the same being. But Thomas’s presentation of the argument in [T4] makes clear that this line of reasoning concerning the identity of essence and being in a genus serves the purpose of proving the broader point that the essences or quiddities in a genus are not owed being in act by virtue of themselves. Thomas argues as follows:

1. Quiddities in a genus are not owed being in act by virtue of themselves.
   1.1 For, the quiddity by virtue of which things are in a genus is common to every member of the genus.
   1.2 So, If the quiddity were owed being in act by virtue of itself, then
being in act would also be common to every member of the genus.

(1.3) It is not the case that being in act is common to every member of a genus.

(1.3.1) For, otherwise, a genus could not comprise a plurality of beings.

(2) Quiddities in a genus must have in them that whereby they actually exist, which cannot belong to any genus as such.

(2.1) For, since being in act (esse in actu) is not owed to a quiddity in a genus by virtue of itself, being in act is owed to a quiddity in a genus by virtue of some external cause.

(3) Therefore everything that is in a genus has a quiddity different from being. Thomas reaches the conclusion that there must be a distinction between quiddity and being (esse) in the category of substance from the fact that “being” in the sense of “being in act” is not owed to a quiddity by virtue of itself; thus, that whereby quiddities in a genus come to be in act must be external to the quiddity. Aquinas’s presentation of the argument in [T4], though it does include a line of reasoning concerning the impossibility of the identity of being and essence in a genus that was not found in Avicenna, follows the general lines of Avicenna’s Categories Argument based on the Avicennian insight that being in act is not a constitutional property of quiddities in the categories. We can see this especially clearly if we replace Aquinas’s term “genus” with the term “category”—a strategy encouraged by the title of Aquinas’s article in [T4]: “Whether God is in the category (praedicamento) of substance?” The title indicates that Aquinas’s argument concerns being in the categories, namely, in the category of substance.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Avicenna’s Categories Argument</th>
<th>Aquinas’s Genus Argument (in <em>Sent.</em> 1 d. 8 q. 4 a. 2)</th>
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<tr>
<td>(1) “Actually being not in a subject” (wujūd b-fi’l) does not belong to substance necessarily and essentially and “actually being in a subject” does not belong to accidents necessarily and essentially.</td>
<td>(1) Everything that is in a <em>category</em> (genus) has a quiddity that differs from [its] being (esse), e.g. a human; for, to humanity is not owed <em>being in act</em> from the fact that it is humanity [...]. Moreover, to the quiddity being (esse) is not owed unless through the fact that [the quiddity] is received in this or in that.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(2) Things in the categories that actually exist must have in them that whereby they actually exist (wujūd b-fi’l), which cannot belong to any category as such.</td>
<td>(2) But in God, his being (esse) is his essence—for, otherwise, [being] would be accidental to [His] quiddity, and so it would be acquired by Him from another, and He would not have being through His essence. And, for this reason, God is not able to be in any <em>category</em> (genus).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Therefore actually existing substances and accidents are composed of their essence and that whereby they actually exist (wujūd b-fi’l).</td>
<td>(3) Everything which is in a <em>category</em> (genus) has a quiddity different from being [...].</td>
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</table>

In Aquinas’s (1), we find the Avicennian view that *being in act* (esse in actu) does not belong to essences in a genus (i.e. in a category—*praedicamentum*) by virtue of
themselves. Thus, things in a category must have being in act—which does not belong to the category as such. This can be seen in Aquinas’s (2), where it is concluded that God cannot be in a genus because otherwise being would be accidental to God. This implies that things in a category have their being in act whereby they actually exist, not through their essences, but as something that occurs outside the essence (and in that sense, accidentally to the essence) in a category. This leads Aquinas to his conclusion that (3) everything that is in a genus (i.e. in a category—*praedicamentum*) has an essence different from its being (*esse*).

Recall, however, that Avicenna’s Categories Argument is presented in its most explicit form in his *Dānesh Nāmeth* and his *al-Ishārāt*. Neither of these texts were available to Aquinas. So, how did Aquinas come upon the reasoning reformulated under the label “Avicenna’s Categories Argument” in this express form? In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the influence that al-Ghazālī had on the Latin west and specifically Aquinas. R.E. Houser has identified al-Ghazālī as an important source for understanding Aquinas’s *Intellectus essentiae Argument* just as an unpublished paper by David Twetten identifies al-Ghazālī as the source for Thomas’s Genus Argument. The arguments of the *Dānesh-Nāmeth* found their way to the Latin world by way of al-Ghazālī’s *Maqāṣid al-falāsifa*, an interpretive Arabic translation of the Persian *Dānesh-Nāmeth*, which was translated into Latin as the *Summa theoreticae philosophiae*. This text was often cited as written either by the single author “Algazel” or by the pair “Avicenna et Algazel.” As a result, al-Ghazālī was thought there to be a student of Avicenna’s

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7 David Twetten, “Aquinas’ Original Proofs of the Real Distinction between Being and Essence and Their Avicennian Source” (draft).
8 Jules Janssens “al-Ġazālī’s *Maqāṣid al-falāsifa*, Latin Translation of,” 388. See also Janssens more detailed
Examining the text that is the source for Thomas’s Genus Argument will help us see why I insist that Thomas’s Genus Argument is intended as a metaphysical argument regarding whatever belongs to the ten categories as found in the world. So, below I have the text of al-Ghazālī and, as a reminder, the text of Avicenna of which al-Ghazālī’s text is an interpretive translation.

[T5: al-Ghazālī, *Metaphysics of the Summa theoreticae philosophiae*, tract. 2 (57-58)]

[S]ubstancia nichil est, nisi id quod res est, cuius esse non est esse in subiecto, scilicet quod cum fuerit non sit in subiecto, non quod habeat esse apud se in effectu. Cuius rei tibi sit exemplum animal quod dicitur fenix quod quidem substancia est sine dubio; tu tamen dubitas si nunc sit vel non, similiter et multe alie substantie. Substancia ergo dicitur certitudo rei, et id quod ipsa est, cum acciderit ei esse in effectu non in specie. Substancia igitur est interpretacio rei, cuius esse diversum est ab eo quod ipsa est. Cuius igitur esse, et id quod est, fuerit unum et idem, non

[T5a] [S]ubstance is nothing other than “that which a thing is,” for which to be (esse) is not to be in a subject, namely, that which, were it to be, is not in a subject—not that in itself it would have being in act (esse in effectu). An example for you of this case is the animal that is called “phoenix,” which is, without a doubt, a substance, although you may doubt whether it now exists or not, and likewise [in the case of] many other substances. Therefore, substance is called the reality (certitudo) [or essence] of a thing and “that which it is” when being in

vocabitur substancia secundum quod act occurs to it—[and is] not in [its]
convenerunt, nisi forte aliquis velit species. Therefore, substance is the
acci per substanciam id tantum cuius esse meaning of a thing whose being is diverse
non est in subiecto, et tunc secundum hoc from “that which it is.” Were there that
necesse esse poterit dici substancia whose being (esse) and “that which it is”
is one and same, it would, therefore, not
be called “substance,” all agree, unless
perhaps someone wished to take
“substance” as that alone whose being
(esse) is not in a subject, and then in this
[sense] the Necessary Being is able to be
called a “substance.”

provenit igitur ex hoc quod necesse esse [T5b] It therefore follows from this fact
non cadit in aliquod decem that the Necessary Being does not fall into
predicamentorum; postquam enim non the ten categories (predicamenta). For,
cadit in predicamento substancie, tunc once it does not fall into the category of
multo minus in predicamentis substance, then much less does it fall into
accidencium, presertim cum esse omnium the categories of accidents, especially
predicamentorum sit preter id quod sunt, since the being (esse) of all of the
et sit accidentale eis, et sit extra id quod categories is in addition to “that which
sunt they are,” and is accidental to them, and is
outside what they are.

In [T5a], al-Ghazālī tells us that the Necessary Being is not a substance even though it
exists through itself and not in a subject like a substance. So how can this be? We are well familiar with this line of reasoning from Chapter IV on Avicenna: a substance is not just that which exists through itself, or not in a subject, but is a thing having a determinate essence through which it has being not in a subject. Al-Ghazālī explains that “being not in a subject” in this formula does not signify “actually existing not in a subject” since one can know that something is a substance without knowing that the substance in question actually is. Thus, al-Ghazālī concludes that a substance is that whose essence is distinct from its actual existence. It is for this reason that the Necessary Being is not a substance: for, there is no diversity between essence and actual existence for the Necessary Being. Al-Ghazālī, like Avicenna in the Kitāb al-Shifāʾ: Ilāhiyāt 8.4, clarifies that the Necessary Being is not in the category of substance—indeed, is not in any category—even though there may be another sense in which the Necessary Being may be called a substance. The issue, as we stated before, is not whether God is a being not in a subject—rather, the issue is whether God’s not being in a subject entails that He is a substance among other substances, that is, that God belongs to the same genus as the others.

Al-Ghazālī makes clear reference to Avicenna’s reasoning regarding the sense of “being not in a subject” that pertains essentially to a substance. And from this line of reasoning, al-Ghazālī reports the reasoning of Avicenna’s Categories Argument: because “actually being not in a subject” does not belong to substance necessarily and essentially, substances must be composed of essence and that whereby they actually exist. Al-Ghazālī

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9 Aquinas also makes this point. See Aquinas, Sent. 1 d. 8 q. 4 a. 2 ad 1: “Deus simpliciter non est accidens, nec tamen omnino proprie potest dici substantia tum quia nomen substantia dicitur a substando, tum quia substantia quidditatem nominat, quae est alius ad esse ejus. Unde illa est divisio entis creati. Si tamen non fieret in hoc vis, largo modo potest dici substantia [...].”
then, like Avicenna, extrapolates this point regarding the category of substance for all of
the categories.

**Avicenna’s Categories Argument**

(1) “Actually being not in a subject” 

(2) Things in the categories that actually 

(3) Therefore actually existing substances 

**The Categories Argument in al-Ghazālī**

(1) [S]ubstance is nothing other than “that 

(2) […] the being (esse) of all of the 

(3) Therefore, substance is called the 

It is clear that al-Ghazālī presents something similar to what we have labelled 

Aquinas’s presentation of the Categories Argument is to al-Ghazālī’s (I extract the
From al-Ghazālī’s [T5]

[S]ubstance is nothing other than “that which a thing is,” for which to be (esse) is not to be in a subject, namely, [i] that which, were it to be, is not in a subject — not that in itself it would have being in act (esse in effectu). [ii] An example for you of this case is the animal that is called “phoenix,” which is, without a doubt, a substance, although you may doubt whether it now exists or not, and likewise in the case of many other substances. Therefore, substance is called the reality (certitudo) [or essence] of a thing and “that which it is” when being in act occurs to it—[and is] not in [its] species. [iii] So, substance is the meaning of a thing whose being is diverse from “that which it is.”

Were there that whose being (esse) and “that which it is” is one and same, it would, therefore, not be called “substance,” all agree, unless perhaps

From Aquinas’s [T4]

Everything that is in a genus has a quiddity that differs from [its] being (esse), e.g. a human; for, to [i] humanity is not owed being in act (esse in actu) from the fact that it is humanity; for, [ii] it is possible for humanity to be thought and it still be unknown whether some human is. And the reason for this is that the common [term]that is predicated of those [things] which are in a genus predicates the quiddity since genus and species are predicated “in the ‘what it is’” [or quidditatively]. Moreover, to the quiddity being (esse) is not owed unless through the fact that it [the quiddity] is received in this or in that. For this reason, the quiddity of a genus or species is not made common according to one being (esse) for all, but only according to one common notion. Hence, it is agreed that [a quiddity’s] being (esse) is not its quiddity. [iii] But in
someone wished to take “substance” as that alone whose being (esse) is not in a subject, and then in this [sense] the Necessary Being is able to be called a “substance.”

God, his being is his essence—for, otherwise, [being] would be accidental to [His] quiddity, and so it would be acquired by Him from another, and He would not have being through his essence.

[iii cont.] And, for this reason, God is not able to be in any genus.

When we line the texts up in this way, we can see just how closely Thomas follows al-Ghazālī’s lead, both in general order of the argumentation and in doctrines. These doctrines and their order can be seen in an abbreviated way in the following table.

From al-Ghazālī’s [T5]  

[i] Substance is i that which were it to be, is not in a subject —not that in itself it would have being in act (esse in effectu).

[ii] An example for you of this case is the animal that is called “phoenix,” which is, without a doubt, a substance, although you may doubt whether it now exists or not […] iii] Were there that whose being (esse) and “that which it is” is one and same, it would, therefore, not be called “substance,” all agree […]

From Aquinas’s [T4]  

[i] humanity is not owed being in act (esse in actu) from the fact that it is humanity; for, [ii] it is possible for humanity to be thought and it still be unknown whether some human is. [iii] But in God, his being is his essence […] […] And, for this reason, God is not able to be in any genus.

Of course, we must also not overlook the characteristic details of Aquinas’s
Genus Argument where Thomas departs from al-Ghazālī. I submit that we should not thereby infer that Aquinas’s argument is of a different general character or follows from different principles: Aquinas’s argument, though uniquely based on the theme of sameness and difference within a genus, shares with Avicenna’s and al-Ghazālī’s texts the goal of proving a distinction between being in act and essence that is in the domain of real being (i.e. the categories). This fact is clearest from the connection to the question whether God is among things classified into a category. Though Thomas introduces a unique line of reasoning based on what is common to and diverse among the members of a genus to support the Avicennian conclusion, he is ultimately guided by the Avicennian view (mediated by al-Ghazālī) that God cannot be in the category of substance (and, a fortiori, in one of the categories of accidents). For, being in act (esse in actu) does not belong to any category as such.

4. An Initial Non-Avicennian Objection to the Genus Argument

Aquinas’s Genus Argument, when we neglect the reasoning of the Avicennian Categories Argument on which it is based, could readily lead one to overlook the fact that the argumentation is conducted in the domain of real being. For both Joseph Owens\(^\text{10}\) and

\(^{10}\) Owens, “Aquinas’s Distinction,” 266-268, cites Aquinas’s reference to the Genus Argument in Sent. I d. 13 q. 1 a. 3 co.: “to have the universal and particular there is required, as said above [Sent. I d. 8 q. 4 a. 2 co.], a real diversity between the communicable quiddity and the existence [esse] which is proper.” Owens comments on the argument referred to: “the starting point is the distinction between a universal nature and the particular instance in which that nature is found. This is obviously enough a conceptual distinction, the distinction that arises when the same thing is conceived in different ways by the human mind. The one and the same person may be represented in the mind as Socrates, as a man, as an animal, as a living thing. For convenience in discussion each of these objects, distinct from one another as Socrates, man, animal, living thing, may itself be called a concept. Here the term ‘concept’ refers directly not to the conceptualizing activity of the mind nor to the product of the activity, but to what is thereby conceived. . . [W]hen ‘concept’ is taken to mean the object, such as man, animal, or living thing, it remains the same no matter who is thinking of it or at what time the thinking takes place. It is in this objective sense of ‘concept’ that the distinction between universal nature and particular instance is a conceptual distinction. However, the argument now being considered infers that this conceptual distinction requires real diversity between the quiddity, which is common, and the existence which is individual in the sense that it belongs exclusively to the instance in which it is found. The inference, therefore, is from conceptual distinction between universal
John Wippel, the force of the Genus Argument rests on the conceptual distinction between the essence and a particular instance of an essence. This reading poses a real problem; for, as Wippel says:

serious questions may be raised about the argument’s validity. It seems to move very quickly from the order of logic and conceptual distinction to the order of real composition and distinction. […] Hence, at the beginning of the argument, the contrast rather seems to be between a general or universal quidditative content which is shared in by all members of the class, on the one hand, and actually existing particular instantiations of the same, on the other hand. Thomas himself would not allow for real distinction between a universal intelligible content and a particular instantiation of the same.¹¹

As we have seen above, Thomas is not distinguishing in his Genus Argument the essence common to the genus from the particular instance of that essence; for example, humanity in general from humanity-1 or humanity-2 found within its genus conceived as a set. Instead, Thomas’s distinction concerns the essence that grounds class membership—even and especially including membership in the most generic division of extramental being, the ten categories—and that whereby those members actually exist in rerum natura. Thomas does not reason to a real distinction from a logical distinction between genus and species, or between essence and its instances. Rather, he reasons from the fact that being in act cannot be included in the very notion or ratio of an essence in and particular to real distinction in the existent between quiddity and existing, between what the thing is and that it exists. But [this reasoning] gives no express mention of how or where the difference is recognized as real.”¹² Granted, there is no real distinction in the mental concept between Socrates and Socrates’s humanity; still, it seems odd that Owens would readily deny the extramental distinction between supposit and essence, between Socrates and his humanity.

¹¹ Wippel, Metaphysical Thought, 160-161. Wippel cites for his point the passage of Owens cited in the previous note. On the other hand, Wippel clearly ascribes to Aquinas the essence-supposit extramental distinction subsequently in Chapter 8 of his book.
virtue of which things have commonality. Reasoning from actual being and the commonality in things, he concludes to a real composition of being in act and essence in all of the categories of extramental being. We see such metaphysical reasoning particularly well by beginning with another version of the Genus Argument.

5. “With a Real Composition”: De veritate q. 27 a. 1 ad 8.

Though previous scholars have often overlooked the metaphysical nature of the Aquinas’s Genus Argument in the Sentences commentary by neglecting the influence of Avicenna, it is otherwise well recognized in the literature that the presentation of the Genus Argument in the De veritate is explicit evidence that Thomas thought (even if wrongly) that the conclusion of his Genus Argument pertains to the domain of real rather than conceptual being. For, unlike in [T1]-[T4] above, Thomas specifies in the De veritate that there must be a real composition of esse and that which is in the category of substance. However, a rereading of this same text reveals greater evidence of the extramental and ontological character of Aquinas’s Genus Argument than has been appreciated. Aquinas answers the eighth argument to the effect that grace must be something uncreated existing in the soul (notice the extramental character of the question). The objector holds that nothing is in any genus except composite, created things; since grace is a simple, non-composite form, it must be uncreated. Aquinas responds:

[T6: Aquinas, De veritate q. 27 a. 1 ad 8 (792, 221-244)]

Ad octavum dicendum quod omne quod [T6a] To the eighth it must be said that

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12 See Wippel, Metaphysical Thought, 160; Owens, “Aquinas’s Distinction,” 271: “The composition between the two is expressly called real, and is regarded as following upon their distinction. The conceptual distinction is the starting point for the reasoning to the difference in reality. But again, no express indication is given as to how the distinction is seen to be real.”
est in genere substantiae est compositum
reali compositione eo quod id quod est in
praedicamento substantiae est in suo esse
subsistens, et oportet quod esse suum sit
aliud quam ipsum; alias non posset
differre secundum esse ab aliis cum
quibus convenit in ratione suae
quae sunt directe in praedicamento; et
ideo omne quod est directe in
praedicamento substantiae, compositum
est saltem ex esse et quod est.

everything that is in the genus of
substance is composed with a real
composition in that (a) that which is in the
category (praedicamentum) of substance
is subsisting in its being (esse), and (b) it
is requisite that its being is other than it
is requisite that its being is other than it
is requisite that its being is other than it
is requisite that its being is other than it
itself; otherwise, it would not be possible
to differ with respect to being (esse) from
other things with which it agrees in the
ratio of its essence—which
[characteristic] is required in everything
that is directly in a category; and for this
reason, everything that is directly in the
category of substance is composed at least
out of being (esse) and that which is.

Here, Thomas argues that everything in the category of substance is composed with a real
composition, a composition of at least being (esse) and “what it is.” We are well familiar
with this line of argumentation: he argues that everything in the category of substance is a
thing subsisting in its being (esse), and that this non-identity between the being of a thing
and the thing itself is necessary for anything in any category. For, a category is a
grouping of individual things on account of their shared extramental essence. If, however,
every substance were identical with the essence which is common to all things in the
category, then one must conclude that there is only one thing in the category of
substance. For, if being (esse) and essence are identical, and essence is common in the
category of substance, then so too is being identical in the category of substance.
Therefore, it would be the case that there is one being in the category of substance. Since
this is obviously false, Thomas concludes that there must be a distinction between being
and essence in the category of substance.

This argument, despite its similarity to other versions, discloses more fully than
the others the full metaphysical structure of substances in Aquinas’s thought (a structure
that to which we have already introduced in T10[c]-[d] of Chapter V): sensible, material
things are individual composites (or supposits) of form and matter in the genus of
substance, each of which has a really distinct essence that it shares with everything else
of its species, genus or sub-genus. In other words, we discover in substances also an
essence-supposit distinction: what makes them the same in their class is different from
(and a “formal part” of) the individual whole, or supposit. Actually being or the act of
being is other than the supposit because it is other than the shared essence. However,
Aquinas is careful to say that what “is” (per se), or what “subsists in its esse” is the quod
est (or supposit), is “that which is in the category of substance,” or is the item itself
(ipsum). He does not say this of the essence of material substances; he does not say that
the essence “is” or “subsists.” In short, it is the supposit that exists through the essence,

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13 For this language, see Aquinas, De potentia 9 a. 1 co.
14 For this language, see also Thomas Aquinas, De spiritualibus creaturis, in Sancti Thomae de Aquino
Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P.M. edita (Commissio Leonina: Rome, 2000), a. 1 ad 8 (15, 493-16, 503):
dicendum quod non idem est componi ex quod est et quo est et ex materia et forma: licet enim forma possit
dici quo aliquid est, tamen materia non proprie potest dici quod est, cum non sit nisi in potentia. Set quod
est est id quod subsistit in esse, quod quidem in substantiis corporis est ipsum compositum ex materia et
forma, in substantiis autem incorporeis est ipsa forma simplex […] . (It should be said that to be composed
of “what is” and “that by which it is” is not the same [as to be composed] of matter and form. For, although
form can be called “that by which something is,” nevertheless matter cannot properly be said to be “what
is,” since it is only in potency. But, “what is” is that which subsists in being, which, on the one hand, is the
composite of matter and form itself in the case of bodily substances, and, on the other, is the simple form
itself in the case of incorporeal substances.)
not the essence that exists. Although Aquinas does not expressly state that *esse* does not as such subsist, he does go on to speak this way of form and matter, each of which are in the genus of substance, even though neither subsists, neither has its own *esse*; the same is true for essence:

Sunt tamen quaedam in praedicamento substantiae per reductionem, ut principia substantiae subsistentis, in quibus praedicta compositio non invenitur; non enim subsistent, et ideo proprium esse non habent.

[T6b] However, there are certain [items] in the category of substance by reduction, as principles of subsistent substances, in which the aforementioned composition is not found. For, they do not subsist, and for this reason, they do not have being proper (*esse proprium*).

Like essence, then, form and matter do not have their own *esse* such that there is in each a further *esse* proper to each that also needs to be extramentally distinct from each. There is only one *esse* proper to each substance, the act of being of the whole composite, the whole supposit, *quod est*. Of course, it is still true that that *esse* is extramentally distinct from the whole as well as from the parts, form and matter, and from what Aquinas calls the “formal part” of the whole, or the “form of the whole,” the essence.

Before turning to another text where we see the complete metaphysical structure of substance on display, let us finish the *ad octavum* of *De veritate* 27.1. Perhaps in light of this discussion, something may be said about one of the most puzzling passages in Aquinas’s metaphysics, where Aquinas appears to deny the real distinction in the case of accidents, or appears to deny that Avicenna’s definitional analysis of all of the categories and that the Genus Argument applies to accidents. This result would contradict Aquinas’s
express teaching on the eucharistic accidents that we saw in [T1] and [T3] of Chapter V.

First, let us read the end of the *ad octavum*:

Similiter accidentia, quia non subsistent, non est eorum proprie esse, sed subjectum est aliquale secundum ea, unde proprie dicuntur magis entis quam entia. Et ideo ad hoc quod aliquid sit in praedicamento aliquo accidentis, non requiritur quod sit compositum compositione reali, sed solummodo compositione rationis ex genere et differentia, et talis compositio in gratia invenitur.

[T6c] Similarly, as for accidents, because they do not subsist, being (*esse*) does not properly belong to them, but the subject is some sort of thing (*aliquale*) with respect to them. Hence, they are more properly called “belonging to a being” (*entis*) than “beings” (*entia*). And for this reason, for something to be in some [one] category of accident, it is not required that it is composite with a real composition, but only with a composition of reason, from genus and differentia, and such composition is found in grace.

Grace is in the genus of accident, and therefore something created, not something uncreated, Aquinas argues. Still, like the soul in the case of substance it is not a composite with its own proper *esse*. Rather, grace is a simple form, as the objector holds, without the consequence that it is outside all of the categories of composite and created things, as though grace were uncreated.

Does Aquinas intend to deny of accidents that are simple forms (not form-matter composites) that there is no really distinct act by which they are? Scarcely. That would be the sole case of such a view in his corpus, contradicting statements elsewhere. He wants
to hold that accidents are created and belong to the category of accident without their
having an esse of their own as such—without thereby themselves being composite with
their own really distinct esse, independent of substance. Instead, they have esse in an
sense only analogously one with that of substance, and they are only analogously called
“beings.” Accidents have inesse, “in-being,” thanks to the substance of which they are
forms, as we saw in [T11] of Chapter V. Substance is the cause of the esse, or, better,
inesse, of the accidents (in the supernatural order, it is possible for this secondary cause
to be suspended and the accidents can still be preserved in esse by the primary cause).
Accidents do not have esse through themselves, or they would be substances, having esse
per se. Compare the soul (or also the essence in the category of substance): the soul is
really distinct from the esse of substance, but not with a real composition through its own
proper esse, in addition to the esse of substance. Similarly, the quality of red, like grace,
is really distinct from the inesse that it has thanks to and in substance, but not by having,
further, its own proper esse and thereby being a composite of its own form and esse.
Otherwise, in the case of the soul, there would be two acts of esse in the genus of
substance, or in the case of red, two acts of esse in the genus of accident. In our analysis
of the argument above, we saw two mentions of the real distinction in the case of
substance, but not two acts of being. In short, argues Aquinas, grace belongs to a
category of “in-beings,” so to speak (or “of-beings”) without itself being a composite of
its own simple form and esse. To say otherwise would lead to an infinite regress, as Barry
Brown has observed.15

The presentation of the Genus Argument in De veritate 27.1 could hardly be more
thorough-going in its account of the real or extramental. That account is made possible,

15 Brown, Accidental Being, 249.
not by starting from mere conceptual distinctions, pace Owens, but by a Genus or
Categories Argument that starts from the nature of what is actually in the category of
substance (and accident): actual supposit (and their accidental forms) with their own
actuality by which they are. Aquinas’s doctrine is that the real distinction belongs to
accidental forms, like grace, not through themselves properly, but only through substance
(in the order of nature). Just as form, matter, and substantial essence do not have their
own esse or “esse proprium,” nor do accidents. However, accidents are not “parts” of
substance, reducible to the category of substance. They belong to one of the nine
categories of accident. But these categories, Aquinas maintains, do not have the same
ontological structure as substance: they are not subsisting wholes that have their own esse
by which they are. In order to account for their really distinct inesse, one must introduce
substance as the proximate cause of that real distinction, and accidents are not further
composed of a real distinction of their own, so to speak.

Our purpose here is not to examine in detail Aquinas’s doctrine of accidental
being (esse). It is enough to see that the doctrine cannot be understood without the
Avicennian understanding of the definition of the categories in the background to
Aquinas’s Genus Argument, which also turns out to be a sort of Categories Argument.
Our purpose here is to bring out the ontological character of the reasoning in Aquinas’s
De veritate 27.1 ad 8. However, one further text may be introduced to reinforce the
richness of that ontological character, involving supposit, essence and esse, as well as
form and matter, in one genus or category of substance.

6. Support from the Essence-Supposit Distinction

The passage in question contains a version of Aquinas’s Intellectus essentiae
Argument (omitted with elipses below), an argument whose Avicennian roots must be explored elsewhere. Aquinas responds to the question whether an angel is composed of matter and form. Of special significance in this text is the detailed discussion of the relation between essence, form and matter, and the supposit. After arguing that angels lack a composition of form and matter, Aquinas adds a clarification:

[T7: Aquinas, Sent. 2 d. 3 q. 1 a. 1 co. (87-88)]

Et tamen aliquam compositionem in angelo ponimus: quae qualis sit, sic investiganda est. In rebus ex materia et forma compositis, natura rei, quae quidditas vel essentia dicitur, ex conjunctione formae ad materiam resultat, ut humanitas ex conjunctione animae et corporis.

[T7a] Nevertheless, we do affirm a certain composition in an angel. As to the sort [of composition] it is, it should be investigated as follows. In things composed of matter and form, the nature of the thing (res), which is called “whatness” or “essence,” results from the conjunction of form and matter, as humanity results from the conjunction of the soul and the body.

Once again, this early text is quite singular in witnessing the distinction between essence and the form-matter composite. I have italicized the description of the relation in question. According to Aquinas, the essence results from the form and matter. In analyzing perceptible substances, in other words, one should start, as in Aristotle’s De anima, with their form as the actuality of what stands in potency to form, namely, the matter: thus, soul actualizes the body, and the result is the compound substance.

Nevertheless, the metaphysician goes further to speak of what all substances of the same
kind share in common, namely, what kind of form, and what kind of matter. The definitions of physical substances, Aquinas likes to repeat, contain both form and matter, for Aristotle. In focusing on what is common to a genus’s form-matter compound, the metaphysician speaks of what \( x \) is, its whatness, or nature and essence. This is not a third principle entirely separate from form and matter, but the result of form and matter, or of form actualizing matter—which result is the commonality of all such form and all such matter: form in general and “common matter.” Thus, Socrates is the compound of his (rational) soul actualizing his body, but his essence, or humanity, is what he shares with Diotima. The essence results from his individual soul and individual body, but it contains (rational) soul in general and (human, chromosomal body) body in general.

Aquinas next introduces a non-compound essence that nonetheless has a composition with \( esse \). He thereby discovers a composition other than form-matter that is found in angels:

De ratione autem quidditatis in quantum est quidditas, non est quod sit composita; quia nunquam inveniretur simplex natura, quod ad minus in Deo falsum est: nec est de ratione ejus quod sit simplex, cum quaedam inveniatur composita, ut humanitas. Esse autem secundum quod dicitur res esse in actu, inventur ad [T7b] However, it is not of the notion (ratio) of whatness as whatness that it be composite. For, [otherwise] there will never be found a simple nature—a [proposition] that, at least in the case of God, is false. Nor is it of the notion of [whatness] that it be simple, since a certain [whatness] is found [to be]

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\( ^{16} \) Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones de quolibet* 2 q. 2 a. 2 co.: [D]iffinitio autem in rebus naturalibus non solum significat formam, set etiam materiam, ut dicitur in VI Methaphisice. (In the case of natural things, the definition signifies not only the form, but also the matter, as it is said in *Metaphysics* 6 [sic: read “8”]). See also Aquinas, *De ente et essentia* 2, p. 370, Ins 14-17.
As mentioned, I omit the *Intellectus essentiae* Argument, which Thomas uses to distinguish the divine being from what is a composite of *esse* and a distinct essence. The next segment of Aquinas’s response picks up this distinction:

[T7c] But everything that *is* besides God has being (*esse*) acquired from another. Therefore, in God alone is His being His whatness or nature; but in everything else, being (*esse*) is beyond the whatness to which being is acquired. But since a whatness that follows a composition depends on [its] parts, it is requisite that it is not subsisting in that [the being (*esse*)] that is acquired to it, but [it is] the composite [that subsists], which is called the “supposit.” And for this reason, the whatness of a composite thing is not the [thing] itself that is, but it is that *which* something is, just as by humanity...
quidditas angeli est quod subsistit etiam ipsum suum esse, quod est praeter suam quidditatem, et est id quo est; [...] et sic angelus compositus est ex esse et quod est [...].

[something] is a human. But a simple whatness, since it is not based on any parts, subsists in the being (esse) that is acquired to it from God. And for this reason, the very whatness of an angel is that by which it subsists besides its very own being, which is beyond its whatness, and it is that by which it is [...]. and in this way an angel is composed from being (esse) and what it is [...].

Once again, Thomas denies that composite, sensible substances subsist in the being (esse) that they acquire, but instead it is the supposit that subsists. He now introduces the standard technical language he uses for distinguishing between Socrates and his humanity: the essence-supposit distinction. He goes on to describe this in terms of a real distinction: “the whatness of a composite thing is not the [thing] itself that is.” The reason that he offers points to the extramental character: “a whatness that follows [upon] (or results from) a composition depends on [its] parts.” The astute objector asks: but does the whatness of Socrates not have the parts of form and matter? Thomas, of course, refers to the individual parts of the composite supposit, the soul and body of Socrates himself.

Because essence results from the composite’s individual parts, whereas it itself is what is common to Diotima and to all humans, the distinction at hand is extramental. The same point arises from Aquinas’s clarification that, not essences, but only supposits subsist. Recall that “to subsist” is the determinate being or esse for individuals in the
category of substance. Humanity, unlike Plato, does not subsist. As we have seen in T10 [c]-[d] of Chapter V, *esse follows (consequitur)* the composition of form and matter in compound substances; in other words, *subsistere* is a determinate *esse* that follows form, or, as Aquinas’s Boethius puts it, *subsistence* belongs to individuals in the genus of substance under some common nature. And so, the subsistence relation in material composites is unlike that in simple substances such as angels: their essence does subsist in their acquired being. In the case of immaterial substances, the form is able to be a subject in its own right. Nevertheless, there is still a composition in angels: of their essence and their *esse*.

In the final part of Aquinas’s response, he adds the consequence that *esse* stands to essence as act to potency:

[...] sed est in ea esse, et forma, quae est quidditas sua: et quia omne quod non habet aliquid ex se, sed recipit illud ab alio, est possibile vel in potentia respectu ejus, ideo ipsa quidditas est sicut potentia, et suum esse acquisitum est sicut actus [...].

[T7d] [...] And for this reason, the very whatness of an angel is that by which it subsists besides its very own being, which is beyond its whatness, and it is that by which it is; And because everything that does not have something from itself, but [instead] receives it from another, it is possible or in potency with respect to it, so its whatness is as a potency and its

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17 This is the standard teaching of Aquinas everywhere except in one of the few passages that is even more metaphysically rich than those we are considering here: Aquinas, *Quaestiones de quolibet* 2 q. 2 a. 1-2. According to Aquinas there in art. 2, even angels have an essence-supposit distinction, since accidents and activities, just as also *esse*, belong to the supposit or individual substance.

acquired being is as an act [...].

In sum, Aquinas’s general point in [T6]-[T7] is that the acquired being (esse) in which a substance subsists, does not belong to form and essence in the case of composite substances. Rather, the essence of a composite substance, which is consequent upon matter and form, is that under which, we may say with T10[d] of Chapter V, the supposit subsists. In other words, the composite substance is due “to be per se” not through its form alone but through the form that is bound up with matter through the essence or common nature. Thus, a composite substance is more than just its form or essence—its essence is distinct from the supposit. So, when the composite substance actually exists, it exists in such a manner that its essence is not identical with the supposit. This is why Lawrence Dewan, writing about the Genus Argument, says that “when a thing has esse, it must have in it something other than the quiddity itself (and particularly the quiddity of the genus). That is, there must be a subject which has esse and essential nature.”19 The essence-supposit real distinction helps us see the force of Aquinas’s arguments for the essence-esse real distinction.20 The act of being or actus essendi is that by which individual substances actually are. But individual substances are not the same as the real essence that is in them, by which they are the same in kind with other individuals. Therefore, it is quite obvious that, if the real essence does not contain the act of being, essence and esse are really distinct. The same doctrine is extended by Aquinas to angels insofar as their supposit is the subject of accidents, unlike their esse. Thus, the essence-supposit distinction allows for the possibility of the essence-esse distinction in all

19 Dewan, “Individual as a Mode of Being,” 412.
20 This is the argument of David Twetten, “A Defense of Essence-Realism,” forthcoming.
creatures. 21

7. Return to the Objections against the Genus Argument

We have seen in [T6a] Aquinas isolate “everything that is directly in the category of substance”: to these things alone does esse properly belong, such that there is one esse that is really distinct within them in the category of substance, and one inesse within them that is really distinct for each accident. According to [T7a-c], it is things (res) or supposita that exist or subsist, not their essences. These clarifications arise from attending to things that actually are in the world within each category, rather merely to logical classes concerning simply what is common to many. The emphasis on actually being within categories that categorize essences with quasi-definitional features in common is easy to discover in the Avicennian background to Aquinas’s Genus (or Categories) Argument. As a result, it is not difficult to respond to the principal objection against the Genus Argument leveled by many authors. 22

Granted that something must diversify members of a logical genus; still, why need the source of diversification be “Thomistic esse” rather than merely whatever serves a given philosopher as the principle of individuation: matter under determinate or indeterminate dimensions; collections of

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22 See especially Wippel, Metaphysical Thought, 160-161: “[A]t the beginning of the [Genus] argument, to what does the term esse refer? In the argument’s conclusion, of course, esse signifies the particular actus essendi which is /161/ present within every particular substance (excluding God) and which is really distinct from the individual essence of that same substance. But as it first appears in the argument, esse may signify nothing more than a particular actually existing member of a generic or specific class, that is, a particular concrete existent. One cannot yet assume what remains to be proved, i.e., that esse already signifies an act principle which is really distinct from the essence principle of each particular substance. Hence, at the beginning of the argument, the contrast rather seems to be between a general or universal quidditative content which is shared in by all members of the class, on the one hand, and actually existing particular instantiations of the same, on the other hand.” See also Sweeney, “Existence/Essence in Thomas Aquinas’s Early Writings,” 111.
accidents; or the individuating form that is haecceity? The Genus Argument, if it appeals merely to the diversity within a logician’s classification system, appears highly fallacious. As a result, Joseph de Finance even wonders whether Thomism has not made too much of argumentation in texts of Avicenna and Aquinas that simply envision an essence-supposit distinction: within any genus of essences, there must be individual essences that are distinct from each other. Aquinas’s argument starts from individual existing things within the categories, which are already understood to have a real essence. Admittedly, the argument is not difficult to make or grasp, once its background and starting point is understood. Working through the Avicennian texts puts us in a strong position to interpret Aquinas’s argument in a new, metaphysical way.

Now that we have set aside a very serious worry, we may return to another that has already been raised. Owens, and Wippel following him, fear that some arguments for Thomas’s essence-being distinction starts from and ends in the logical distinction between a universal and an instance of the universal; or between a genus and its instances. This objection, I think, misses the point somewhat: Thomas is not concerned with universals in the logician’s sense in his account of the essence-being distinction. According to Owens, it is one and the same thing that the mind considers now as particular, now as universal—yielding merely conceptually distinct features of that one extramental thing, Socrates. Yet, it is clear that the universal qua the intention in the intellect resulting from abstraction is not what Aquinas’s distinction is about. Rather, the “essence” with which Thomas is concerned is, first, the essence absolutely considered,

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24 See above at nn. 10-11.
25 Owens, “Aquinas’ Distinction,” 267, quoted above, n. 10: “The one and the same person may be represented in the mind as Socrates, as a man, as an animal, as a living thing.”
which is the object of definition (or quasi-definition, in our case) and which, in and of
itself, is not determined to actually being in reality or in the mind. Twice within versions
of the Genus Argument above (T3 and T4), Aquinas even speaks of “genus” in the sense
of essence absolutely considered, namely, as what is predicated of \( x \) quidditatively (or \( in
eo quod quid \)); the logician’s genus cannot be so predicated.\(^{26}\) Second, Thomas considers
essence as a principle within individual extramental things. Individual essences are
reducible to the category of substance, we have seen, and, thus, belong to the domain of
real being. For, while the essence as the formal part is not directly in the category of
substance insofar as it is incomplete,\(^{27}\) nevertheless as a part and principle of a substance
it belongs to the category of substance by reduction.\(^{28}\) Therefore, this distinction is one
that takes place within the category of substance as it belongs to extramental things
(rather than merely within a logician’s “universal”), and thereby in the realm of real
distinction.

It is worth noting that the Owens’s and Wippel’s objection to Aquinas’s Genus
Argument is similar to Averroes’s objection to Avicenna’s distinction between essence
and existence, discussed in the Chapter 4. For, both groups of objectors take issue with

\(^{26}\) See also a text that uses premises found in versions of the Genus Argument: Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio
libri Posteriorum, in Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P.M. edita* (Commissio
Leonina: Rome, 1989), lib. 2 lec. 6 (on 2.6, 92b8-18), 194, 60-61.

\(^{27}\) In addition to [T6] above, see Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de anima, in Sancti Thomae de
Aquino Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P.M. edita* (Commissio Leonina: Rome, 1996), q. 1 co. (7, 191-
200): [H]oc aliquid proprié dicitur individuum in genere substantie. Dicit enim Philosophus in
Predicamentis quod prime substantie indubitanter hoc aliquid significat, secunde uero substantie, etsi
uideantur hoc aliquid significare, magis tamen significant quale quid. Individuum autem in genere
substantie non solum habet ut per se possit subsistere, set quod sit aliquid completum in aliqua specie et
genere substantie.

\(^{28}\) Ibid. 7, 200-207: Vnde Philosophus in Predicamentis manus, pedes et huiusmodi nominat partes
substantiarum magis quam substantias primas uel secundas, quia licet non sint in alio sicut in subiecto,
quod proprium substantie est, non tamen participant complete naturam alcuies speciei. Vnde non sunt in
alia specie neque in aliquo genere nisi per reductionem. See also Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1 q. 3 a. 5 co:
aliquid est in genere dupliciter. Uno modo simpliciter et proprié; sicut species, quae sub genere continentur.
Alio modo, per reductionem, sicut principia et privationes, sicut punctus et unitas reducuntur ad genus
quantitatis, sicut principia; caecitas autem, et omnis privatio, reducitur ad genus sui habitus.
inferring a real distinction between essence and existence from the phenomenon of the instantiation of essences. Averroes criticized Avicenna for having made existence an accident of essence, when all that is really needed to accommodate existential claims is an extramental thing and a mind judging that it conforms to a concept. Likewise, Owens and Wippel criticize Aquinas’s Genus Argument for inferring a real distinction from what is no more than a conceptual distinction between a universal and an instance. Both groups of objectors insist that the distinction really at play is one between a universal and particular intentions—i.e. something in the mind—given an extramental instance. But, as I have shown in these chapters, Avicenna’s and Aquinas’s distinction between essence and being in act (*esse in actu, wujūd bi-fi’l*) does not concern the distinction between universals and instances—rather, it concerns real or extramental essences and their actually existing instances.

8. Conclusion

I have argued that Thomas’s Genus Argument from beginning to end involves extramental things in the categories, especially in the category of substance, enabling the reasoning to conclude to an extramental or real distinction between essence and being in act (*esse in actu*) within the categories of substance and accident. I have also shown that the reasoning in the Genus Argument uses another real distinction, which is well-attested in Thomas: the essence-supposit distinction. By way of conclusion, I offer some remarks about the influence of Avicenna on Aquinas.

Avicenna’s influence, we have seen, is found throughout Thomas’s thought concerning being in the sense of *ens* and the categories. The way Thomas thinks about being (*ens*) as common to all of the categories but divided according to modes of being
(modi essendi) rather than according to additions like species or accidents is Avicennian, in its ground and in its bearing, as I have shown over the last two chapters. According to Avicenna, being in act (wujūd bi-fi’l) is outside the definition of the categories, and it cannot be equated with the quasi-differentiae “being vs not-being in a subject.” Similarly, Thomas’s Genus Argument is clearly and explicitly Avicennian. Aquinas ascribes the argument to Avicenna, and we have seen how the stages in reasoning of Avicenna’s Categories Argument line up well with Thomas’s earliest version of the Genus Argument—which, as my table above lays out, is inspired by al-Ghazālī’s Metaphysics of the Summa theoreticae philosophiae. What are the major doctrines that Thomas learned from Avicenna? Arguably the most important is Avicenna’s doctrine on the categories as categories of essences, quasi-defined vis-à-vis “being.” Avicenna disambiguates “being in act” (wujūd bi-fi’l) in the context of this definitional project. Thomas inherits the fruits of this disambiguation and lays them out in what we call the “Genus Argument” for the essence-esse real distinction. The Genus Argument is only understood well as a form of Categories Argument, and to see that fact is to understand the argument against the background of Avicenna.

Retrospective on Chapters 5 and 6. Aquinas and the Commentatorial Consensuses Thomas learned from Avicenna, and from the whole commentary tradition by transitivity, that the categories comprise per se beings (entia per se) in the Essence Sense, which are what they are and have the mode of being proper to them in virtue of their essences. This way of thinking about the categories as categories of essences distinguished according to diverse modes requires that one think of what possesses categorial essences as necessarily composite. For, it is requisite that a thing in a category has an essence to which a mode of
being is either owed or must be given if it is actually to be.

We have in this concise statement of Thomas’s doctrine concerning the categories all three of our commentator consensuses from Chapter 2: that the categories involve a limited ontological analysis concerned only with sensible, composite substance; that the categories categorize essences; and that “being not in a subject” and “being in a subject” are something like properties, concomitants, and completers of essence. Thomas’s analysis of essence in the categories requires that the categories apply only to composite things with essences (that is, to things composed with an essence and a really distinct *esse* or act of being). Further, essence is common to all of the categories, as is clear from Thomas’s Avicennian (quasi) definitions of substance and accident: a thing having a quiddity to whom being either in a subject or not in a subject is owed. Finally, Thomas recognizes that “being not in a subject” and “being in a subject” pertain essentially and properly to substances and accidents respectively and will even call them “properties.”

That being said, Thomas does not entirely follow the commentary tradition. The categories pertain to composite substances for Thomas, yes, but not necessarily to sensible substances composed of form and matter alone. For, as we saw above, even the angels are composed of essence and supposit, according to Thomas, and for that reason they too are in the category of substance as things having an essence by which they are substances and intelligences. Further, though there may be instances where Thomas calls “being not in a subject” proper to substance, Thomas will with usually call it a “mode of being.” “Mode” expresses not something additional or external to the essence, but rather how it is when/if it is. When one focuses on the “how” aspect of a mode, one may see that

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29 See Thomas Aquinas, *In Meta.* 7 lec. 5 (338, no. 1370): Proprium enim est substantiae in subiecto non esse. (It is a property [*proprium*] of a substance not to be in a subject.)
it quasi-necessarily follows from the essence: substances are the sorts of things that, when they exist, are not in a subject. This is true by virtue of the essence of substance and not by virtue of a cause. But, when we consider the other aspect—the “when/if”—we can see that this is not a necessary, definitional fact, and it requires being caused by another.

Now, although Thomas makes use of the language of “modes of being” rather than “property,” “concomitant,” or “completer” of “being per se,” nevertheless he attributes the same sort of qualities to it as the commentators. For, “being (esse) per se” follows as if constituted through the essence of a substance. As we have seen in [T6] above (De veritate q. 27 a. 1 ad 8), only individual substances properly have their own being (esse), whereas form, matter (and essence) in composites lack their own esse.

In sum, considering the categories definitionally in relation to being (esse, wujūd), especially the category of substance provides the occasion for Thomas, following Avicenna to articulate an extramental or real distinction between essence and being in act (esse in actu). Pace Gilson, Avicenna’s and Thomas’s speculation concerning the (quasi) definition of substance does not presuppose the essence-esse distinction, but rather, as we see most clearly in Thomas’s Genus Argument, provide the precise occasion and insight to discover that a thing’s essence and its being in act must be distinct in the category of substance, and thus that this essence-esse distinction is a distinction pertinent to real being.

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30 See Aquinas, Questiones disputate de anima, q. 14 co. (125-126): “esse per se consequitur formam,” thereby establishing the everlasting perdurance of the immaterial soul; also Aquinas, In Meta. 4.2, lec. 2, n. 558: “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.”
Chapter VII: Conclusion

We can discern in the works of Aristotle through the late-antique Greek commentators, Avicenna, and Aquinas a tradition of reading the categories that makes possible the discovery of the real distinction between essence and being, or existence. Aristotle lays the foundation in thinking of the categories as \textit{per se} beings (\textit{onta kath’} ‘\textit{auto}) and, thus, as essences, or distinct and diverse intelligible patterns in nature.

Though there is a discernible sense, ascribable to Aristotle, in which only substances are beings \textit{per se} (which I call the Subject Sense), there is, more explicitly, a sense in which all of the categories are beings \textit{per se}. In fact, “\textit{onta kath’} ‘\textit{auto}” is explicitly and literally used by Aristotle and his commentators, only in this latter sense (which I call the Essence Sense). When Aristotle uses the phrase “\textit{per se}” to distinguish substances from accidents, it signifies that independence, as opposed to accidents, which are in subjects (i.e. in substances); substances, by contrast, are not in subjects but in fact are subjects. In this sense, “\textit{per se}” is said of substances only, so as to distinguish them from accidents.

However, the actual formula “\textit{to on kath’} ‘\textit{auto}” (“being \textit{per se}”) is not used to distinguish substances from accidents, but in fact to signify what accidents and substances have in common, namely, that they are discrete, intelligible patterns in nature. Substances, like humans and horses, as well as accidents like white and three-cubits-long are what they are by virtue of their very selves and are irreducibly so—i.e. there is no further answer to the question “why is a human an animal?” or “why is white a color?” In recognizing this sense of “being \textit{per se},” Aristotle recognizes an important sense in which essence is to be found in all of the categories.

The Essence Sense of “being \textit{per se},” involving a nature as common to all of the
categories, is assumed by the Greek commentators on Aristotle, who recognized the
categories as categories of different natures, each of them beings in their own right (pace
Andronicus). Further, when the commentators use the phrase “to be per se” or “not being
in a subject,” they usually use it as a characteristic that distinguishes the category of
substance from the categories of accidents and signifies that substances are not in
subjects, but are subjects. For the commentators, “not being in a subject” or “to be per
se” as a property, concomitant, or completer of substance. This way of thinking about
“not being in a subject” entails that it is constitutive of a substance as such and serves to
distinguish the category of substance from the categories of accidents. We can find in this
way of thinking about the categories a certain composition within the categories in terms
of a (quasi) genus and differentia: the categories share in common that they categorize
essences or natures, and these essences or natures are distinguished according to the
property or completer proper to the essences. This way of thinking about the categories as
composed and complex fits the standard justification for reading Aristotle’s Categories as
consistent with Plato’s broader metaphysical project, a justification that the late-antique
commentators develop in response to challenges of Plotinus. For, Plotinus thought that
Aristotle’s categories failed to categorize accurately all beings and, thus, authors such as
Porphyry, Dexippus, and Ammonius all defended Aristotle’s Categories by viewing it as
a true presentation of the composite, material domain of being alone. As a result, the late-
antique commentary tradition was insistent upon the fact that the categories categorize
composite essences—namely, essences or forms bound up in matter and possessing some
amount of complexity and composition, not only out of form and matter, but also out of
essence and proprium.
Avicenna is influenced by the commentators’ way of thinking about the categories as categories of essences (and, thus, as categories to which belongs to on kath’ hauto: the Essence Sense), distinguished from each other by virtue of diverse propria. Avicenna formulates a (quasi) definition of substance to reflect this structure of the categories as involving (quasi) genus and (quasi) differentia. “A thing having a determinate essence” is that which is common to all things in the categories, according to Avicenna; and “for which to be is not to be in a subject” is that which distinguishes the category of substance from the other categories of accidents. However, Avicenna contributes a unique reflection to this commentary tradition: he recognizes that “being” (mawjud) appears in the (quasi) definition of substance, and, as any good Aristotelian metaphysician must, he recognizes a need to disambiguate “being.” For, “being (mawjud) not in a subject” is essential to being a substance, yet it is false to conclude that “being” in the sense of “actual existence” follows necessarily upon the essence of a substance. Otherwise, to know that \( x \) is a substance would by that very fact be to know that \( x \) exists. Avicenna’s insight, in effect, consists in applying Aristotle’s own disambiguation of the term “being” in Meta. Δ.7 to the (quasi) definition of substance the (quasi) differentia term of which Avicenna received from the commentary tradition. Because “being” in the sense of “act” and “potency” divides the categories, according to Aristotle, Avicenna concludes that the “being” (mawjud) that is part of the (quasi) definition of substance cannot signify “being” as “act.” Otherwise, all substances would be actual existents in virtue of themselves—i.e. necessary in being through themselves. Instead, substances are existent through what is not in their definable essence: being in act (wuğūd bi-fi ‘l).

Thomas Aquinas, under the influence of Avicenna, adopted this late-antique
commentary tradition’s view of the categories as categories of composite essences. Thomas also broke from the commentary tradition in how he understood the phrase “being not in a subject.” For the tradition (including Avicenna), “being not in a subject” is understood as something like a constitutive property of the essence of a substance akin to a differentia or a property. Though all of the commentators, including Avicenna, knew well that the categories are divisions of being (to on; mawjud; ens) and that being is not a genus, the commentators and Avicenna struggled to describe how the categories could divide being in a manner unlike how differentiae divide genera into species. The Aristotle commentators and Avicenna alike end up using terminology (sumplērōtikon, muqawwim) connected with the differentia to describe the property “being not in a subject,” and thus remain inadvertently attached to thinking of being as a genus and “being not in a subject” or “being in a subject” as a differentia.

Aquinas avoids this issue by using language that he learned from the Latin Avicenna. Aquinas describes “being not in a subject” or “being per se” as a “mode of being” (modus essendi) proper to substance. This use suggests that “being not in a subject” is not a formal addition to being but rather is a condition on being (esse). A “mode of being” is adverbial, as it were: a modulation of the being that actualizes essences, according to what is their due. In the case of substances, being not in a subject is not a formal addition to the essence of a substance, but is how that essence exists when it actually exists, and how being (esse) relates to the subject that it actualizes so as to be. Aquinas’s division of the categories according to modes of being rather than according to constitutional properties introduces a new, non-formal way of dividing being (ens) in an existential rather than an essential way. The categories are distinguished according to the
sort of existence they are owed if or when they exist.

Aquinas learned to think of the categories as categories of essences distinguished according to modulations of an act of being by which essences are actualized and perfected. The act of being, however, is not something that pertains to the very essence of the item in the category, as Avicenna had already seen. For, if that were the case, then items in the categories would share not only in a common nature or essence, but also in their actus essendi, such that they would be one being (ens)—an obvious absurdity. In this way, Aquinas’s Genus Argument proves that there must be a distinction between the essence by virtue of which an item is in a category and being in act (esse in actu) whereby an item actually exists. At the heart of Aquinas’s Genus Argument is Avicenna’s insight that being in act (wujūd bi-fiʿl) cannot be included in a thing’s essence.

What is it that Avicenna and Aquinas learned from the commentary tradition that led to their discoveries of the real distinction between essence and being? They both recognize real essences or common natures in the categories and, further, recognize that being in act (wujūd bi-fiʿl, esse in actu) is not included in the definition of any of the categories. This distinction is not a distinction between a universal and a particular instance of that universal—rather, it is a distinction between the essence by virtue of which something is in a category and that by which it actually exists, its being in act.

The originality of this dissertation, then, consists principally in the discovery of a distinctively Avicennian way of understanding the categories, influenced by the late antique commentators, and inherited in the works of Thomas Aquinas. Appreciating this background allows for a certain vindication of Aquinas’s Genus Argument, frequently
rejected as fallacious by even the greatest and most sympathetic Thomists. The argument is routinely criticized as reasoning from the merely logical properties of class-membership to an ontological claim. Once Aquinas’s Genus Argument is understood in light of Avicenna’s understanding of the categories, especially the category of substance, one can see that genera of the Genus Argument are principally the categories in the domain of real being. Avicenna proves that being in act (wujūd bi-fiʿl) cannot enter into the essence by virtue of which an item is in a category. Thus, being in act and essence must be extramentally distinct in the categories—a conclusion acknowledged (and rejected) by Averroes.

The Avicennian texts studied in Chapter 4 have not hitherto been the focus of scholarly attention as regards the essence-existence distinction, and they disclose, better than has been seen, Avicenna’s acceptance of a real distinction, as well as what I have synthesized as his “Categories Argument” for the real distinction. Aquinas adopts this Avicennian insight into the categories’ (quasi) definition in relation to being (esse) to argue as follows in his Genus Argument. The essence by virtue of which an item in a category has commonality with other such items cannot be identical with “being in act” without the other’s being actualized by the same act of being (esse in actu). Again, the texts lying behind Avicenna’s “Categories Argument” have been largely overlooked for their influence on Aquinas’s doctrine on accidental being (Chapter 5), but especially for their influence on the Genus Argument (Chapter 6). After all, Avicenna does not appeal to the theme of genus-membership in the reasoning behind his “Categories Argument.” Avicenna does not argue from a mere logical class. Nor does Aquinas. But Aquinas’s addition of the theme of genus-membership has blinded scholars to the true metaphysical
character of his argument, as is revealed by its Avicennian background.

We have examined how thinking about the structure and nature of the categories leads philosophers like Avicenna and Aquinas to discover a real distinction between being and essence. For Gilson, Christian or Muslim philosophers must modify how they define and speak of substance because of their theological commitment to creationism. By contrast, I show how the nature, structure, and definition of the categories of substance and accidents provides the occasion for Avicenna’s discovery, subsequently systematized by Aquinas, that actual existence must be really distinct from the essence by virtue of which an item is in a category. In this way, I have made good on an unrealized insight of Cornelio Fabro: the structure and nature of the categories as divisions of being (\textit{ens}) according to diverse “modes of being,” he proposes, requires the distinction between being (\textit{esse}) and essence. For Fabro, because of the ontological structure of the categories, Aquinas avails himself of the Genus Argument—a “most valid argument”—for the real distinction between essence and being in act (\textit{esse in actu}) in the categories. However, unlike Fabro, I have shown that Aquinas’s Genus Argument, like Avicenna’s “Categories Argument” on which it is based, are not fundamentally “logical” arguments, which are thereby vulnerable to the charge that they begin and end in mere conceptual distinctions. Rather, as these arguments show, to be in the categories requires that there be a distinction between an item’s essence and that whereby it is a being in act. The arguments point at an \textit{esse}, or \textit{wujūd}, that enters into composition with an essence as its act. The resulting “most valid argument” for the “real distinction” does not involve being liberated from the influence of Avicenna. On the contrary, to understand the Avicennian background of the Genus Argument is to see it, no longer as an argument about the
logician’s notion of “genus,” but as an articulation of the categories as categorizing actually existing things according to real essences. To understand the Avicennian background is to see the Genus Argument as a form of Categories Argument regarding the very metaphysical structure of reality.
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