Aquinas on The Distinction Between *Esse* and *Esse:* How the Name '*Esse*' Can Signify *Essence*

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Abstract

In a number of texts throughout his career, Thomas Aquinas identifies different senses of the term '*esse*'. Most notably, he notes that according to one sense, the term signifies *the act of existence* (*actus essendi*), which he famously holds is really distinct from essence in all beings other than God. Perhaps surprisingly, he also notes on a number of occasions that according to another sense, the term '*esse*' can signify that very principle that he says is *distinct* from the act of existence, namely, *essence.* In light of Aquinas's semantic theory, this paper investigates how he coherently holds within his metaphysical system that this term '*esse*' can signify in different ways both *essence* and *the act of existence*. More broadly, what it shows is how, for Aquinas, the metaphysician can look to the modes of signification (*modi significandi*) of terms and as well as their modes of predication (*modi praedicandi*) to draw careful conclusions about the modes of existence (*modi essendi*) of real beings. These considerations reveal that in Aquinas's view, although the grammarian and logician in their way are also concerned with these semantic modes, it is not their job to employ them to discern the various senses of the term 'being' or the fundamental modes of *being*. In the end, this is a task for the metaphysician.

Keywords

Being, Actuality, Categories, Essence, Existence, Signification, Modes of signification, Modes of predication

Few teachings in the thought of Thomas Aquinas are as foundational as his doctrine of *esse* as the act of existing *(actus essendi)*. God, he argues, is *esse* by his very essence and, hence, a subsisting *esse.* By contrast, in every other being, its *esse* is really distinct from its essence. The reader familiar with these teachings might be surprised, then, to find Aquinas stating at times that the term *'esse'* can also be used to

signify *essence*—the very metaphysical principle that he takes such care to show must be distinct from the act of existing. Given the importance of this metaphysical distinction in Aquinas's thought, one might wonder why he would present the term *'esse'* as signifying essence at all?[1] Moreover, one might ask how seriously we should we take these statements as reflecting his own views?

Lending to the latter question is the fact that a number of texts in which Aquinas most clearly notes this sense of the term *'esse'* occur in one of his earliest works, the *Scriptum Super Sententiis* (1252–56).[2] For example, in the context of considering there whether the Divine Relations are the divine essence itself, Aquinas clarifies that '[The term] *'esse'* is said in three ways:

(1) In one way, *'esse'* names the very *quiddity*, or *nature*, of a thing […]

(2) In another way *'esse'* names the very *act* of an essence […]

(3) In a third way, *'esse'* names what signifies the truth of the composition in propositions, inasmuch as it is called the 'copula'.[3]

It might be tempting to dismiss Aquinas's presentation here of the first sense of *'esse'* as a mere youthful effort to diligently report on this common usage of the term by others. Indeed, as Armand Maurer

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[1]   In what follows, I will employ the convention of using single quotation marks to indicate terms (e.g. 'being', 'substance') and italicization to indicate the notions, natures, etc. that these terms signify (e.g. *being, substance*). Some valuable scholarly treatments of this question on the different senses of *'esse'* are offered by Joseph Owens, 'The Accidental and Essential Character of Being in the Doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas', *Mediaeval Studies* 20 (1958): 1–40; Ralph McInerny, 'Being and Predication', in *Being and Predication: Thomistic Interpretations*, vol. 16, Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 173-228. This chapter includes two earlier published articles: 'Some Notes on Being and Predication', *The Thomist* 22 (1959): 315-35, and 'Notes on Being and Predication', Laval théologique et philosophique 15 (1959): 236-74.

[2]   All dating of Thomas's works follows Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Initiation à saint Thomas d'Aquin: Sa personne et son œuvre*, Nouvelle édition profondément remaniée, vol. 1 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2015).

[3]   *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum magistri Petri Lombardi episcopi Parisiensis* I (hereafter *Super Sententiis* I), ed. P. Mandonnet, vol. 1 (Paris: Lethielleux, 1929), d. 33, q. 1, a. 1, ad 1 (pp. 765–66): 'Sed sciendum, quod esse dicitur tripliciter. Uno modo dicitur esse ipsa quidditas vel natura rei, sicut dicitur quod definitio est oratio significans quid est esse; definitio enim quidditatem rei significat. Alio modo dicitur esse ipse actus essentiae; sicut vivere, quod est esse viventibus, est animae actus; non actus secundus, qui est operatio, sed actus primus. Tertio modo dicitur esse quod significat veritatem compositionis in propositionibus, secundum quod est dicitur copula: et secundum hoc est in intellectu componente et dividente quantum ad sui complementum; sed fundatur in esse rei, quod est actus essentiae, sicut supra de veritate dictum est'. (Emphasis added in translation). Mandonnet notes that the Parma edition has 'dupliciter' instead of 'triplicter' (766).

observes, 'William of Auvergne, for example, uses the term *esse* to de-note both the existence of man and his intelligible and definable quiddity or essence'. Maurer goes on to note that 'Although the use of *esse* to mean essence had a long tradition in the Middle Ages, going back at least to Boethius, St Thomas himself reserved the term *esse* to mean the act of existing'.[4] Certainly in his metaphysical and theological considerations, Aquinas shows a decided preference for using the term to signify the *act of existing*. Nevertheless, a careful review of Aquinas's corpus reveals that, in fact, he consistently holds throughout his career that, in some respect, '*esse*' can signify *essence*. Moreover, he does so for substantive semantic reasons that are intended to elucidate themes in his metaphysical thought.

To understand, then, not only why Aquinas considers this quidditative sense of '*esse*' to be relevant for a metaphysics centered on the *act of existence,* but also how it fits into that system, we must turn to a consideration of Aquinas's semantics. To this end, my paper will have three parts. (1) First, I will offer a brief chronological review of the texts in which he explicitly draws either a twofold or threefold distinction regarding what the terms '*esse*' and '*ens*' name or signify in order to highlight his treatment of a quidditative sense of these terms. (2) Next, I will look at Aquinas's Commentary on *Metaphysics* V, 7 to see Aristotle's influence on his account of the different senses of '*esse*'. (3) Then, I will offer a brief overview of Aquinas's account of signification to provide a frame of reference to consider how the term *'esse'* could signify essence. (4) Finally, I will offer some concluding thoughts.

§1. Textual References Chronologically Considered

Aquinas's observation that the term 'being' can be said in two ways (*dupliciter*) appears numerous times throughout his corpus. Sometimes he makes this observation with regard to the term *'ens'* whereas other times he does so with regard to the term *'esse'*. As we have already seen, on occasion he observes that 'being' can be said in *three* ways. The occasion for Aquinas to draw these two- or threefold distinctions occurs most frequently when he wishes to explain how evil can be said 'to be' even though it is a privation. At other times, he does so to explain how we can know the 'is' in the assertion '*Deus est*' even though we do not know the *esse* that is God's essence. And, still other times, he draws these distinctions in order to address whether there is only one *esse* in Christ. The question I am interested in here, however, is less about the context than the observations themselves and what Aquinas means by them.

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[4] Armand Maurer, *Thomas Aquinas. On Being and Essence* (Toronto, 1968), 15–16.

In order to compare the various relevant texts, and to do so in a manageable way, I have produced the table in Fig. 1, which catalogs the various instances throughout Aquinas's corpus when he explicitly tells us that the terms *'esse'* and *'ens'* can be said, name, or signify, in two or three ways. In other words, it focuses on those texts in which Aquinas compares different senses of these terms.[5] Hence, this catalog does not pretend to be exhaustive, since there are a number of other, non-comparative statements by Aquinas regarding what the terms '*esse*' and *'ens'* signify. I will address some of these other texts in what follows. For now, it should be noted that the last three columns in the table follow the order in which he presents his considerations of the relevant term in a given text; my summaries in these columns attempt to be as literal as possible given the space provided.[6] The shaded cells are intended to highlight locations where Aquinas explicitly observes that *'esse'* or *'ens'* names or signifies *essentia,* or the related notions of *quidditas* and *natura.*

In reviewing this table, we find the following commonalities among the various texts. First, in all of these texts Aquinas's principal considerations are ones about '*esse*' and '*ens*' taken as terms, addressing how each either can be said (*dicitur*), name (*dicitur quod*), or signify (*significat*). Another common feature, present in all of these texts, with the exception of **13**, is the explicit mention of a sense of the term 'being' that signifies the truth of a composition in a proposition. Considering this sense, he makes clear in some of these texts (**4, 7, 8**) that the verb *'est'* functions in this way in its role as a copula, joining a predicate to a subject. For this reason, he notes at times that *'esse'* taken in this way is present in the mind (intellect, reason), rather than in things (**2, 4–8, 11, 14**). In texts **5, 12,** and **13** he also notes (or indicates) that this sense of 'being' answers the question 'Is it?' (*an est*).[7] Going forward,

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[5] The texts identified in this table were located in part through a search through the work of prior scholarship and in part through searches of the Index Thomisticus (e.g., [ens/esse *2 dicitur *2 dupliciter/tripliciter]). For prior work in this area, see Hermann Weidemann, 'The Logic of Being in Thomas Aquinas', in *The Logic of Being*, ed. Simo Knuuttila and Jaakko Hintikka, vol. 28, Synthese Historical Library (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1986), 181–200; Gyula Klima, 'The Semantic Principles Underlying Saint Thomas Aquinas's Metaphysics of Being', *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 5 (1996): esp. 92, n. 9; Gyula Klima, 'Aquinas' Theory of the Copula and the Analogy of Being', *Logical Analysis and History of Philosophy* 5 (2002): esp. 160, n. 1.

[6] One liberty I have taken, however, is to simplify and standardize the phrases *decem genera* and *decem praedicamenta* as 'ten categories', since those are what Aquinas clearly has in mind.

[7] On how the copulative sense of being answers the question *an est*, see Weidemann, 'The Logic of Being', esp. 183–86; C. F. J. Martin, 'The Notion of Existence Used in Answering *an est?*', in *Thomas Aquinas: God and Explanations* (Ediburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 50–79; Lawrence Dewan O.P., 'Which *Esse* Gives the Answer to the Question: 'Is It?' for St. Thomas', *Doctor Communis N.S.* 3 (2002): 80–97; Stephen L. Brock, 'Thomas Aquinas and "What Actually Exists"', in *Wisdom's Apprentice: Thomistic Essays in Honor of*

DATE	TEXT	SOURCE	WAYS IN WHICH 'ENS'/'ESSE' IS SAID	IN ONE WAY	IN ANOTHER WAY	IN A THIRD WAY
1252–56	1	*De ente* c. 1	*'Ens'* 2 ways	Names what is divided by the ten categories. **'ESSENCE'** is taken from *'ens'* said in this way. Thus, *'ens'* signifies the **ESSENCE** of a thing.	Names what signifies the **truth of propositions**	n/a
	2	*Sent.* I 19.5.1 ad 1	*'Esse'* 2 ways	*'Ens'* [sic] signifies the **ESSENCE** of things as divided by the ten categories	*'Esse'* signifies the **composition** made by mind. Thus, *'ens'* names what is **true**.	n/a
	3	*Sent.* I 28.2.3 *expos.*	*'Esse'* 2 ways	Signifies the **truth of a composition**	Signifies the **act of an essence**	n/a
	4	*Sent.* I 33.1.1 ad 1	*'Esse'* 3 ways	Names the very **QUIDDITY** or **NATURE** of a thing	Names the **act of an essence**	Names what signifies the **truth of composition in propositions**, as the **copula**. This *esse* is in the intellect but is founded in the *esse* of the thing that is an act of essence.
	5	*Sent.* II 34.1.1 co.	*'Ens'* 2 ways	Names **what is divided by the ten categories.** Thus, *'ens'* signifies something existing in reality (*in natura existens*) and is a substantial predicate.	Names what signifies the **truth of a proposition** and, thus, the **composition of the intellect.** This *'ens'* is an accidental predicate that **pertains to the question *an est.***	n/a
	6	*Sent.* II 37.1.2 ad 3.	*'Ens'* 2 ways	Names what signifies the **ESSENCE** of a thing existing outside of the mind (*extra animam existens*)	Names what signifies the **truth of a proposition.** This *esse* is only in reason.	n/a
	7	*Sent.* III 6.2.2 co.	*'Esse'* Aquinas says 2 ways, then adds a 3rd	As the **copula**, names what signifies the **truth of a proposition.** This *esse* is in the mind.	Names what **belongs** to a thing's nature as divided by the categories *and* **is in a thing as act.**	Sometimes *'esse'* is taken for the **ESSENCE** according to which a thing *is*

Figure 1. Texts on Ways that '*Esse*'/'*Ens*' is Said.

Date	#	Citation	Term			
XMAS 1257	8	*Quod.* IX 2.2 [3] co.	*'Esse'* 2 ways	As the copula it signifies the composition of an enunciation made by the mind (*anima*). Hence, this *esse* is only in an act of the mind.	Names the act of a being (*ens*) *qua* being (*ens*) by which something is denominated *ens actu in rerum natura*, the sort divided by the ten categories	[Aquinas gives subdivisions of 2nd way to account for the esse of substances, accidents, forms, substantial parts, accidental being.]
1259 – 65	9	*SCG* III 9.9	*'Ens'* 2 ways	Signifies the ESSENCE of a thing and is divided by the ten categories	Signifies the truth of a composition	n / a
1265 – 66	10	*De potentia* 7.2 ad 1	*'Ens' & 'Esse'* 2 ways	Signify *either* • the ESSENCE of a thing • *or* the act of existing (*actus essendi*)	Signify the truth of a composition	n / a
1265 – 68	11	*Summa theol.* I 3.4 ad 2	*'Esse'* 2 ways	Signifies the act of existing (*actus essendi*)	Signifies the composition of a proposition which the mind devises by joining a predicate to a subject	n / a
	12	*Summa theol.* I 48.2 ad 2	*'Ens'* 2 ways	Signifies *entitas rei* as divided by the categories	Names what signifies the truth of a proposition; this *'ens'* answers the question *an est*.	n / a
AFTER MARCH 1266	13	*De malo* 1.1 ad 19	*'Ens'* 2 ways	Signifies a NATURE in the ten categories	Answers the question *an est*	n / a
1270 – 72	14	*In Meta.* X Lect. 3.1982	*'Ens'* 2 ways	Signifies the composition of a proposition and is an accidental predicate because an intellect makes the composition at a determinate time	As divided by the 10 categories, *'ens'* signifies the very NATURES of the categories, insofar as they are *either* in act *or* in potency	n / a

Figure 1. *Continued*

I will refer to this sense of 'being' as the copulative sense of 'being', or simply as copulative *being*.

Another common feature of these texts is Aquinas's identification of a sense of 'being' that is divided by the categories (**1, 2, 5, 7–9, 12–14**). Thus, nine of the fourteen texts indicate what is clearly a fundamental sense of the term for Aquinas, which I will refer to as the categorial sense of 'being', or simply as categorial *being*. In some of these texts he makes clear that—unlike the copulative sense—the categorial sense of 'being' signifies something that exists outside of the mind in reality (**5**: *in natura existens;* **6**: *extra animam existens;* **8**: *in rerum natura*). This categorial sense of the term is twice associated with a third sense of 'being' identified by Aquinas (**7, 8**), which I will refer to as the 'actuality sense of 'being'' or '*being* as act'. We find this actuality sense mentioned in four other texts without reference to the categories (**3, 4, 10, 11**). As he makes clear, here '*ens*' and '*esse*' signify the *act of existing* (*actus essendi*) (**10, 11**) which is the act of an essence (**3, 7**) and, hence, the act of a being inasmuch as it is a being (*actus entis in quantum est ens*) (**8**). Still, although Aquinas mentions the division of the categories in texts **7** and **8** when presenting the actuality sense of 'being', we would be mistaken if we took that sense to be the same as the categorial sense of the term. If we look closely at text **7**, he makes clear that, according to the actuality sense, the term 'names the *esse* that belongs to the nature of a thing inasmuch as it [i.e., the nature] is divided according to the ten categories'.[8] Similarly, in text **8** he notes that the sort of *esse* that names the act of a being inasmuch as it is a being is 'attributed only to the very things that are contained in the ten categories; hence, from such *esse* is named the [sort of] *being* (*ens*) that is divided by the ten categories'.[9]

In sum, the sense of 'being' that is divided by the categories is not the actuality sense of the term but, rather, the categorial sense, which receives the name of 'being' (*ens*) from the act of existing inasmuch as things receive, or have, such an act, which is the act of their essence (**3, 4**). As Aquinas makes clear in other texts (**1, 2, 9, 12–14**), it is essences (quiddities or natures), that are divided by the categories.[10] Hence, he

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Lawrence Dewan, O.P., ed. Peter A. Kwasniewski (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 13–39.

[8]   *Sup. Sent.*, III.6.2.2 co. (Moos, 3.238): '*Alio modo* dicitur *esse quod pertinet ad naturam rei*, secundum quod dividitur secundum decem genera. Et hoc quidem esse in re est, et est actus entis resultans ex principiis rei, sicut lucere est actus lucentis'.

[9]   *Quodlibet IX,* 2.2 [3] co. (Leon. 25/1.94–95:31–66): 'Alio modo esse dicitur actus entis in quantum est ens, id est quo denominatur aliquid ens actu in rerum natura; et sic esse non attribuitur nisi rebus ipsis que in decem generibus continentur, unde ens a tali esse dictum per decem genera diuiditur'.

[10]   A question arises with Text 12, from the Prima Pars, whether Aquinas is in fact identifying the categorial sense of '*ens*' with the quidditative sense of the term since here he speaks of the *entitas* of a thing as divided by the categories rather than speaking of the thing's

identifies a sense of the term 'being' (whether '*ens*' or '*esse'*), that signifies *essence.* Going forward, I will refer to this sense of the term as the quidditative sense of 'being', or quidditative *being* for short. And, from the foregoing analysis, we see that the quidditative sense of 'being' is identical to the categorial sense of the term for Aquinas, since it is quidditative *being* that is divided by the categories.

To sum up, in these texts Aquinas identifies the follows three senses of the term 'being', whether taken as '*ens*' or '*esse*':

- **Copulative Sense**: Signifies, as the copula, a composition of the intellect and, hence, the truth of a proposition.
- **Categorial/Quidditative Sense**: Signifies *essence* (*quiddity* or *nature*) and is divided by the categories.
- **Actuality Sense**: Signifies the act of existing (*actus essendi*), which is the act of an essence and, hence, the act of a being inasmuch as it is a being (*actus entis in quantum est ens*).

If we review the texts in this table, we see that Aquinas acknowledges a quidditative sense of 'being' from the start of his career to the end. More commonly he presents '*ens*' as a term that can signify *essence* (**1, 2, 6, 9, 10, 13, 14**). But, at times, he presents '*esse*' as doing the same, notably in his early Commentary on the *Sentences* (**4, 7**), but even as late as the *De potentia* (**10**, 1265–66). This fact should help us recognize that Aquinas's acknowledgement of a quidditative sense of '*esse*' is not a mere youthful reporting of an Augstinian/Boethian usage of the term by others. Indeed, the common authority whom he cites for support in his considerations of the different senses of the term 'being' is none other than Aristotle (**1, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12**), including when Aquinas presents '*esse*' as signifying essence (**7, 10**). His reference to the Philosopher on this point would suggest that Aquinas acknowledges a quidditative sense of the term '*esse*' for substantive reasons in accord with his own philosophical thought. To get a sense of why that is, we should turn to the text of Aristotle that Aquinas references in these passages, namely, *Metaphysics* V, 7.

§2. Aquinas on the Quidditative Sense of '*Ens*' and '*Esse*' in Metaphysics V, 7

In *Metaphysics* V, 7 Aristotle considers the ways in which the terms 'being' *(on)* and 'to be' *(einai)* are said. He begins with an initial distinction between (1) accidental *(kata sumbebēkos)* and (2) *per se (kath'*

essentia, quidditas, *or* natura. As will be discussed below, there are texts where Aquinas appears to identify (or at least associate) the notion of *entitas* with that of *actualitas.* Still, in the context of Text 12 (q. 48, a. 2, ad 2), it is clear that he means it to signify *essence.*

auto) senses of 'being' and treats the former first, by looking at different types of accidental predications. As regards the latter, Aristotle looks at the figures of predication, namely the categories. He then identifies a third sense of 'to be', noting that (3) the term 'is' can indicate that a statement is true and the phrasing 'is not' that it is false. Finally, he observes that (4) sometimes in statements the terms 'to be' and 'is' mean that something *is* potentially or that it *is* actually.[11]

A surface reading of this text might suggest that Aristotle is presenting only the categorial sense of 'being' as what he terms '*per se being*'.[12] But when considering this passage in *lectio* 9 of his Commentary on *Metaphysics* V, 7—in what I will call the CM text—Aquinas tells us that in fact each of the last three senses of 'being' pertain to *per se* modes of being. In summary, Aquinas sees the following senses of 'being' as presented in by Aristotle:

1. *Per accidens being*

PER SE BEING
2. *Being* as divided by the categories (i.e., categorial *being*)
3. *Being* as truth of a proposition (i.e., copulative *being*)
4. *Being* as divided by potency and act

If we return to the texts treated in the table from Fig. 1, it is clear that when Aquinas speaks of 'being' as said in two or three ways (whether '*ens*' or '*esse*'), he has in mind Aristotle's *per se being* and is leaving out of consideration *per accidens being* (presumably, precisely because it is *per accidens*). Thus, in text **1** from his early *De ente et essentia,* Aquinas explicitly tells us: 'We should note that, as the Philosopher says in *Metaphysics* V, '*per se* being' (*ens per se*) is said in two ways: [1] in one way, as it is divided by the ten categories; [2] in another way as it signifies the truth of propositions'.[13] We might wonder why Aquinas here leaves out *being* as divided by act and potency and how it relates to the actuality sense of 'being'. An answer to this question is indicated in his prefatory remarks from the CM text, where Aquinas tells us that Aristotle does the following when treating of the modes of *per se being*:

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[11] *Metaphysics,* V.7, 1017a8–b9.
[12] Aristotle himself is ambiguous on this point. Although the third and fourth senses of 'being' that he identifies could be read this way, they could also be read as distinct from and in addition to the accidental and *per se* senses of 'being'. For a consideration of Aquinas on the ordering and interrelation of these four senses of being, see Alejandro Llano, '"Being as True" According to Aquinas', *Acta Philosophica* 4 (1995): 73–82; Alejandro Llano, 'The Different Meanings of "Being" According to Aristotle and Aquinas', *Acta Philosophica* 10 (2001): 29–44. See also Brock, 'What Actually Exists'.
[13] *De ente,* c. 1 (Leon. 43.369:1–26): 'Sciendum est igitur quod, sicut in V Methaphisice Philosophus dicit, ens per se dupliciter dicitur: [1] uno modo quod diuiditur per decem genera, [2] alio modo quod significatpropositionum ueritatem'.

(1) First, he divides [the mode of] *ens* that is outside of the mind *(extra animam)* by the ten categories, which is *ens perfectum.*

(2) Second, he sets out another mode of *ens*, which is only in the mind […]

(3) Third, he divides *ens* by potency and act. And *ens* divided in this way is more common than *ens perfectum.* For *ens* in potency is *ens* only in a qualified way and is imperfect […].[14]

As in the texts from Fig. 1, here too Aquinas presents categorial *being* as outside of the mind and copulative *being* as only *in* the mind. What is different here is his presentation of categorial *being* as *ens perfectum.* In describing categorial *being* as perfect, or complete, Aquinas goes beyond a literal commentary of the text. We see that the contrast he is drawing is not with copulative *being* but, as he notes, with *being* that is in potency, which is *being* only in a qualified and imperfect way. Does that mean that categorial *being* is simply to be identified with actual *being* and, hence, in that respect, actuality? The answer is clearly, no. As we proceed further into the CM text, it becomes clearer how he sees Aristotle's third mode of *being* as related to the first two:

> [E]very single one of the categories is divided by act and potency. And just as with [real] things, which are outside of the mind, there is something said '[to be] in act' and something said '[to be] in potency', so it is the case with acts of the mind and with privations, which are only conceptual things (*res rationis*).[15]

Here, we find an implicit answer to our question of why, in the *De ente,* Aquinas presents only two of Aristotle's three senses of *per se being*. The reason is that *being* as divided by act and potency is not a third sort of *being* in addition to categorial and copulative *being* but, rather, is a division of each of those two since both can be divided by

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[14] *In Metaphysicam,* V.9 (Marietti 238.889): 'Deinde cum dicit «secundum se». Distinguit *modum entis per se:* et circa hoc tria facit. Primo *distinguit ens, quod est extra animam, per decem praedicamenta*, quod est ens perfectum. Secundo ponit alium modum entis, secundum quod est tantum in mente, ibi, «Amplius autem et esse significat». Tertio dividit ens per potentiam et actum: et ens sic divisum est communius quam ens perfectum. Nam ens in potentia, est ens secundum quid tantum et imperfectum, ibi, «Amplius esse significat et ens»'. Italics in original.

[15] It is noteworthy that on this point, Aquinas goes beyond the text of Aristotle, which makes no clear mention of this third sense of '*per se being'* as dividing the prior two, nor does he make mention of the sort of *res rationis* described by Aquinas (*Metaphysics* V, 7, 1017b1–10). *In Meta.* V.9.897: 'In omnibus enim praedictis terminis, quae significant decem praedicamenta, aliquid dicitur in actu, et aliquid in potentia. Et ex hoc accidit, quod unumquodque praedicamentum per actum et potentiam dividitur. Et sicut in rebus, quae extra animam sunt, dicitur aliquid in actu et aliquid in potentia, ita in actibus animae et privationibus, quae sunt res rationis tantum'.

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act and potency. Aquinas clearly sees, in a certain respect, a priority of the first two modes to the third—namely, the priority of the divisible to what divides it. Hence, in the *De ente,* as in other texts (e.g. **2, 5, 6, 9, 12–14**), he focuses his attention only on categorial and copulative *being*.

We see, then, that categorial *being* is not limited to the actual. Indeed, later in his commentary on Book X of the *Metaphysics* (text **14**), he tells us that 'the *being* that is divided by the ten categories signifies the very natures of the ten categories that are [*either*] *in act* or *in potency*'.[16] Why, then, when commenting on V, 7 does Aquinas begin his consideration of categorial *being* by identifying it as *ens perfectum*? Presumably because, as he tells us elsewhere, the division by act and potency is a division of the analogical which is a division according to priority and posteriority.[17] Thus, the primary mode of categorial *being* pertains to actual beings, with potential beings said *to be* in the categories only with reference back to actual, or perfect, beings.

What is most of interest to us, however, is how Aquinas finds in *Metaphysics* V, 7 a quidditative sense of the verb *'esse'* ('to be'). Commenting on Aristotle's presentation there of categorial *being,* Aquinas goes beyond the text at hand by reminding us that *being* (*ens*) is not a genus and, hence, cannot be contracted to the diverse genera of the categories by means of the addition of differences. Instead, we are told, it is contracted to the categories according to diverse modes of predication (*modi praedicandi*) that follow upon the diversity of modes of existing (*modi essendi*). Aquinas explains this view both by quoting Aristotle and by explicating his words for the reader:

> For 'in as many ways as "being" (*ens*) is said'—that is, in as many ways as something is predicated—'so in just as many ways "to be" (*esse*) "is signified"'—that is, in just as many ways is it signified that 'Something *is*'. And for this reason, those [genera] into which *being* (*ens*) is first divided are said to be 'predicaments' since they are distinguished according to a diverse mode of predication (*modus praedicandi*).[18]

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[16] *In duodecim libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis expositio,* X.3.1982, M.-R. Cathala and R. M. Spiazzi eds. (Turin-Rome: Marietti, 1950), 472: 'Sed ens quod dividitur per decem praedicamenta, significat ipsas naturas decem generum secundum quod sunt actu vel potentia'. Emphasis added in translation.

[17] *De malo,* q. 7 a. 1 ad 1.

[18] *In Metaphysicam,* V.9 (Marietti 238.890): 'Unde oportet, quod ens contrahatur ad diversa genera secundum diversum modum praedicandi, qui consequitur diversum modum essendi; quia «quoties ens dicitur», idest quot modis aliquid praedicatur, «toties esse significatur», idest tot modis significatur aliquid esse. Et propter hoc ea in quae dividitur ens primo, dicuntur esse praedicamenta, quia distinguuntur secundum diversum modum praedicandi. Quia igitur eorum quae praedicantur, quaedam significant quid, idest substantiam, quaedam quale, quaedam quantum, et sic de aliis; oportet quod unicuique modo praedicandi, esse significet idem; ut cum dicitur homo est animal, esse significat substantiam. Cum autem dicitur, homo est albus, significat qualitatem, et sic de aliis'. Italics added in translation.

Thus far, we might wonder whether Aquinas is focusing on the actuality sense of the term '*esse*', since he is identifying *modi essendi:* ways of *existing*. But the quidditative sense of this term is brought out more clearly in his semantic analysis that immediately follows:

> Since, therefore, among these [terms] that are predicated, some signify *what* (i.e., *substance*), some *what sort,* some *how much,* and so forth regarding the others, it must be the case that for each mode of predication, 'to be' (*esse*) would signify the same. For example, when we say, 'A human *is* an animal', 'is' (*esse*) signifies *substance.* And when we say, 'A human *is* white', 'is' signifies *quality.* And so forth for the others.[19]

What is noteworthy in this text is Aquinas's presentation of the term '*esse*' (and its conjugated form '*est*') as signifying—not actuality— but, rather, categorial natures, with the examples of *substance, quantity,* and *quality*. In other words, he presents '*esse*' and '*est*' here as signifying various types of quiddities. Surely, he is not excluding some sort of connection between predication and the act of existence. But to be clear: it is the act of existence as *modified* by some essence.[20] And, as he indicates here, this modification is seen in the very use of the verb 'to be' *(esse)*. To illustrate this fact, let us consider the two example propositions he provides of distinct *modi praedicandi* offered to reveal distinct *modi essendi:*

(1) 'A human *is* an animal'.

(2) 'A human *is* white'.

As Aquinas presents the matter, the diverse *modi essendi* of the predicates in these propositions are revealed to us by the very way the predicates are affirmed of the subject using the verb 'is'. In this way, diverse *modi praedicandi*—diverse 'is-es'—somehow signify the fundamental kinds of essences that are the categories. It is here that we must turn to Aquinas's semantic theory to see how '*esse*' can signify essence in this way.

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[19] Ibid. See n. 18 for the Latin.
[20] To draw this connection between essence and *modus essendi* is not to identify the two, as though *modus essendi* were another name for essence. Rather, as already mentioned, it is to point out that a being's mode of existing *follows from* the kind of essence that it has. On mode and essence, see John Tomarchio, 'Aquinas's Division of Being According to Modes of Existing', *The Review of Metaphysics* 54 (2001): 585–613.

§3. Modes of Signification and of Predication: How '*Esse*' and '*Est*' Signify *Essence*

Following Aristotle, Aquinas holds that words signify conceptions of the intellect, which conceptions in turn are the likenesses of things. Thus, in a mediated way our words signify things.[21] As Aquinas sums up this role, 'The *ratio* that a name signifies is a conception of the intellect *of* the "thing" *(res)* signified by the name'.[22] Whereas the *significatum* of a name's *ratio* (account, analysis) is a conceptualization within the mind, then, this conceptualization is itself the likeness of some *res;* thus, the 'thing' signified (*res significata*) by a term is something beyond the concept.[23] Paradigmatically, this *res significata* is something outside of the mind (*extra animam*), in reality (*in rerum natura*).[24]

Here, we need to be careful not to confuse the medieval accounts of signification and supposition. The extramental *res* that a name signifies is typically not the same as what the name supposits for (i.e., references).[25] When we say that 'A human is an animal' *(homo est animal)* the *res significata* of 'human' is not an individual human being, such as Socrates. Rather, an individual human is what the term 'human' supposits for, or references, in the context of this proposition. By contrast, what the term 'human' signifies, Aquinas explains, is

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[21] *Expositio libri Peryermeneias* (hereafter *In Peri.*), I, lect. 2 in *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera Omnia*, vol. 1*/1 (Rome: Commissio Leonina, 1989), 9–13. The common account of signification for Aquinas and his contemporaries is that '"to signify is to establish an understanding" ('significare est intellecturn constituere')'. E.J. Ashworth, 'Signification and Modes of Signifying in Thirteenth-Century Logic: A Preface to Aquinas on Analogy', *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 1 (1991): 44. This formulation is from Aristotle's *Peri hermeneias,* 16b19–21.

[22] *Summa theologiae: Pars Prima* (hereafter ST I), 13.4 co. in *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera Omnia*, vol. 4 (Rome: Commissio Leonina, 1888), 144: 'Ratio enim quam significat nomen, est conceptio intellectus de re significata per nomen' (Emphasis added in translation). Cf. ST I.5.2 (Leon. 4.58). 'Analysis' is Ashworth's preferred translation of *ratio* in these contexts (see Ibid., 50–52.).

[23] On the distinction between *significatum* and *res significata,* see Ashworth, 'Signification and Modes of Signifying', 50–53.

[24] I say 'paradigmatically' because, as we have already seen in Aquinas's consideration of the different senses of being, we can have meaningful language also about privations, such as blindness. Regarding how there is meaningful signification not only in the cases of names for *entia rationis* such as privations and second intentions, but also for names of fictions such as the chimera, see Gyula Klima, 'The Changing Role of *Entia Rationis* in Mediaeval Semantics and Ontology: A Comparative Study with a Reconstruction', *Synthese* 96, no. 1 (1993): 25–58; Klima, 'Semantic Principles', esp. 91–97; Klima, 'Aquinas's Theory of the Copula'.

[25] See Ashworth, 'Signification and Modes of Signifying', 52–53. There are occasions where the two—referent (*suppositum*) and *res significata*—coincide, such as when the name 'Socrates' is said of Socrates. In the context of such a proposition, the name signifies that which it also references.

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human nature.[26] In short, the 'thing' that is signified by a name is neither an individual, nor a collection of individuals, but some form (nature, property, perfection).[27] Thus, *humanity (humanitas)* is the *res significata* of the term 'human'. With that said, *humanity* is also the *res significata* of the term 'humanity'. In other words, both 'human' and 'humanity' signify the same *res*. Still, each does so in a different way—according to a different *mode*. Indeed, in accordance with Aquinas's terminist semantics, the *res* that is signified by a word is always signified according to a *modus significandi*.

Unlike the later speculative grammarians known as the Modistae, Aquinas himself does not provide us with any systematic treatment of the modes of signification of terms. With that said, he does clearly acknowledge throughout his corpus a distinction between a number of grammatical and logical *modi significandi*—for example, between male, female, and neuter nouns; between different cases of nouns; and between different tenses of verbs. And, what concerns our considerations, he identifies a distinction between concrete and abstract *modi significandi*.[28] Regarding these *modi significandi,* Aquinas is clear about this much: just as words signify an extramental *res* in a mediated way via concepts, so modes of signification follow upon extramental modes of existing *(modi essendi)* in a mediated way—namely, through modes of understanding *(modi intelligendi)*.[29] In affirming this connection between this triad of modes—*significandi*, *intelligendi*, *essendi*—

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[26] *Scriptum super Sententiis magistri Petri Lombardi III* (hereather *Super Sententiis* III), 6.1.2 ad 4, vol. 3, ed. R. P. Maria Fabianus Moos, O.P. (Paris: Lethielleux, 1933), 231: 'Homo significat humanam naturam, et supponit pro subsistente in natura illa'.

On the doctrine of supposition and its relation to signification, see Paul Vincent Spade, 'The Semantics of Terms', in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny, and Jan Pinborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 192–96; Henk J. M. Schoot, 'Aquinas and Supposition: The Possibilities and Limitations of Logic *In Divinis*', *Vivarium* 30 (1993): 193–225.

[27] Ashworth, 'Signification and Modes of Signifying', 52–53; Klima, 'Semantic Principles', 103–106; Rosa E. Vargas Della Casa, 'Thomas Aquinas on the Apprehension of Being: The Role of Judgement in Light of Thirteenth-Century Semantics' (Dissertation, Marquette University, 2013), 53–54. It should be noted that to say that the *res significata* of a word is some form is not to say that it is always some *metaphysical* form. For example, there is no extramental metaphysical form with terms for second intentions (like 'genus' and 'species'), privations (like 'blindness'), and fictions (like 'chimera'). On this point, see *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia* (hereafter *De potentia*), 7.10 ad 8 in vol. 2, *Quaestiones disputatae,* 8th rev. ed., ed. M. Pession (Turin-Rome: Marietti, 1949), 65; *Super Sententiis* I.19.5.1 (Mandonnet 1.486); Klima, 'Semantic Principles', 107, n. 37; Vargas Della Casa, 'Apprehension of Being', 59.

[28] Schoot catalogs these and twenty other *modi significandi* acknowledged by Aquinas. See Schoot, 'Aquinas and Supposition', 200–201. For the distinction between grammatical and logical *modi significandi,* see Vargas Della Casa, 'Apprehension of Being', 40–43.

[29] *In Metaphysicam,* VII.1 (Marietti, 317.1253): 'Licet modus significandi vocum non consequatur immediate modum essendi rerum, sed mediante modo intelligendi; quia intellectus sunt similitudines rerum, voces autem intellectuum, ut dicitur in primo *Perihermenias*'.

Aquinas shares something in common with the Modistae. But unlike these speculative grammarians, Aquinas does not see a simple isomorphism between word and reality. *Modi significandi* have a foundation in reality, but not a necessary one-to-one correspondence between that mode and a *modus essendi*.[30] Nevertheless, on this point he is clear: words that signify their *res* according to a concrete *modus significandi* do so because of some extramental composition.[31]

We find this view exemplified with the term 'human': it signifies the form *humanity*, but according to a concrete mode. This is because what 'human' fully signifies (its *significatum*) is a haver of *humanity* (*habens humanitatem*). Similarly, the concrete term 'something white' *(album)* signifies a haver of *whiteness* (*habens albedinem*).[32] In each case, the formality that is signified *(humanity, whiteness),* is signified as *in* a haver. In this way, although the concrete terms 'human' and 'white [thing]' do not principally signify composition, they nevertheless *con*signify it by implication, or in Aquinas's terms, *ex consequenti*. In this respect, the consignification of a term is a secondary, or additional, signification that is, as it were, an 'accidental' property of the term, which follows from a term's mode of signification. As with nouns and adjectives, so too with verbs: they have both abstract and concrete modes of signification, and following the latter, verbs consignify composition when taken according to a concrete mode of signification. And we find this to be the case for Aquinas no less with the verb 'to be' (*'esse'*).

The relevance of these semantic distinctions for verbs is brought out nicely in Aquinas's Commentary on the *De hebdomadibus* where he famously draws a comparison between the verbs *'currere'* and *'esse'*. Considering the former, he tells us that the term 'running' (*currere*), signifies according to an abstract mode, in a manner parallel to the term 'whiteness'; by contrast, the term 'someone who runs' (*currens*) does according to a concrete mode, in a manner parallel to the term 'white'. Similarly, he notes, *'esse'* signifies abstractly, whereas 'what is' (*quod est*), or 'a being' (*'ens'*) does so concretely. Thus, just as we say of a runner (*currens)* that 'He runs' (*currat*) inasmuch as he participates in running, so we say of a being (*ens*), that 'It *is*' (*est*) inasmuch as it participates in an act of existing (*actus essendi*).[33] The

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[30] On the tendency of the Modistae to treat speculative grammar as entailing an isomorphism between *modi significandi* and *modi essendi,* see Keith A. Buersmeyer, 'Aquinas on the "*Modi Significandi*"', *The Modern Schoolman* 64 (1987): 75–79.

[31] The exception would be the case of divine names, in which concrete names are said of God who is perfectly simple and in whom there is no composition. See, e.g., ST I.13.1 ad 2 (Leon. 4.139–40).

[32] *In De hebdo.* c. 2 (Leon. 50.272:129–31): 'Aliter autem se habet in hiis que significantur in concreto, nam homo significatur ut qui habet humanitatem, et album ut quod habet albedinem'.

[33] *In De hebdo.* c. 2 (Leon. 50.271–72:36–54).

composition that is consignified by the concrete term *'ens'* is brought out by Aquinas in other texts, where he tells us that this term signifies <u>that which has</u> *esse (id quod habet esse),* or a <u>haver of esse (habens esse),</u> and also <u>the subject of esse (subiectum essendi).</u>[34]

In light of these semantic considerations, we can begin to see how Aquinas can hold that *'ens'* can signify *essence.* In saying this, he does not mean that *essence* is the *res significata* of this term. As we see in the various formulations above, the *res* that *'ens'* signifies is *esse* taken as the *act of existence.* Nevertheless, it signifies this *res* according to a concrete mode of signification, and therefore *con*signifies composition *ex consequenti*; in this way, essence is indicated by the *'quod'* of *'quod est'* and the *'habens'* of *'habens esse'.* Less evident is how Aquinas could see *'esse'* as signifying *essence.* Unlike the participial noun *'ens',* the infinitive verb form *'esse'* signifies according to an abstract mode. As an abstract term, it signifies as something simple and as that *by which* something is *(quo est).*[35] Thus, the very *modus significandi* of the term *'esse'* would seem to prevent it from signifying *essence* at all. Our question is thus heightened: Why would Aquinas say on occasion that *'esse'* can signify essence?

We begin to get an answer to this question if we consider what Aquinas tells us in text **7**, from *Super Sententiis* (1252–56). There, in the context of considering whether there is only a single *esse* in Christ, he notes that the term *'esse'* is said in two ways: (1) as it signifies the truth of a proposition, inasmuch as it is a copula, and (2) as the act of a being (*actus entis*) resulting from the principles of that thing. Then, he adds a third way:

> Nevertheless, sometimes *'esse'* is taken for the *essence* according to which a thing is, since the principles of [acts] customarily come to be signified by means of [those] acts, as with powers and habits.[36]

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[34] See, e.g., *In Meta.* XII.l (Marietti, 567.2419): 'Nam ens dicitur quasi esse habens […]'; *Summa theologiae: Prima Secundae* (hereafter ST I-II), 26.4 co. in *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera Omnia*, vol. 6 (Rome: Commissio Leonina, 1891), 144: '[…] ens simpliciter est quod habet esse […]'.; *In De hebdo.* c. 2 (Leon. 50.271:52–59): 'Set *id quod est* significatur sicut *subiectum essendi* […]'. (Italics added for emphasis).

[35] SCG I.30 (Leon. 13.92.3): 'Unde intellectus noster, quidquid significat ut subsistens, significat in concretione: quod vero ut simplex, significat non ut *quod est*, sed ut *quo est*'. See also ST I.13.1 ad 2 (Leon. 4.140); *Super Sententiis* I.8.5.2 (Mandonnet 1.229). Vargas Della Casa, 'Apprehension of Being', 74–83, 123–29.

[36] *Super Sententiis* III.6.2.2 co. (Moos 3.238): 'Secundum Philosophum, V *Meta.* (δ 7. 1017ᵃ, 31–35; l. 9, n. 895–896) *esse duobus* modis dicitur. *Uno modo,* secundum quod significat *veritatem propositionis*, secundum quod est copula; et sic, ut Commentator ibidem (text. 6) dicit, *ens* est *praedicatum accidentale.* Et hoc esse non est in re, sed in mente, quae conjungit subjectum cum praedicato, ut dicit philosophus in VI *Meta.* (ε 4. 1027ᵇ 25–27; l. 4, n. 1230–1231). […] *Alio modo* (1017ᵃ 22–27; l. 9, n. 889–895) dicitur *esse quod pertinet ad naturam rei*, secundum quod dividitur secundum decem genera. Et hoc quidem esse in re est, et est actus entis resultans ex principiis rei, sicut lucere est actus lucentis. *Aliquando* tamen

We find Aquinas in this text providing us with something of an ety-
mological account for the quidditative use of the word *'esse'*. As I read
him here, this third sense of the term *'esse'* does indeed have a different
res significata than the actuality sense of the term. If that is the case,
then he is presenting two different terms that signify two different con-
cepts. Let us refer to the actuality sense of the term as *'esse*$_A$*'* and the
quidditative sense signifying *essence* as '*esse*$_E$'. As Aquinas presents
the matter, the rationale for '*esse*$_E$' signifying essence is that the word
in this case is imposed *from* (derived from) the act of existing, but by
convention what it is imposed *upon* (applied to) is not that act itself but
rather what is actualized by that act, namely *essence*. Complementing
this etymological account of '*esse*$_E$' is text **4** from Fig. 1, which ap-
pears earlier in the same work. There, Aquinas justifies the Boethian
use of the term *'esse'* to name the quiddity, or nature, of a thing with
a distinctly Aristotelian account, namely, that 'a definition is speech
signifying *what-it-is-to be (quid est esse)*, for a definition signifies the
quiddity of a thing'.[37] In short, texts **4** and **7** indicate that the *res sig-
nificata* of '*esse*$_E$' is different from than that of '*esse*$_A$' even though
the former term is etymologically derived from the latter. If that is the
case, then in these texts the two uses of the word *'esse'* are indeed
homonymous.

It is worth noting at this point, however, that in these texts Aquinas
is not *using* the term '*esse*' but identifying *how* it can be used. We have
here a case of the use-mention distinction noted by analytic philoso-
phers. Aquinas is indeed clarifying for us how the word *'esse'* can
be used, but when he tells us in these texts from Fig. 1 that '*esse*'
can name, signify, or be said in two or three ways, the term 'esse'
is referencing the word. It is as if Aquinas were saying, 'This word
that is spelled *e-s-s-e* can be used in these different ways'. Or—to
make the same point according to his own terminist semantics—when
Aquinas tells us that '*"Esse"* is said in two/three ways', the term *'esse'*
supposits with material supposition, referencing the word itself, even
though the assertion as a whole concerns how the term signifies.

Highlighting Aquinas's application of the use-mention distinction is
key for us to understand how he does and does not adopt as his own a
quidditative sense of the term *'esse'*. On the one hand, if '*esse*' is taken
as suppositing only for the word spelled *e-s-s-e*, then Maurer is quite
right to say that Aquinas reserved the term *'esse'* to mean *the act of
existing* ('*esse*$_A$'). With that in mind, I believe that texts such as **4** and **7**
can be fairly read as Aquinas reporting the conventional use of '*esse*$_E$'

esse sumitur *pro essentia*, secundum quam res est; quia per actus consueverunt significari
eorum principia, ut potentiae vel habitus'.
   [37] *Sup. Sent.*, I.33.1.1 ad 1 (Mandonnet, 1.765–66): 'Esse dicitur tripliciter. Uno modo
dicitur esse ipsa quidditas vel natura rei, sicut dicitur quod definitio est oratio significans
quid est esse; definitio enim quidditatem rei significat. […]'

by others (e.g., Augustine, Boethius, William of Auvergne). On the other hand, Maurer's assertion needs to be qualified in light of the later text **10** from the *De potentia* as well Aquinas's treatment of the meanings of '*esse*' in the CM text. In texts such as these, I believe, Aquinas again makes mention of the term '*esse*' with material supposition—not to supposit merely for that word as such—but, instead, as the name for the verb 'to be' along with its various grammatical modes, such as conjugated and participial forms. Conventionally in Latin, as in English, the infinitive mode of a verb acts as such a name. With that in mind, we must consider that in certain contexts when Aquinas speaks of about the term '*esse*', he should be read as employing that verb according to its infinitive mode as a name inclusive of any of its various derivative grammatical forms, such as *'ens'* and also *'est'*.[38] If we take the term '*esse*' in that way, we find that at times Aquinas presents the verb as capable of signifying both *actuality* and *essence* simultaneously, albeit in different respects.

To get a sense of this usage, let us consider again Aquinas's analysis of categorial *being* in the CM text. As we have seen, Aquinas tells us there that 'when we say, "A human *is* an animal", '*esse*' signifies *substance.* And when we say, "A human *is* white", ['*esse*'] signifies *quality.* And so forth for the others [i.e., other categorial modes of predications]'.[39] In looking at this text, we were left with the question of how 'is' ('*est*') could signify *essence* in these examples. The question is heightened by what Aquinas tells us in his commentary on Aristotle's *Peri hermeneias.* There, acknowledging the copulative sense of 'is' as signifying the composition of proposition, he clarifies that this role of the verb is in fact secondary to its principal signification:

> This verb 'is' (*est*) *con*signifies composition, because it does not principally signify that but rather does so *ex consequenti.* For ['is'] signifies what first falls into the intellect according to a mode of actuality [taken] absolutely. For 'is' said simply signifies *to be in act* (*esse actu*) and, therefore, it signifies according to the mode of a verb.[40]

If in propositions such as Aquinas's examples from the CM text the verb 'is' principally signifies actuality and *con*signifies the composition of a proposition (and hence its truth) *ex consequenti,* how does it quidditatively the various categories of being? The answer again lies in a consideration of mode of signification entailed in the term '*est*'. Like

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[38] I take it that this is why in t.2 Aquinas starts by noting that 'Esse dicitur duplicter' and then quickly shifts word form to note that 'uno modo secundum quod ens significat essentiam …' (*Super Sententiis* I.19.5.1 ad; Mandonnet 1.488).

[39] For the Latin, see n. 18 above.

[40] *In Peri.*, I.5 (Leon. 1*/1.31:391–97): '[H]oc uerbum 'est' consignificat compositionem, quia non principaliter eam significat, set ex consequenti: significat enim id quod primo cadit in intellectu per modum actualitatis absolute; nam 'est' simpliciter dictum significat esse actu et ideo significat per modum uerbi'.

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the participial noun *'ens'*, the verbal form *'est'* signifies according to a concrete *modus significandi*.[41] And thus it *con*signifies implicitly and *ex consequenti* the composition of a subject with the *res significata* that it principally signifies. Granted, Aquinas tells us that 'is' said simply (i.e., on its own) signifies *act* taken absolutely. But simply to say 'Is!' is not to make an assertion at all. A complete assertion requires a subject as well as a predicate.[42] Thus, with the verb *'est'* one must assert either that *'x* is' or that *'x* is F'. As we have seen Aquinas indicate in the CM text, it is through the analysis of the latter sort of statement that we can discern the fundamentally diverse *modi praedicandi* that in turn point to the fundamental *modi essendi,* which are the ten categories of essences.[43] The reason, again, is that as a concrete term, *'est'* not only signifies its *res significata* but does so according to a concrete mode. Aquinas indicates as much in his commentary on the *Peri hermeneias* where, after noting that 'is' said simply signifies *to be in act,* he adds,

> But *actuality*—which this verb 'is' principally signifies—is commonly the actuality of every form or act, whether substantial or accidental. Hence, for this reason, when we wish to signify that any form or act actually inheres in (*actualiter inesse*) some subject, we signify that by means of this verb 'is'—simply according to the present tense, but in a qualified way according to other tenses. And, therefore, this verb 'is' signifies composition consequently.[44]

Here, we have one of Aquinas's classic texts on the inherence theory of predication, which holds that the predication of a common term F of an individual *x* is true if and only if that form ultimately signified by F in *x* actually exists.[45] In presenting this account, Aquinas indicates a double role for *'is'* in a statement of the sort, *'x* is F'. In one way, it signifies the

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[41] Unlike the term *'ens',* however, which signifies in the mode of a noun, *'est'* signifies in the mode of a verb and, thus, according to the 'mode of action, namely as proceeding from a substance and inhering in it as a subject'.*In Peri.*, I.5 (Leon. 1*/1.26:55-66): '[…] per modum actionis, ut scilicet est egrediens a substantia et inherens ei ut subiecto, et sic significatur per uerba aliorum modorum, que attribuuntur personis'.

[42] The subject term, however, may be merely implied in Latin, for example in response to the question, *Socrates est albus?* ('Is Socrates white?') one can simply reply *Est!* to indicate 'He is!'.

[43] For a thorough account of how Aquinas derives the categories by an analysis of modes of predication, see Gregory T. Doolan, 'Aquinas's Methodology for Deriving the Categories: Convergences with Albert's *Sufficientia Praedicamentorum*', *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 30 (2019): 654–89.

[44] *In Peri hermeias* II, lect. 2 (Leon. 1*/1.87–88:34–52): 'Quia uero actualitas, quam principaliter significat hoc uerbum 'est', est communiter actualitas omnis forme uel actus, substancialis uel accidentalis, inde est quod, cum uolumus significare quamcunque formam uel actum actualiter inesse alicui subiecto, significamus illud per hoc uerbum 'est', simpliciter quidem secundum presens tempus, secundum quid autem secundum alia tempora; et ideo ex consequenti hoc uerbum 'est' significat compositionem'.

[45] The above formulation of the inherence theory is derived from that presented by Klima, 'Semantic Principles', 106.

> **'IS' PRINCIPALLY SIGNIFIES …**
> *whiteness as an actuality*
>
> **"Socrates   is   white"**
>
> **'IS' CONSIGNIGNIFIES …**
> - *inherence of whiteness in the subject, hence …*
> - *composition, hence …*
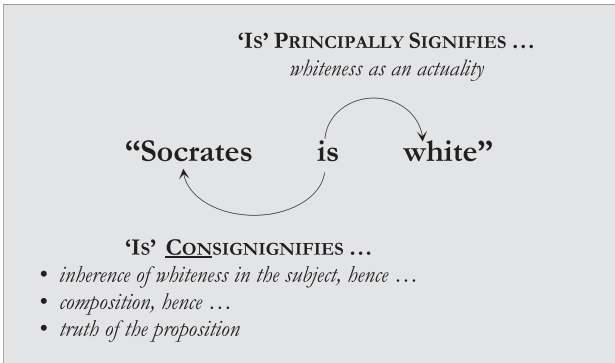> - *truth of the proposition*

Figure 2. The Copulative Role of 'Is'

actuality of the nominal predicate term, and in another it joins that term to the subject signifying *ex consequenti* that that actuality inheres in the subject. In this text, then, we find Aquinas acknowledging that both the actuality sense and the copulative sense of '*esse'* are simultaneously at work, each in its own respect. To bring out the distinctions being made in this text, consider the following visual analysis of the proposition, 'Socrates is white', offered in Fig. 2:

What we see is that Aquinas presents the term 'is' in such a proposition as looking, if you will, both forward and back. Its role as the copula, it looks back to the subject, joining the nominal predicate to the subject and, in doing so, signifies composition and, hence, the truth of a proposition. But he makes clear that this copulative sense of 'is' is secondary to its principal sense of signifying actuality. And in the context of such a proposition, 'is' no longer signifies actuality absolutely (as it does simply, on its own) but, rather, it signifies the actuality of the nominal predicate, namely by entering into composition with it to form the full predicate of the proposition. In our example proposition, then, the complete predicate is not simply the term 'white' but, rather 'is-white'.[46] And that nominal predicate in turn, modifies the actuality signified by 'is' so that, in the context of the proposition, its concrete *modus significandi* takes on the *modus praedicandi* of *con*signifying the actuality of *quality*. And, as Aquinas tells us in the CM text, 'it must be the case that for each mode of predication, '*esse'* would signify the same', namely, one of the ten fundamental quidditative categories.[47]

We find something similar, *mutatis mutandis*, with propositions of the form, '*x* is'. Aquinas tells us that 'when we say, 'Socrates *is*' we intend by this nothing other than to signify that Socrates *is* in reality

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[46] *In Peri hermeias* II, lect. 2 (Leon. 1*/1.87–88:34–52).
[47] For the Latin, see n. 18 above.

(*in rerum natura*)'.[48] In other words, we find 'is' again signifying *actuality*, but this time it is the actuality of the subject since, for Aquinas (*pace* Kant, Russell, and others) 'is' here functions as the entire predicate. And, as before, the quidditative sense of the word is simultaneously at work. We get a clear indication of this fact if we return to the CM text. There, after having considered Aristotle's treatment of categorial *being* as the first mode of *per se being*, Aquinas looks at Aristotle's presentation of the second, copulative, mode and draws a contrast between the two:

> [T]he *esse* that each thing has in its own nature is substantial. Therefore, when we say that 'Socrates *is*', if the 'is' is taken according to the first mode [categorial *being*], it is a substantial predicate. For *'ens'* is a higher predicate with reference to any single being, just as 'animal' is with reference to 'human'. But if 'is' is taken according to the second mode [copulative *being*], it concerns an accidental predicate.[49]

As Aquinas explains, the reason that 'is' taken as a copula is an accidental predicate of Socrates is that it is accidental to him whether or not we say anything of him at all. What is particularly intriguing about this text, however, is Aquinas's observation that the term 'is' in the proposition 'Socrates *is*' can sometimes be a substantial predicate. On the one hand, this would seem to follow since his *actus essendi* is the *esse* of a substance: *esse substantiale.* On the other hand, Socrates as a substance does not exist by his very essence. How then can this 'is' be a substantial predicate?

This question is heightened if we consider another text in which Aquinas addresses the same proposition. Composed shortly before his Commentary on the *Metaphysics, Quodlibet* 2 (Christmas 1269) addresses in question 2, art. 1 [3], whether an angel is substantially composed of essence and *esse*. In this text, Aquinas again provides a twofold distinction regarding *being*, but this time in terms of answers to two different questions: 'Is it?' *(an est)* and 'What is it?' *(quid est).*[50] Our concern is with Aquinas's consideration of the first of these two questions, regarding which, he explains,

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[48] *In Peri hermeias* II, lect. 2 (Leon. 1*/1.87–88:34–52): '[H]oc uerbum 'est' quandoque in enunciatione predicatur secundum se, ut cum dicitur: «Sortes est», per quod nichil aliud intendimus significare quam quod Sortes sit in rerum natura'.

[49] *In Metaphysicam,* V.9 (Marietti, 239.896): 'Accidit autem unicuique rei quod aliquid de ipsa vere affirmetur intellectu vel voce. Nam res non refertur ad scientiam, sed e converso. Esse vero quod in sui natura unaquaeque res habet, est substantiale. Et ideo, cum dicitur, Socrates est, si ille est primo modo accipiatur, est de praedicato substantiali. Nam ens est superius ad unumquodque entium, sicut animal ad hominem. Si autem accipiatur secundo modo, est de praedicato accidentali'.

[50] I have not included this text in Table 1 since it presents a distinction between these senses of being in terms of these two questions rather according to the ways that word 'being' is said.

> Since everything that is other than the essence of a thing is called an accident, the *esse* that pertains to the question 'Is it?' is an accident. And, therefore, the Commentator says in *Metaphyisics* V that [in] this proposition, 'Socrates *is*', 'is' is an accidental predicate inasmuch as it indicates [either] [a.] the entity of a thing (*entitas rei*) *or* [b.] the truth of a proposition.[51]

As with the CM text, here Aquinas presents two ways in which we may take the 'is' of the proposition 'Socrates *is*'. The second is clearly the copulative sense of the word. By contrast, according to the first way, 'is' signifies *entitas rei.* The terminology is less familiar to us, perhaps, but the context and question raised by the article make clear that this first way concerns the actuality sense of 'is'. Suffice it to say, in this text Aquinas makes clear that in both ways, the 'is' in the assertion 'Socrates *is*' is an accidental predicate.[52] As before, we can see that the copulative sense is an accidental predicate because it is accidental to Socrates that we make any assertion about him at all; as regards the actuality sense, the remainder of the article makes clear why this too is accidental, namely, because the act of existence of a being such as Socrates is really distinct from his essence.

We might wonder whether Aquinas's observations in this quodlibet can be reconciled with those in the CM text where he identifies a sense of 'is' that is a substantial predicate. Indeed, we might wonder how any form of the verb 'to be' (*'esse'*) can be predicated substantially of a creature, since Aquinas notably holds that only God is a being essentially since only God *is* by his very essence. Here, I would argue, we can draw upon the same semantic distinctions as we have before. In both the CM and quodlibetal texts, the non-copulative senses of 'is' in the proposition 'Socrates *is'* are the same term whose *res significata* is *esse* taken as the act of existing. But the two texts differ in their point of focus. In *Quodlibet* 2, Aquinas's point of focus is precisely upon the formality signified by that *res,* and so he concludes that what 'is' in this assertion is an accidental predicate since Socrates' *actus essendi* does not belong to his essence. In the CM text, the point of focus is instead on the concrete *modus significandi* of the term 'is' together with the *modus praedicandi* it takes on in conjunction with the subject term of

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[51] *Quodlibet Secundum*, 2.1 [3] co. in *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera Omnia*, vol. 25/2 (Rome: Commissio Leonina, 1996), 214–15:50–72. 'Vnde participatur sicut aliquid non existens de essencia rei, et ideo alia questio est 'an est' et 'quid est'; unde, cum omne quod est preter essenciam rei dicatur accidens, esse, quod pertinet ad questionem 'an est', <est> accidens. Et ideo Commentator dicit in V Methaphisice quod ista propositio: 'Sortes est', est de accidentali predicato, secundum quod importat entitatem rei uel ueritatem propositionis […]'. Italics added in translation. As regards the second question (*quid est),* Aquinas addresses it in terms of *ens,* noting the quidditative sense of that term and what it signifies is divided by the categories.

[52] Dewan, for his part, raises questions about authenticity of this quodlibetal text given Aquinas's handling of Averroes. See Dewan, 'Which *Esse*', 97.

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the proposition, which is a singular substance, namely, Socrates. From this perspective, even though what the 'is' in the statement 'Socrates *is*' principally signifies an act of existence that is accidental to his essence, it nevertheless *con*signifies it *ex consequenti* as a substantial predicate.

§4. Conclusion

What we have found from this review of texts throughout Aquinas's corpus is that these occasions in which he identifies the different ways in which 'being' is said reveal a consistent general position throughout his career: that in a way, the term *'esse'* can signify essence. Nevertheless, in saying this Aquinas does not mean to indicate that in his view the term *'esse'* itself should be directly employed as a synonym for the words 'essence', 'quiddity', or 'nature'. Rather, what we have seen, is that when he speaks of *'esse'* in this way, in his own voice, Aquinas tends to employ the term as the name of the verb, standing for its relevant conjugated and participial forms, such as *'est'* and *'ens'*. Although these terms do not principally signify *essence,* following from their concrete *modus significandi* and relevant *modus praedicandi* they nevertheless *con*signify it. In this way, the quidditative sense of these terms does not as such exclude the other senses of '*per se* being', whether copulative or actuality. More broadly, what we have found is that Aquinas looks to the *modi significandi* and *modi praedicandi* of terms to carefully draw conclusions about the *modi essendi* of real beings, illustrating for the reader of his metaphysical thought the importance of having a familiarity with his semantic theory. What these considerations have also revealed is that for Aquinas, although the grammarian and logician are in their own way concerned with semantic modes, it is not their job to employ them to discern the various senses of the term 'being' or the fundamental modes of *being*. In the end, this is a task for the metaphysician.[53]

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[53] Regarding Aquinas's view that it is the metaphysician's job to clarify the senses of 'being', see e.g. *In Metaphysicam,* IV.1 (Marietti, 151–53.534–43); ibid., IV.4 (Marietti, 160–62.570–87).