On Being and Essence

Prologue

Because a small error in the beginning is a great one in the end, according to the Philosopher, and because being and essence are what are first conceived by the intellect, as Avicenna says, then—so that error does not come about due to ignorance of them—to explicate their difficulty we should state:

(a) what is signified by the name ‘essence’ (and ‘being’);
(b) how it is found in diverse conditions;
(c) how it is related to logical intentions, namely to genus, species, and differentia.

Now we should acquire the cognition of simples on the basis of composites and arrive at what is prior from what is posterior. That way, beginning with easier matters, learning takes place in a more suitable fashion. Hence, one should proceed from the signification of ‘being’ to the signification of ‘essence’.

Chapter 1

Note that, as the Philosopher says, ‘being’ is said on its own in two ways:

(a) what is divided by the ten genera; (b) what signifies the truth of propositions.

The difference between (a) and (b) is that according to (b), anything of which an affirmative proposition can be formulated can be called a being, even if it puts forward nothing in reality. According to (b), privations and negations are called beings: for we say that affirmation is opposed to negation, and that blindness is in the eye. But according to (a), only what puts forward something in reality can be called a being. Accordingly, blindness and the like are not beings according to (a).

2Metaphysics I.5.
3For Aquinas, an ‘intention’ is a cognitive act understood as directed toward something. Should that toward which it is directed be itself a mental act directed toward something, it is called a ‘second intention’—roughly, a concept of concepts. It was commonly held at the time that, e.g., a species such as human being was a second intention, that is, a mental act directed at the individual concepts of Socrates, Plato, and so on. The ‘logical’ intentions correspond to the basic elements of logic: genus, species, differentia, and definition.
4Metaphysics V.7, 1017a22–35.
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Hence the name ‘essence’ (essentia) is not taken from ‘being’ (ens) said according to (b). For some items are called beings according to (b) that do not have essence, as is clear in the case of privations. Instead, ‘essence’ is taken from ‘being’ said according to (a). Accordingly, the Commentator says that ‘being’ said according to (a) is what signifies the essence of a thing.5 Since, as noted, ‘being’ said according to (a) is divided by the ten genera, ‘essence’ must signify something common to all natures. And diverse beings are classified into diverse genera and species by these natures. For example, humanity is the essence of human being, and so on for other cases.

That by which a thing is classified in its proper genus or species is what is signified by a definition indicating what the thing is. For this reason, the name ‘essence’ is changed into the name ‘quiddity’ by philosophers. This is also what the Philosopher often names the ‘what-it-is-to-be’6—that is, that by which something has the feature of being what it is. It is also called ‘form’, in that the definiteness of any one thing is signified by ‘form’, as Avicenna says.7 The essence is also called by another name, ‘nature’—taking ‘nature’ in the first of the four ways that Boethius gives,8 namely in that one calls ‘nature’ everything that can somehow be grasped by the intellect. For a thing is intelligible only through its definition and essence. Thus the Philosopher also says that every substance is a nature.9 Nevertheless, the name ‘nature’ taken in this way seems to signify the essence of a thing in that it has an order to the proper operation of the thing, since no thing is devoid of its proper operation. Now the name ‘quiddity’ is taken from the fact that it is signified by the definition, but ‘essence’ is said in that through it and in it a being has existence.

But because ‘being’ is said of substances absolutely and primarily, and said of accidents as posterior and as though in a respect (secundum quid), it is thereby the case as well that essence is strictly and genuinely in substances, but is in accidents in a certain fashion and in a respect. Now some substances are simple and others are composite. There is essence in both, but it is in the simple ones in a more genuine and excellent way, in that they also have a more excellent existence. For simple substances—at least, the first and simple substance (which is God)—are the cause of those that are composite. But because the essences of those substances are more hidden from us, for this reason one ought to begin with the essences of composite substances, so that from easier matters learning happens in a more suitable manner.

5Averroës, Metaphysics V.14.
6The ‘what-it-is-to-be’: quod quid erat esse, the standard Latin translation of Aristotle’s formula τὸ ἔχειν ἔστων. See for example Aristotle, Metaphysics VII.3, 1028b34.
7Metaphysics II.2.
8On the Two Natures ch.1.
9Aristotle, Metaphysics V.5, 1014b36.
Chapter 2

In the case of composite substances, then, form and matter is familiar, e.g., soul and body in human being. However, it cannot be said that either one of them alone is called the essence [of the composite substance]. Indeed, it is obvious that the matter alone of a thing is not the essence. For a thing is both cognizable and ordered in a species or genus by its essence. But matter is not a principle of cognition. Nor is something determined to a genus or species according to its matter, but rather according to what the thing actually is. Also, neither can only the form of a composite substance be called its essence, although some philosophers try to assert this. For it is clear from what has been said that the essence is what is signified by the definition of a thing. But the definition of natural substances contains not only the form but also the matter, for otherwise natural and mathematical definitions would not differ. Nor can it be said that matter is put into the definition of a natural substance as something added to its essence or as a being outside of its essence. For this kind of definition is more proper to accidents, which do not have a perfect essence, and as a result accidents must admit into their definition a subject that is outside their genus. Therefore, it is clear that the essence of a composite substance includes both matter and form.

Furthermore, it cannot be said that ‘essence’ signifies either (a) the relation that exists between matter and form, or (b) something further added to matter and form, because this of necessity would be an accident and extraneous to the thing, and the thing would not be known through it—and all these features are suitable to the essence. In fact, the matter is rendered a being in actuality and something concrete (hoc aliquid) by the form, which is the actuality of the matter. Accordingly, that which further advenes does not give actual existence simply to the matter, but rather it gives actual existence as such-and-so to the matter, just as accidents also do—for example, whiteness makes something actually white. And, accordingly, when such a form is acquired [the composite substance] is not said to be generated simply but rather to be generated in a respect.

Therefore, it remains that in the case of composite substances the name ‘essence’ signifies that which is composed out of matter and form. Boethius’ remark that ‘ousia’ signifies the composite is in harmony with this. For ‘ousia’ among the Greeks is the same as ‘essence’ in our language, as he himself says.11 Avicenna, too, says that the quiddity of composite substances is the very composition of the form and the matter.12 Also, the Commentator says: “The nature that species have in the case of generable things is a certain mean, i.e., composed out of matter and form.”13 Reason too is in agreement with this. For the existence of a composite substance does not belong only to the form, nor only to the matter, but

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10 In Categorias Aristotelis 64:184A.
11 Boethius, On the Two Natures ch. 3.
12 Metaphysics V.5.
13 Averroës, Metaphysics VII.27.
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to the composite itself. However, the essence is that according to which the thing is said to be (esse). Accordingly, the essence, by which a thing is denominated as a being, must be neither only the form nor only the matter, but rather both the form and the matter—although the form alone is, in its own way, the cause of this kind of existence. Indeed, this is the case in other things that are constituted out of several principles: We see that things are not denominated on the basis of one of those principles only, but rather by that which embraces both principles. This is clear in the case of flavors. For sweetness is caused by the action of heat dispersing moisture, and although heat is the cause of sweetness in this way, still a body is not denominated ‘sweet’ by the heat but instead by the flavor, which embraces heat and moisture.

But since matter is the principle of individuation, it would perhaps seem to follow from this that the essence, which embraces in itself matter and form together, is only particular and not universal—from which it would follow that universals would not have a definition, if the essence is that which is signified by the definition. Hence, it should be known that the principle of individuation is not matter taken in any way whatsoever, but rather only signate matter. (I call ‘signate’ that matter which is considered under determinate dimensions.) Furthermore, this [signate] matter is not put into the definition that pertains to human being as human being, but it would be put into the definition of Socrates (if Socrates were to have a definition). However, non-signate matter is put into the definition of human being. For this bone and this flesh are not put into the definition of human being, but rather bone and flesh absolutely, which are the non-signate matter of human being.

Therefore, it is clear that the essence of human being and the essence of Socrates differ only according to signate and non-signate. Thus the Commentator says: “Socrates is nothing other than animality and rationality, which are his quiddity.” So too the essence of the genus and of the species differ according to signate and non-signate, although there is a different manner of designation in each case. The reason for this is that the designation of the individual with respect to the species is through matter determined in its dimensions, whereas the designation of the species with respect to the genus is through the constitutive differentia, which is taken from the form of the thing. Furthermore, this determination or designation that is in the species with respect to the genus is not through something existing in the essence of the species that is not in any way in the essence of the genus; instead, whatever is in the species is also in the genus as not determinate. For if animal were not the whole that is human being but merely part of it, animal would not be predicated of human being, since no integral part is predicated of its whole.

14Aquinas, following Aristotle in Posterior Analytics 2.3, 90b30, holds that individuals do not have definitions as such: Socrates does indeed have a definition, but only insofar as he is human.

15Averroës, Metaphysics VII.20.
Moreover, we can see how this occurs by looking closely at how body differs when it is put forward as: (a) part of animal, and when it is put forward as (b) the genus of animal; for it cannot be a genus in the way in which it is an integral part. Hence, this name ‘body’ can be taken in many ways. Insofar as it is in the genus of Substance, ‘body’ is said on the basis of the fact that it has such a nature that three dimensions can be designated in it. In fact, these three designated dimensions are the body that is in the genus of Quantity. Now it happens in things that what has one perfection may also reach to a further perfection, as is clear in the case of human being, who has both a sensitive nature and, beyond that, an intellectual nature. Likewise, too, another perfection can also be added beyond the perfection of having such a form that three dimensions can be designated in it, e.g., the perfection life (or something of the sort). Therefore, this name ‘body’ can signify a certain thing that has such a form from which there follows in [the thing] designability in three dimensions with an exclusion (praecisio)—that is, such that no further perfection follows from that form; rather, if anything else were further added, it would be outside the signification of ‘body’ said in this way. And body will be an integral and material part of animal in this way, since then soul will be outside that which is signified by the name ‘body’ and it will enter upon body—with the result that animal will be constituted out of these two, body and soul, as out of parts.

The name ‘body’ can also be taken so that it signifies a certain thing that has such a form on the basis of which three dimensions can be designated in it, whatever that form may be, whether some further perfection can issue from it or not. In this way, body will be the genus of animal, because there will be nothing to take in animal that is not implicitly contained in body. For the soul is not a form different from that form through which three dimensions were able to be designated in that thing. Hence, when we said that “body is what has such a form on the basis of which three dimensions can be designated in it,” it was understood as regards whatever the form may be—whether it be the soul, stonehood, or anything else. Thus the form of animal is implicitly contained in the form of body, insofar as body is its genus.

Such is the relationship of animal to human being as well. On the one hand, if ‘animal’ were to name only a certain thing that has a perfection such that it can sense and be moved by a principle existing in it, with the exclusion of another perfection, then, whatever other further perfection were to enter upon it, that perfection would be related to animal in the manner of an associated part and not as implicitly contained in the account (ratio) of animal—and thus animal would not be a genus. On the other hand, animal is a genus in that it signifies a certain thing from whose form sensing and motion can issue, whatever that form may be, whether the soul be only sensitive, or it be sensitive and rational together.

In this way, then, the genus signifies indeterminately the whole that is in the species, for it does not signify the matter only. Likewise, the differentia too also signifies the whole, and it does not signify the form only. The definition—as well as the species—also signifies the whole. Yet they signify the whole in diverse
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ways. The genus signifies the whole as a certain denomination determining that which is material in the thing, without the determination of the proper form. Accordingly, the genus is derived from the matter, although it is not matter—as is clear, because ‘body’ is said on the basis of the fact that it has a perfection such that three dimensions can be designated in it, and this perfection is materially related to a further perfection. But the differentia, conversely, signifies the whole as a certain denomination derived from the determinate form, apart from the fact that determinate matter pertains to the primary understanding of it—as is clear when one says ‘ensouled’ (i.e., that which has a soul), for one does not determine what it is [that is ensouled], whether body or something else. Accordingly, Avicenna says that the genus is understood in the differentia not as a part of its essence, but only as being outside the essence, just as the subject also pertains to the understanding of its attributes. Hence, even the genus, strictly speaking, is not predicated of the differentia, as the Philosopher says, except perhaps as a subject is predicated of an attribute. But the definition or the species includes both, namely (a) the determinate matter that the name of the genus designates, and (b) the determinate form that the name of the differentia designates.

On this basis, the reason is clear wherein the genus, species, and differentia are related proportionately to the matter and the form and the composite in nature, even though they are not the same as the latter. For the genus is not the matter, but derived from the matter as signifying the whole. Nor is the differentia the form, but derived from the form as signifying the whole. Accordingly, we say that human being is the rational animal, and not composed out of rational and animal, as we say that human being is composed out of soul and body. For human being is said to be composed out of soul and body as a certain ‘third thing’ constituted out of two things, which is neither of them, for human being is neither soul nor body. But if human being were said to be composed out of rational and animal in some way, it will not be as a third thing composed out of two things, but as a third understanding out of two understandings. For the understanding of animal lacks the determination of a specific form, expressing the nature of a thing by the fact that it is material with respect to its further perfection. On the other hand, the understanding of the differentia rational consists in the determination of the specific form. The understanding of the species or of the definition is constituted out of these two understandings. Hence, just as a thing that is constituted out of other things does not admit the predication of the things out of which it is constituted, so too neither does an understanding admit the predication of those understandings out of which it is constituted. For we do not say that the definition is the genus or the differentia.

Now although the genus signifies the whole essence of the species, still there need not be one essence for diverse species whose genus is the same. The

16Avicenna, Metaphysics V.6.
17Metaphysics III.3, 998b24–25; Topics IV.2, 122b20.
reason for this is that the unity of the genus proceeds from its very indeterminateness or indifference—not, however, in such a way that what is signified by the genus is numerically one nature in diverse species, on top of which another thing enters in that is the differentia determining it (as the form determines matter that is numerically one). Rather, it is because the genus signifies some form, yet not determinately this form or that one, which the differentia expresses determinately (and this is none other than the form that was indeterminately signified by the genus). Hence, the Commentator says that prime matter is called ‘one’ by the removal of all forms, whereas the genus is called ‘one’ by the commonness of the signified form. Accordingly, it is clear that through the addition of the differentia—since it removes the indeterminateness that was the cause of the unity of the genus—what remains are species that are diverse in essence.

Now the nature of the species is indeterminate with respect to the individual, just as the nature of the genus is indeterminate with respect to the species, as stated above. For this reason, it follows that just as that which is the genus, insofar as it was predicated of the species, implied (although indistinctly) in its signification the whole that is determinately in the species, so too that which is the species, in that it is predicated of the individual, must signify (even though indistinctly) the whole that is essentially in the individual. The essence of Socrates is signified by the name ‘man’ in the manner described above. Accordingly, human being is predicated of Socrates. However, if the nature of the species were signified along with the exclusion of designated matter, which is the principle of individuation, then the species will be related to the individual in the manner of a part. The nature of the species is signified by the name ‘humanity’ in the manner described, for ‘humanity’ signifies that whereby human being is human being. Yet designated matter is not that whereby human being is human being, and so it is not contained in any way among those elements due to which human being has the feature that it is human being. Therefore, since humanity includes in its understanding only those elements due to which human being has the feature that it is human being, it is clear that the designated matter is cut off or excluded from the signification. And because the part is not predicated of the whole, it is thereby the case that humanity is predicated neither of human being nor of Socrates. Accordingly, Avicenna says that the quiddity of a composite is not the very composite of which it is the quiddity, even if the quiddity itself is composite—just as humanity, though composite, is not human being. Rather, it must be received in something that is the designated matter.

18Averroës, Metaphysics XII.14.
19Following the manuscript variant Socratis rather than the reading speciei, which would give the sense “The essence of the species…”
20Metaphysics V.5.
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But, as mentioned above, the designation of the species with respect to the genus is through form, whereas the designation of the individual with respect to the species is through matter. From this it follows that the name signifying that whereby the nature of the genus is derived along with the exclusion of the determinate form perfecting the species must therefore signify the material part of the whole, as body is the material part of human being. On the other hand, the name signifying that whereby the nature of the species is derived along with the exclusion of the designated matter signifies the formal part of the whole. Hence, humanity is signified as a certain form, and it is said that it is the ‘form of the whole’—to be sure, not as though it were further added to the essential parts of the whole (namely form and matter) as the form of the house is further added to its integral parts, but rather it is the form that is the whole, that is, embracing the form and the matter, yet along with the exclusion of those elements through which the matter is apt to be designated.

Thus it is clear, then, that the name ‘human being’ and the name ‘humanity’ signify the essence of human being, but in diverse ways as described. The name ‘human being’ signifies it as a whole, namely insofar as it does not exclude the designation of matter but contains it implicitly and indistinctly, just as one says that the genus contains the differentia. Hence, the name ‘human being’ is predicated of individuals. The name ‘humanity,’ however, signifies the essence of human being as a part, since it contains in its signification only that which belongs to human being as human being, and excludes any designation of matter. Accordingly, the name ‘humanity’ is not predicated of individual human beings. It is due to this fact that we find the name ‘essence’ on the one hand predicated of a thing (for we say that Socrates is some essence), and on the other hand it is denied of a thing (e.g., we say that the essence of Socrates is not Socrates).

Chapter 3

Having seen what is signified by the name ‘essence’ in the case of composite substances, it should be seen how it is related to the account of the genus and species and differentia. However, since that to which the account of the genus or species or differentia is suitable is predicated of this signate singular, it is impossible for the account of the universal (namely genus or species) to be suitable to the essence in that it is signified in the manner of a part, e.g., by the name ‘humanity’ or ‘animality.’ Hence, Avicenna says that rationality is not the differentia, but rather the principle of the differentia.\(^{21}\) By the same reasoning, humanity is not a species, nor animality a genus. Likewise, too, it cannot be said that the account of the genus or species is suitable to the essence in that the essence is a certain thing existing outside singulars, as the Platonists maintained, since then the genus and

\(^{21}\) Metaphysics V.6.
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the species would not be predicated of this individual. For it cannot be said that
Socrates is what is separate from him, nor again that what is separate would assist
in the cognition of this singular. Hence, it remains that the account of the genus
or species is suitable to the essence in that it is signified in the manner of a whole,
e.g., by the name ‘man’ or ‘animal,’ insofar as it implicitly and indistinctly con-
tains the whole that is in the individual.

Now ‘nature’ or ‘essence’ taken like this can be considered in two ways. (a) It
is considered according to its own account, and this is the absolute consideration
of it. In this first way, nothing is true of the nature except what is suitable to it in
that it is of this sort. Accordingly, whatever else may be attributed to it, the attribu-
tion will be false. For example, rational and animal (and other features that fall
under the definition) is suitable to human being as human being, whereas white
or black (or anything of this sort that does not pertain to the account of human-
ity) is not suitable to human being as human being. Accordingly, if the question
were raised whether the nature considered in this first way can be called one
or many, neither ought to be granted, for each is outside the understanding of
humanity, and each can accrue to it. Indeed, if being many were to pertain to the
understanding of the nature, it could never be one, even though it nevertheless is
one in that it is in Socrates. Likewise, if being one were to pertain to its account,
then the nature of Socrates and of Plato would be one and the same, and it could
not be multiplied in many. (b) It is considered according to the existence
that it has in this or in that condition, and so something is predicated of it incidentally
by reason of that in which it is. For example, it is said that human being is white
because Socrates is white, even though white is not suitable to human being as
human being.

Furthermore, this nature has a twofold existence: one in singulars and the
other in the soul. Accidents follow upon the aforementioned nature, accord-
ing to each kind of existence. The nature, in singulars, has a multiple existence
according to the diversity of the singulars. Yet none of these kinds of existence
is appropriate to the nature itself according to the first consideration, namely
the absolute consideration [described above]. For it is false to say that the essence
of human being as such has existence-in-this-singular, because if existence-in-this-
singular were to be suitable to human being as human being, it would never be
outside this singular. Likewise, too, if existence-not-in-this-singular were suitable
to human being as such, it would never be in this singular. But it is true to say
that human being, not as human being, has the feature that it is in this singular
or in that one, or in the soul. Therefore, it is clear that the nature of human being
considered absolutely abstracts from any given existence, yet in such a way that
the exclusion of any of them does not occur. And it is the nature considered
in this way that is predicated of all individuals.

Yet it cannot be said that the account of the universal is suitable to the nature
taken in this way. For unity and commonness pertain to the account of the uni-
versal, whereas neither of these is suitable to human nature according to its abso-
lute consideration. Indeed, if commonness were to pertain to the understanding
of human being, then commonness would be found in whatever humanity is
found in—and this is false, since no commonness is found in Socrates; rather, whatever is in him has been individuated. Likewise, it also cannot be said that the account of the genus or species accrues to human nature according to the existence that it has in individuals. For human nature is not found in individuals in accordance with a unity such that it is some one thing that is suitable to all, which the account of the universal requires. Therefore, it remains that the account of the species accrues to human nature according to the existence that it has in the intellect.

Indeed, human nature itself in the intellect has existence abstracted from everything that individuates. Hence it has a uniform relation to all individuals that are outside the soul, for the reason that it is equally the likeness of all and leads into the cognition of all (insofar as they are human beings). And in virtue of the fact that it has such a relation to all individuals, the intellect devises the account of the species and attributes it to the nature. Accordingly, the Commentator says that the intellect is that which makes universality in things, and Avicenna says this too in his *Metaphysics* [V.2]. Although this understood nature has the account of the universal in that it is paired with things outside the soul, since it is one likeness of all of them, nevertheless, in that it has existence in this intellect or in that one, it is a certain understood particular appearance (*species*). Hence the Commentator’s failing in De anima III [n. 5] is clear, where he wanted to deduce the unity of the intellect in all human beings from the universality of the form that is understood. For universality does not belong to that form according to the existence that it has in the intellect, but rather in that it pertains to things as a likeness of things. For example, even if there were one corporeal statue representing many human beings, it is the case that the image or appearance of the statue would have a singular and proper existence in that it would exist in *this* matter, but it would have the account of commonness in that it would be the common representative of many.

Now because it is suitable to human nature according to its absolute consideration that it is predicated of Socrates, and also because the account of the species is not suitable to human nature according to its absolute consideration but rather pertains to the accidents that follow upon it according to the existence that it has in the intellect, then for these reasons the name ‘species’ is not predicated of Socrates such that one says “Socrates is a species.” This would happen of necessity if the account of the species were to be suitable to human being according to the existence that it has in Socrates, or according to its absolute consideration (namely as human being), for whatever is suitable to human being as human being is predicated of Socrates.

Yet being predicated is suitable to the genus of itself (*per se*), since it is put into the definition of the genus. Indeed, predication is something that (a) is accomplished through the intellect’s action of combining and dividing, and (b) has as a foundation in the thing itself the unity of those items of

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22*De anima* I.8.
which one is said of the other. Accordingly, the account of predicability can be encompassed in the account of the [logical] intention that is the genus, which likewise is completed through the intellect’s act. Yet nonetheless, that to which the intellect attributes the intention of predicability, combining it with another, is not itself the intention of the genus, but instead is that to which the intellect attributes the intention of the genus—e.g., what is signified by the name ‘animal.’

Therefore, it is clear in this way how the essence or the nature is related to the account of the species. For the account of the species is not among the characteristics that are suitable to the nature according to its absolute consideration; neither is it among the accidents, such as whiteness or blackness, that follow upon the nature according to the existence that it has outside the soul. But it is among the accidents that follow upon it according to the existence that it has in the intellect. And in this way the account of the genus or differentia is also suitable to it.

Chapter 4

Now it remains to look at the way in which there is essence in separated substances, i.e., in soul, Intelligence, and First Cause. Yet even though everyone grants the simplicity of the First Cause, some nevertheless attempt to introduce the composition of form and matter into the Intelligences and into the soul. The originator of this position seems to have been Avicebron, the author of the Fountain of Life. However, this is generally incompatible with the remarks of philosophers, because it is matter that they refer to these substances as “separated” from and they prove that these substances are free from all matter. The strongest demonstration of this is based on the power (virtus) of understanding that is in them. We see that forms are intelligible in actuality only in that they are separated from matter and from its conditions, and they are rendered intelligible in actuality only through the power of a substance that understands, in that forms are received in it and they are in actuality through it. Accordingly, there must be complete exemption from matter in any given substance that understands, such that it neither has matter as a part of itself nor even, as is the case among material forms, is it as a form impressed in matter.

Nor can anyone say that not any matter whatsoever prevents intelligibility, but only corporeal matter does. For if this were so by reason of corporeal matter only, then, since matter is called ‘corporeal’ only in that it stands under a corporeal form, it would be necessary that matter have this feature (i.e., preventing

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23 The First Cause is, of course, God. The Intelligences are the angels, who came by this name due to the role they play in Aristotelian-Ptolemaic cosmology, in which each separate sphere is caused to rotate by the action of an intelligent being—identified with an angel, who causes physical motion by love for God.
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30 intelligibility) by its corporeal form. This cannot be the case, because even a corporeal form itself is actually intelligible, just as other forms are, in that it is abstracted from matter. Accordingly, there is not a composition out of matter and form in any way in a soul or an Intelligence such that ‘essence’ is taken in this way in them, as it is in the case of corporeal substances. But there is a composition of form and existence. Accordingly, it is said in the comment on the ninth proposition in the Book of Causes that an Intelligence is something that has form and existence—and ‘form’ is taken in this passage for the quiddity or simple nature itself.

It is plain to see how this is the case. Whatever items are related to one another such that one is the cause of the existence of the other, the one that has the account of the cause can have existence without the other, but not conversely. Furthermore, the relationship of matter and form is such that the form gives existence to the matter. Hence it is impossible that matter exists without form. On the other hand, it is not impossible that some form exists without matter. The reason for this is that form as form does not have a dependence upon matter. Now if one were to discover some forms that can only be in matter, this feature accrues to them in that they are distant from the first principle, which is primary and pure actuality. Accordingly, the forms that are nearest to the first principle are forms subsisting on their own (per se) without matter. For form does not require matter according to its genus as a whole, as stated. And the Intelligences are forms of this sort [that do not require matter]. Hence it is not necessary that the essences or the quiddities of these substances be other than form itself.

Therefore, the essence of a composite substance differs from the essence of a simple substance in this regard, that the essence of a composite substance is not only the form but rather embraces the form and the matter, whereas the essence of a simple substance is only the form. Two other differences [between the essences of composite and simple substances] are also grounded on this fact. The first difference is that the essence of a composite substance can be signified as a whole or as a part, which happens due to the designation of matter, as stated above. Hence the essence of a composite thing is not predicated in any way of the composite thing itself. For it cannot be said that human being is his quiddity. On the other hand, the essence of a simple thing, which is its form, can be signified only as a whole, since nothing else is there apart from the form as though it were receiving the form. Hence however we take the essence of a simple substance, the essence is predicated of the simple substance. Accordingly, Avicenna says that the quiddity of a simple thing is the very simple thing itself, since there is not anything else receiving the quiddity.24 The second difference is that the essences of composite things, in virtue of the fact that they are received in designated matter, are multiplied according to its division—whereby it happens that some composite things are the same in species and numerically

24Metaphysics V.5.
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diverse from one another. On the other hand, since the essence of a simple
substance is not received in matter, there cannot be such a multiplication
in this case. Hence in the case of simple substances it is necessary that one
does not find many individuals belonging to the same species. Instead, in this
case there are just as many species as there are individuals, as Avicenna says
explicitly.25

Therefore, even though substances of this sort are forms only, without matter,
still there is not every kind of simplicity in them. Nor are they pure actuality.
Instead, they have an admixture of potentiality. This is clear as follows. What-
ever does not pertain to the understanding of the essence or quiddity advenes as
external and produces a composition with the essence, since no essence can be
understood without the elements that are parts of the essence. However, every
essence or quiddity can be understood without this feature: that something be
understood pertaining to its existence. For I can understand what human being
or phoenix is, and yet be ignorant whether they have existence in the world.
Therefore, it is clear that existence differs from the essence or quiddity. This
conclusion holds unless, perhaps, there is some thing whose quiddity is its own
existence itself. This thing whose quiddity is its own existence itself can only be
one and primary, since it is impossible that the multiplication of anything occur
unless it does so either (a) by the addition of some differentia, which is how the
nature of the genus is multiplied in the species; or (b) by the fact that the form is
received in diverse matters, which is how the nature of the species is multiplied
in diverse individuals; or (c) by the fact that the one is absolute and the other is
received in something, which is how, if there were heat separated [from matter],
it would be different from non-separated heat in virtue of its very separation.

[With regard to (a)]: if some thing that is only existence were postulated, such
that its very existence were subsisting, this existence will not receive the addition
of a differentia, since then it would not be existence only, but rather existence
and, apart from this, some form. [With regard to (b)]: so much the less would
it receive the addition of matter, since then it would be not subsisting existence
but material existence. Accordingly, it remains that there can be only one such
thing that is its own existence. Apart from this exception, then, in the case of
anything else whatsoever, it is necessary that its existence is one thing and its
quiddity or nature or form another. Accordingly, there must be existence apart
from form in the case of the Intelligences, and so it was said that an Intelligence
is form and existence.

Furthermore, whatever is suitable to something either (i) is caused due to
the principles of its nature, e.g., the capacity for laughter in human being; or
(ii) advenes by some extrinsic principle, e.g., the light in the air due to the sun’s
influence. [With regard to (i)]: It cannot be the case that the existence itself
is caused by the very form or quiddity of the thing—I mean ‘caused’ as by an
efficient cause—since then some thing would be the cause of itself and make

25Metaphysics V.2.
On Being and Essence

itself exist, which is impossible. Therefore, every such thing whose existence differs from its nature must have existence from another. And since whatever is through another is reduced to that which is through itself (per se), as to a first cause, there must be some thing that is the cause of being (causa essendi) for all things, in that it is existence only. Otherwise one would proceed to infinity in causes, since every thing that is not existence only has a cause of its existence, as just stated. Therefore, it is clear that an Intelligence is form and existence, and that it has existence from the first being that is existence only—and this is the First Cause, which is God.

Now whatever receives something from another is in potentiality with respect to what it receives, and what is received in it is its actuality. Therefore, the very quiddity or form that is an Intelligence must be in potentiality with respect to the existence that it receives from God, and that existence is received in the manner of an actuality. And so one finds potentiality and actuality in Intelligences. On the other hand, one does not find form and matter in Intelligences, except equivocally. Accordingly, undergoing, receiving, being a subject, and everything of this sort—features that seem to be suitable to things by reason of their matter—are equivocally suitable to intellectual substances and to corporeal substances, as the Commentator says in De anima III [n. 14]. And since the quiddity of an Intelligence is the very Intelligence itself, as stated, then its quiddity or essence is itself what it is, and its existence received from God is that by which it subsists in the world. For this reason, some say that substances of this sort are composed out of “by which it is” and “what it is,” or out of “what it is” and existence, as Boethius says. 26

Because potentiality and actuality are put into the Intelligences, it will not be difficult to find a multiplicity of Intelligences—which would be impossible if no potentiality were in them. Accordingly, the Commentator says in De anima III [n. 5] that if the nature of the possible intellect were unknown, we could not find multiplicity in separated substances. Therefore, the distinction of these Intelligences from one another accords with their degree of potentiality and actuality, such that the higher Intelligence (which is nearer to the First Being) has more of actuality and less of potentiality—and so on for the others.

This progression is finished in the human soul, which occupies the lowest degree among intellectual substances. Accordingly, the possible intellect belonging to the human soul is related to intelligible forms just as prime matter (which occupies the lowest degree of sensible existence) is related to sensible forms, as the Commentator says in De anima III [n. 5]. Hence the Philosopher compares the human soul to a tablet on which nothing is written. 27 Due to the fact that the human soul, among the other intellectual substances, has more of potentiality, it is thereby rendered to that extent near to material things, so that a material thing is drawn to participate in its existence—namely such that

26 On the Hebdomads (Theological Tractates pp. 41–43).
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from soul and body there results one existence in one composite, even though that existence, insofar as it belongs to the soul, is not dependent upon the body. Hence after the form that is the human soul, other forms are found having more of potentiality, and nearer to matter to the extent that their existence is not without matter. Also, in these other forms one finds there to be order and degree all the way down to the primary forms of the elements, which are the nearest to matter. Accordingly, these other forms do not have any operation except due to the exigency of active and passive qualities, and other qualities by which matter is disposed to form.

Chapter 5

Now that we have looked at these matters, then, it is clear how essence is found in diverse cases. In fact, a threefold way of having essence is found in substances. In the first way, there is something (namely God) whose essence is his very existence itself. Hence some philosophers are found to say that God does not have quiddity or essence, since his essence does not differ from his existence. It follows from this that God is not in a genus, since whatever is in a genus must have quiddity apart from its existence. The reason for this is that the quiddity or nature of the genus or species is not distinguished according to the account of the nature in the substances whose genus or species it is, whereas the existence is diverse in the diverse substances.

Nor is it necessary, if we say that God is existence only, that we fall into the error of those who said that God is that universal existence by which any given thing formally is. For this existence that is God satisfies a condition of this type: that no addition can be made to it. Accordingly, God’s existence is distinct from all other existence by its very purity. For this reason, it is said in the comment on the ninth proposition in the Book of Causes that the individuation of the First Cause, which is existence only, is through its pure goodness. However, just as existence in general does not include in its understanding any addition, so too it does not include in its understanding the exclusion of an addition. For if this were the case, nothing in which something were added beyond existence could be understood to be.

Likewise, too, even though God is existence only, the remaining perfecions and excellences need not be lacking in him. Rather, God has all the perfections that are in all genera, for the reason that ‘perfect’ is said simply, as the Philosopher and the Commentator say. But God has them in a way that is more excellent than all other things do, since in him they are one but in

28Amaury of Bène (†1207), while lecturing on theology at the University of Paris, was accused of holding this view—taken to amount to pantheism. It was formally condemned by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1210. See below, ST I.3.8 reply.

other things they have diversity. This is because all those perfections are suitable together according to his simple existence—much as if someone through one quality could produce the operations belonging to all qualities, he would have all qualities in that one quality. In this way, God has all perfections in His very existence.

In the second way, essence is found in created intellectual substances. In them, existence differs from essence, even though the essence is without matter. Accordingly, their existence is not absolute but received, and hence finite and limited to the capacity of the nature that is the recipient. On the other hand, their nature or quiddity is absolute, not received in any matter. Hence it is said in the sixteenth proposition in the Book of Causes that the Intelligences are infinite below and finite above: for they are finite as regards their existence, which they receive from above, yet they are not made finite below, since their forms are not limited to the capacity of some matter receiving them. As stated, one does not find a multiplicity of individuals in one species in the case of such substances—except in the human soul, due to the body to which it is united. And although the individuation of the human soul depends on the body as an occasion as regards its inception, since it only acquires an individuated existence in the body of which it is the actuality, nevertheless it is not necessary that individuation cease when the body is taken away. The reason for this is that because the human soul has an absolute existence in virtue of which an individuated existence has been acquired for itself, due to the fact that the human soul was made as the form of this body, it follows that that existence always remains individuated. Hence Avicenna says that the individuation and multiplication of souls depends upon the body with regard to its beginning, but not with regard to its end.30

Because quiddity is not the same as existence in these substances, they are thereby able to be ordered in a category. For this reason one finds genus and species and differentia in them, even though their proper differentiae are hidden from us. Indeed, even in the case of sensible things the essential differentiae are unknown. Accordingly, the essential differentiae of material substances are signified by the accidental differentiae that arise from the essential differentiae (as a cause is signified by its effect), e.g., two-footed is postulated as the differentia of human being. However, the proper accidents of immaterial substances are unknown to us. Accordingly, the differentiae of immaterial substances cannot be signified by us either on their own or through accidental differentiae.

Nevertheless, this point should be noted: one does not take the genus and the differentia in the same way in these immaterial substances and in sensible substances. The reason for this is that in the case of sensible substances, the genus is taken from that which is material in the thing, whereas the differentia is taken from that which is formal in it. Accordingly, Avicenna says that in the case of things composed out of matter and form, the form “is the simple

30Liber de anima V.3 (pp. 107, 109).
differentia of that which is constituted from it”\textsuperscript{31}—not, however, such that the form is itself the differentia, but rather because the form is the principle of the differentia, as he says.\textsuperscript{32} Such a differentia is called the ‘simple differentia’ because it is taken from that which is part of the quiddity of the thing, that is, from the form. However, since immaterial substances are simple quiddities, the differentia in their case cannot be taken from that which is part of the quiddity, but rather from the whole quiddity. Hence Avicenna says: “Only species whose essences are composed out of matter and form have a simple differentia.”\textsuperscript{33}

Likewise, too, in these immaterial substances the genus is taken from the essence as a whole, but in a different way. For one separated substance is suited to another in immateriality, and they differ from one another in degree of perfection, according to their distance from potentiality and their proximity to pure actuality. Hence in these separated substances, the genus is taken from what follows upon them insofar as they are immaterial, such as their intellectuality or something of the sort. In these substances, however, the differentia (though unknown to us) is taken from what follows upon the degree of perfection in them. Nor is it necessary that these differentiae be accidental because they are in accordance with greater and lesser perfection, which do not diversify the species. For the degree of perfection in receiving the same form does not diversify the species, as for instance more white and less white do not diversify the species in participating in a whiteness of the same character (ratio). But a degree of perfection that is diverse in the very participated forms or natures does diversify the species, e.g., nature advances by degrees from plants to animals through certain cases that are intermediate between plants and animals, according to the Philosopher.\textsuperscript{34} Nor again is it necessary that the division of intellectual substances always be through two genuine differentiae, for it is impossible that this happen in all things, as the Philosopher says.\textsuperscript{35}

In the third way, essence is found in substances composed out of matter and form. In them, existence is both received and finite, for the reason that they both have their existence from another. Again, their nature or quiddity is received in signate matter. Hence they are finite both above and below. Also, the multiplication of individuals in one species is now possible in them, in accordance with the division of signate matter. How essence is related to logical intentions in the case of these composite substances has been stated above.

\textsuperscript{31}Liber de anima I.1 (p. 19).
\textsuperscript{32}Metaphysics V.6.
\textsuperscript{33}Liber de anima I.1 (p. 19).
\textsuperscript{34}History of Animals VIII.1, 588b4–12.
\textsuperscript{35}Parts of Animals I.2, 642b5–7.
Chapter 6

Now it remains to look at the way in which there is essence in accidents, for how it is in all substances has been stated. Now since the essence is that which is signified by the definition, as stated, accidents must have essence in the way in which they have a definition. However, accidents have an incomplete definition, since they can only be defined if a subject is put into their definition. The reason for this is that they do not have existence on their own apart from a subject. Instead, just as substantial existence results from form and matter when they are combined, so too accidental existence results from accident and subject when an accident advenes on a subject. Hence a substantial form does not have a complete essence, and neither does matter, since one must put into the definition even of a substantial form that of which it is the form. Thus its definition is through the addition of something that is outside its genus, just as the definition of an accidental form is. Accordingly, body is also put into the definition of the soul by the natural philosopher, who considers the soul only insofar as it is the form of a physical body.36

Yet there is still this much of a difference between substantial and accidental forms: Just as a substantial form does not have absolute existence on its own without that on which it advenes, so too neither does that on which it advenes, namely matter. Hence from the conjunction of substantial form and matter there results the existence in which a thing subsists on its own, and from them something that is one on its own is produced, for the reason that a certain essence results from their conjunction. Accordingly, the substantial form—although considered in itself it does not have the complete account of the essence—nevertheless is part of the complete essence. In contrast, that on which the accident advenes is a being that is complete in itself, subsisting in its own existence, which naturally precedes the accident that supervenes. Hence the supervenient accident does not cause that existence in which a thing subsists ([i.e.,] through which a thing is a being on its own) by the conjunction of itself with that on which it advenes. Instead, it causes a certain ‘secondary existence’ that a subsisting thing can be understood without—just as the primary can be understood without the secondary. Accordingly, what is one of itself is not produced from accident and subject, but rather what is one incidentally (per accidens). Hence no essence results from their conjunction, as it does from the conjunction of form and matter. For this reason, an accident neither has the account of the complete essence nor is part of a complete essence. Rather, just as it is a being in a respect (secundum quid), so too it also has essence in a respect.

Yet since that which is said most of all and most genuinely in any genus is the cause of those that are after it in that genus—e.g., fire, which is the extreme case of hotness, is the cause of heat in things that are hot, as is

36See Aristotle, De anima II.1, 412b5.
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said in *Metaphysics* II [993b24–26]—then substance, which is the first in the
genus of being, having essence most of all and most genuinely, must be the
cause of accidents that secondarily and, as it were, in a respect participate in
the account of being. Nevertheless, this happens in diverse ways. Since the
parts of substance are matter and form, some accidents thereby follow prin-
cipally upon the form and others upon the matter. However, one finds some
forms whose existence does not depend on matter (e.g., the intellectual soul),
whereas matter has existence only through form. Accordingly, in the case of
accidents that follow upon the form there is something that does not have an
association with matter, e.g., understanding, which, as the Philosopher
proves, does not take place through a corporeal organ. There are also some
accidents that, in virtue of following upon the form, have an association with
matter, e.g., sensing. However, no accident follows upon matter without an
association with a form.

Nevertheless, a certain diversity is found among these accidents that follow
upon the matter. For some accidents follow upon matter according to the order
that the matter has to a specific form—e.g., masculine and feminine in the case
of animals, the diversity of which is reduced to matter, as is said in *Metaphysics*
X [1058b21–23]. Accordingly, were the form of animal removed, the given acci-
dents would not remain (except equivocally). Yet other accidents follow upon
matter according to the order that the matter has to a generic form, and so, were
the specific form removed, these accidents would still remain. For example, the
blackness of the skin in an Ethiopian is from the mixture of the elements and not
from the account of the soul, and so will remain in it after death.

Now since any given thing is individuated from its matter and classified in
a genus or species through its form, then the accidents that follow upon matter
are accidents of the individual, according to which individuals, even those of the
same species, differ from one another. However, accidents that follow upon the
form are proper attributes either of the genus or of the species. Accordingly, they
are found in everything participating in the nature of the genus or the species. For
example, the ability to laugh follows upon the form in the case of human being,
since laughter takes place due to some cognitive apprehension belonging to the
soul of human being.

It should also be noted that accidents are caused by essential principles accord-
ing to either (a) perfect actuality, e.g., the heat in fire, which is always hot; or (b)
aptitude only, but in this latter case there occurs a complement from an external
agent, e.g., transparency in the air, which is completed by a bright external body.
In such cases as (b), the aptitude is an inseparable accident, but the complement
that advenes from some principle that is outside the essence of the thing or does not
enter into the constitution of the thing is separable, e.g., being moved and the like.

Furthermore, it should also be known that in the case of accidents the genus,
the *differentia*, and the species are taken in a different way than they are in the

37 *De anima* III.1, 429a22–26.
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case of substances. The reason for this is as follows. In the case of substances, what is one of itself is produced out of substantial form and matter, with a definite nature that is one resulting from their conjunction (and this nature is properly classified in the category of Substance). Hence, in the case of substances, the concrete names that signify the composite (e.g., 'human being' or 'animal') are properly said to be in the genus [of Substance] as species or genera. Furthermore, the form or the matter is not in the category in this way, except by reduction, as principles are said to be in the genus. But from an accident and a subject there does not come about what is one of itself. Accordingly, there does not result from their conjunction any nature to which the intention of the genus or the species can be attributed. Accordingly, accidental names said in a concrete fashion, e.g., 'the white' or 'the musical', are not put into a category as species or genera except by reduction—but only in that they are signified in the abstract, e.g., whiteness and music. Because accidents are not composed out of matter and form, the genus cannot be taken in them from the matter and the differentiae from the form, as [one can] in the case of composite substances. Instead, the primary genus must be taken from their very manner of being (modus essendi), in that 'being' is said in diverse ways of the ten genera that are the categories according to the prior and the posterior. For example, one says 'quantity' in virtue of the fact that it is the measure of substance, and 'quality' in that it is the condition of substance, and so for the other categories, according to the Philosopher.38

Now in the case of accidents, the differentiae are taken from the diversity of the principles by which they are caused. Because proper attributes are caused by the proper principles of the subject, the subject is put into their definition in place of the differentiae—if they are defined in the abstract (according to which they are properly in a genus). For example, it is said that snubness is the curvature of the nose. However, the converse would be the case if the definition of accidents were taken in that they are said in a concrete fashion. In this way, the subject would be put into their definition as the genus, since then they would be defined in the manner of composite substances, in which the account of the genus is taken from the matter. For example, we say that the snub is the curved nose. This is likewise the case if one accident is the principle of another accident, as the principle of relation is action and passion and quantity—and so the Philosopher divides relation according to them.39 But since the proper principles of accidents are not always obvious, we then sometimes take the differentiae of accidents from their effects. For example, combinative and separative are called the differentiae of color, and they are caused by the abundance or the scarcity of the light by which the diverse species of color are caused.40

38Metaphysics IX.1, 1045b27–32.
39Metaphysics V.15, 1020b26–32.
40See Aristotle, Metaphysics X.9, 1057b8–9.
Conclusion

Therefore, it is clear in this fashion how essence is in substances and accidents, how it is in composite and simple substances, and the manner in which universal logical intentions are found in all these—with the exception of him who is First, who is entirely simple; because of his simplicity, no account of genus or species is suitable to him, and so neither is definition. May the end and consummation of this discourse lie in him. Amen.