Gaining Clarity on the *That* and *What* of Life

Dennis Bielfeldt

I

W E SHALL ENGAGE THE QUESTION of life by reflecting upon the fundamental distinction between the *what* and the *that* of any entity. Given that there are many kinds of things, how ought we value particular things that could or might be? Given that an individual is different in some way from any other individual, what are the conditions that make this individuality *precious*? Furthermore, given that a particular thing is precious, what relevance, if any, should be afforded to its act of existence over and against the particularity of that which exists? Ought the individuality of a precious thing, or its existence as such, be sufficient for it to exist *paribus ceteris*? Simply put, what considerations should count against the judgment that an individual thing that would otherwise exist ought not to be?

While this article cannot address all of these issues, it is profoundly interested in the last question, particularly in light of my claim that, in general, *existence is irreducible to essence.* Accordingly, Section II below briefly discusses the metaphysical difference between the *what* and the *that* of a thing, Section III applies those insights to the issue of abortion, and Section IV argues that because of the incommensurability between the act of existence and the kind of particular things that exist, common consequentialist moves in the abortion argument are problematized. A short Epilogue reflects on the theological implications of all of this.

II

IN *THE CATEGORIES,* ARISTOTLE (384-322 BC) famously distinguishes the *said-of* and *present-in* relations that apply to primary substances. A primary substance can, for Aristotle, neither be *said-of* another thing, nor is it *present-in* another thing. Nonetheless, a primary substance is a *particular* about which certain things might be asserted.

A *secondary substance*, on the other hand, is that which can be *said-of* primary substances. Accordingly, secondary substances are universals for Aristotle, e.g., Socrates is a primary substance and human being which can be *said-of* Socrates is

a secondary substance that can also be *said-of* a great many other particulars. The *said-of* relation is transitive; what can be *said-of* a secondary substance can be *said-of* the primary substance, e.g., since mammality can be *said-of* human being, and human being can be *said-of* Socrates, mammality can be *said-of* Socrates. Traditionally, we say that what is *said-of* something else, in Aristotle's sense, is *essential* to that thing.[1] Clearly, Aristotle placed the universality of the abstract form within the thing or *primary substance*.

The *present-in* relation, for Aristotle, is one of inherence. Primary substances have properties dependent upon them that nonetheless might not have been instanced by those substances. These are known as *accidents*, and the list, for Aristotle, is well-known: quality, quantity, relative, place, time, position, having, affecting, and being affected. While Socrates could be Socrates without having a particular whiteness of skin, Socrates cannot be Socrates without being a human being. Accordingly, the particularity of accidents a primary substance displays is *contingent*, while the secondary substances that can be *said-of* the primary substance are *necessary*. Unlike the *said-of* relationship, the *present-in* relationship is not transitive. While a particular mood of foreboding might be *present-in* Socrates, and while what is *present-in* this mood of foreboding is the relational property of being known by *x*, it does not follow that Socrates himself is known by *x*.

Since every primary substance differs from every other primary substance, what is it by virtue of which a primary substance is what it is? The question has traditionally motivated debate among Aristotle scholars about whether or not the philosopher countenanced *individual essences*. To say that something has an individual essence is to say that there exist sets of properties that individuate a particular entity in all possible worlds. If Socrates were to have an individual essence, then any entity in any possible world having that essence would be Socrates. Accordingly, individual essences, unlike general essences or natural kinds, are not *shareable*. While there is some textual support in Aristotle for the existence of individual essences, there is clearly a *prima facie* objection to them in that Aristotle explicitly says in the *Metaphysics* that individuals are indefinable,[2] yet equates definition and essence.[3] Asserting individual essences would, however, solve the problem of what makes a thing a particular thing, since accidents can't ultimately individuate because they are properties that the thing might have but need not have in order for it to be the particular that it is.

Whatever might be thought of this, conjoining those features essential to a thing with those accidental to it does deliver a kind of contingent particular, a primary substance differing from other substances by virtue of the essential and accidental properties it possesses.[4] Left unsolved on this assumption, however, is the question as to the particularity of the particular, for the particularity of Socrates is not definable in terms of the accidental features Socrates possesses.

While Aristotle sought to discriminate universality and particularity, he did not identify particularity with the act of existing itself. This move had to await the ruminations of the High Middle Ages when *esse* was routinely distinguished from *ens*. While the latter refers to a thing having being, the former concerns the *to-be-ness* of that being. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) famously argued that God is wholly *esse* and that all things that exist share *esse* with God. For Aquinas, an *ens* is a determinate limitation of pure *esse*. *Essentia* is, in fact, that limitation of *esse* which produces an *ens*. Accordingly, to be at all is to have some of what God wholly is, for God's essence, that which makes God, is God's *esse*, pure existence itself. To be God is to be in an unqualified way. Accordingly, Thomas can say that God's essence is God's existence.[5]

Duns Scotus (1265-1308) was suspicious of Thomas' Neo-Platonic-inspired understanding that individual things participate in *esse,* the pure existence that is God *in se.* For Scotus, being becomes simply the most general and abstract of concepts applicable to both the finite and the infinite orders. Any possible thing either is or is not. A thing that is has *esse*, while a non-existent thing lacks it entirely. God has *esse* because God exists; mud hens have *esse* because they exist. Unicorns don't have *esse* because they don't exist. Accordingly, God is an *ens*, but a unicorn is not.[6]

While Scotus' consideration of being as the most general and abstract of concepts spelled an end to the "degrees of being" model of the earlier tradition, Scotus was, like his predecessors, very interested in being, particularly the *thisness* of things in comparison to their *whatness*. In fact, Scotus was so interested in particular existence that he routinely employed a technical term to refer to it. For Scotus, *haeccitas* is the primordial thisness of a thing that is not deducible from a thing's *quidditas* or whatness.[7] While every *ens* participates in *esse* for Thomas, Scotus' *haeccitas* is logically irreducible to *quidditas*. God grants and values the *particularity* of being. Particular things have a self-identity not explicable in terms of general natures. Moreover, over and against Thomas, the divine essence does not entail existence.[8]

The separation between *thatness* and *whatness* was enshrined by Kant (1724-1804) in his critique of the ontological argument. The ontological argument, classically stated by Anselm (1089-1152), had argued that since God is that which none greater can be thought, God must exist because it is greater to exist than not to exist. Accordingly, the conceivability of God entails the existence of God. Famously, Anselm had offered a second argument claiming that since God is that which none greater can be thought, God must *necessarily* exist because it is greater to exist necessarily than merely to exist contingently.[9]

Kant, though likely not reading Anselm, would nevertheless have none of this reasoning, for while one can derive three-sidedness from the concept of a triangle, one cannot derive existence from the concept of God. Why? The reason is

that although the concept of God's perfection might include the *concept* of God's existence, God's *actual* existence is a different matter entirely. The *concept* of an existing God does not an *actual* existing God make. One must distinguish the instantiation of any concept from the concept itself. If one allows existence to be a predicate, then one is stuck with saying, "there is an *x*, such that *x* does not exist." But this is nonsense. Accordingly, no amount of determining *what* can issue in an actually existing *that*.[10]

Once upon a time, the Western tradition widely accepted Augustine's (354-430) notion of *creatio ex nihilo*, the claim that creation itself emerges from nothing. It knew that no amount of moving the deck furniture around upon the ship of existence could produce through that moving a newly existing ship. A causally efficacious God was needed to create and sustain the universe. A divine being with efficient causality was necessary for there to be created things. Being is not merely an inversion or unexplored side of nonbeing, but rather stands out from being on the basis of a divine *fiat*. Existence is not a move in the unfolding of the Absolute Idea, but it is a bringing about of that which was not, *a bringing about not related ultimately to other things that are*.[11]

The West has, of course, been very busy forgetting this insight. Human beings, we are told, are co-creators with God. We envision, construct, paint, compose, and otherwise bring new things out of old, believing that God also engages in ordering the chaos. We forget the old ways because we have forgotten Leibniz's (1646-1716) fundamental question: "Why is there something and not nothing at all?" We dream of quantum cosmology where a multiverse contains all possible ways that the universe might go, including the actual way it went, and thus we attempt to make less jarring the fact of the *existence* of the universe by pointing to the *essential* structure of that from which existence flows. But we lose the point of Leibniz's question, for why does the multiverse, which grounds every trajectory of possible existence, itself exist? Why is there *something* and not merely *nothing*?[12]

Our modern logic presupposes the distinction between *that* and *what*. We express the *what* of anything through monadic and polyadic predicates which take as their values names or terms for existing entities.[13] We might say, for instance, that the *whatness* of the subatomic world is found in the spins, charges, and mass that particular entities possess. But theories of particle physics are accordingly committed to the existence of those entities over which the fundamental theories of particle physics quantify. Quine's (1908-2000) famous quip applies clearly: "To be is to be a value of a bound variable." The domain over which bound variables quantify is the *that* which exists, while the properties and relations that the *that* which exists sustains constitutes the *what* of the properties and relations exhibited. The early Wittgenstein (1889-1951) taught us that we cannot reason from the fact that something exists with determinate properties to the existence of some other existing thing. After all, following Kant, *existence is not a predicate*.[14]

The rejection of the ontological argument and the acceptance of the gap between essence and existence, between polyadic properties and relations and their *instantiation* is standard fare in philosophy, though reasoning in the way of Aquinas is clearly not. But why is this so? Does not the distinction between properties and their *instantiation* recapitulate, as it were, the Thomistic distinction between essence and existence? Moreover, what is the value of this insight to a small subdomain within philosophy dealing with the *ethics of abortion*? Why is it the case here that certain arguments seem to forget the irreducibility of existence to essence—or perhaps the incommensurability of existence and essence—and accordingly assert that the existence or nonexistence of something ought to be justifiably derivable from the particular way other things are?[15]

III

I BELIEVE THAT ARGUMENTS about the permissibility or non-permissibility of abortion often suffer from a loss of precision between the *what* and the *that* of a thing. In what follows I want to be precise *in exploring the structure of common consequentialist arguments that allow abortion*. I shall here not try to prove abortion is always wrong, or even determine under what conditions abortion might be morally permissible. I am only concerned with arguments that regard the property of the *existence* or *nonexistence* of the fetus/baby as inferentially relatable to the *description* of the happiness of agents within the wider context in which that fetus/baby is the ingredient. In simple language, *I am interested in exploring arguments that claim that* "*the baby would be better off not existing than be existing in a situation like this*." For those trained in ethics, I am also assuming that an *ought* cannot be derived from *is*, that whether the baby ought or ought not be aborted is not properly derivable from facts about other matters.[16]

Imagine female *f* and her partner *p* decide that it is morally justified to terminate *f*'s fetus/baby *b* because of the likely liabilities that *f, p,* and *b* would suffer were *b* to exist. Let us assume, for instance, that *f* is living in poverty, that *f*'s relationship with *p* is unstable, that *f* already has three young children, and that *f* will likely descend into substance abuse to mitigate the tensions in her life were *b* to exist. One might, given this scenario, simply do the calculation about what the likely collective utility or disutility would be to *f, p,* and *b* were *b* to exist or, alternatively, were *b* not to exist. Included in this utilitarian calculation might be the putative *rights f* has for self-determination, and how carrying and delivering *b* might intrude on the exercise of these rights. One might even suppose that *b* also has a *prima facie* right to exist, for this makes no difference to the structure of the argument. Arguments like this, while structured as purely *consequentialist* in nature, might thus include an element of *deontology,* as suggested

by *f* and *b* having rights. In what follows, however, I am interested only in the *consequentialist* component of the argument.

The question before us is this: Can a description of the *what* of *f, p*, and *b*'s pleasure, happiness or tranquility entail either that *b* should exist or should not exist? More to the point, should the calculation of *f, p*, and *b*'s total possible happiness on *b* existing or *b* not existing justifiably affect the *existence* of *b* at all?[17]

There are perhaps reasons to say it should. After all, don't we often argue from the *whatness* of an organism's physical condition to a determination to end the *thatness* of an invading virus, bacteria, or parasite? Assume *f* and *p* and bacteria *s* rather than fetus/baby *b*. Thus, *s* exists and this eventuates in the suffering of *f* in whom the bacteria is operating and also perhaps some set $P = \{p_1, p_2 \dots p_n\}$, the family or friends of that agent. Clearly, we would never claim that the existence or nonexistence of *s* is incommensurate with the happiness of the other agents, that there is no reasonable entailment relation between the eradication of *s* and the happiness of *f* and relevant subsets of *P*. But is not the existence of fetus/baby *b* analogous to the existence of parasite *s*?

We might generalize from this example to the obvious fact that human beings have always had to end the life of other entities for they themselves to survive. I grew up on an Iowa farm and knew that ending the life of bovine, ovine and swine was necessary for a successful farm operation that could provide a means to live. Even if we were only producing cash crops, we knew that we had to limit the population of both noxious plants and insects if we were going to remain profitable. Clearly, we on the farm were motivated by considerations of utility, and in order to bring about this utility, we had to eliminate certain kinds of life. The primitive mists shrouding the origins of humankind cannot occlude the obvious: other life has had to die for human beings to live!

Furthermore, we regularly calculate how much collateral death we can accept in order to bring about other goods. The current response to the Hamas attacks in the Gaza Strip display that just war theory itself enshrines the relatability of the *what* and *that* of life. To respond to Hamas in the way that Israel has done entails their taking of other life, even life not directly involved in the original attacks. Clearly, there is some relation between a description of the *what* of a class of entities or events, and the *that* of other possible things that may or may not exist. Are not we here deciding what to *instantiate* on the basis of what overall utility that instantiation will likely produce, and accordingly relating existence and essence?

Accordingly, it seems that our efforts to disambiguate the act of existence from beings that exist have not been helpful in advancing the discussion with respect to abortion. We have claimed that considerations of utility do not easily inferentially relate to the question of the continued existence of the fetus because existence is of a

different order than how things already existing are. Unfortunately for the argument, however, it seems that human existence itself has always been engaged in calculating how the existence of other things affects the utility of human persons, groups, and perhaps the species itself. One might claim that this is what any evolutionary theory that includes a "fight for survival" assumes. Accordingly, the question is this: Is there a path available to override the incommensurability argument between the *that* and *what* of being for instances of survival and/or livelihood and not in consideration of the life of the fetus?

I don't, however, find the general argument convincing that the *that* of existence of the fetus can be calculated on the basis of utility, even though we routinely calculate *what* beings ought exist (or ought not exist) for the maximal benefit of human life. Why is this?

Perhaps the best way to show the disanalogy between the bacteria's existence and that of the fetus is through employment of a functionality argument. One can plausibly argue, I think, that while having baby *b* is within the proper function of agent *f*, the having of lethal parasite *s* is not within the proper function of agent *f*. The reason is this: *s* it not beneficial for *f*'s survival (or that of her species), making *f* less than what *f* otherwise might be. However, having *b* is within the very nature of *f*, that part of what *f* is includes the possibility of *b*. Simply put, *b* is beneficial for the survival of *f* and her species.[18] In fact, in another age one would have plausibly argued that *f* is diminished were *f* not to have *b*. Thus, while the natural organism *f* has its function optimized in not having *s*, it is arguable that *f*'s function is optimized by *not* terminating *b*. To see what the proper function of a thing is, it is necessary to know the nature of *that* thing, of course, and this commits us to the existence of *natures*, not a category everybody easily countenances.

Clearly, it is now the case that some no longer would regard birthing *b* as part of the nature of *f*. They might say that *b* is no more determined to come about given *f* as *s* is determined to come about given *f*. Accordingly, there is no natural tie between *f* and *b*.

But, of course, it is difficult to claim that there is no natural tie between *f* and *b* when *f* is clearly the *sine qua non* of *b* occurring, i.e., that the having of *b* seems to be a good because were there to be no *b*s at all, there would be no people, no civilization, and certainly not this entire discussion. Accordingly, if *b*, then *f*, and without *f* there can be no *b* (I am going to avoid for now the question of *b* being produced in a laboratory).

But functionality arguments generate controversy, and it is unlikely that I can here develop a fully defensible one. I avert to them only because I am cognizant that some way must be found to argue for the preciousness of *b* existing and not *s* or myriad other things existing. Whatever might be thought about arguments from

proper functionality, that *b* should not be terminated given the happiness of *f* and other relevant agents, while *s* should be terminated does not entail that we accept functionality arguments, but only that we allow defeaters to the claim that the existence or non-existence of some entity cannot be related to the utility for some group that *b* not obtaining might have.

The argument can easily enough be sketched for various defeaters:

1. For all *x*, such that *x* may or may not exist, the existence of *x* is logically independent of the utility that *x*'s existence might have for some group of agents A = $\{a_1, a_2 ... a_n\}$.
2. Defeaters of (1) are the following:
   a. When *x*'s existence threatens the existence of subsets of A, and *x* is unconnected to their proper function.
   b. When *x*'s existence threatens the existence of subsets of A, and *x* has very little intrinsic value.
   c. When *x*'s existence or non-existence has historically been connected to the survivability of subsets of A.[19]
3. In all other cases for *x*, the basic incommensurability between the fact that *x* exists and the what or how subsets of A exist, provides *prima facie* justification for the existence of *x*.

Let us thus assume then that we can disarm arguments that make *s* like *b* with respect to *f,* and simply look at calculating the goodness of *b*'s existence given the possible scenarios for *f* and *p* on both *b* and ~*b*. How would such a calculation work? How could one assign a value to the existence of *b* or nonexistence of *b* given that the happiness or pleasure of *f, p,* and *b* is incommensurate with the existence of *b*?

Clearly, since there is no *rule* or *recipe* tracking from *whatness* to *thatness*, there can be no rule or recipe from a description of likely or unlikely *consequences* of having *b* to the actual existence of *b*. While it might be possible at the conceptual level to think that *b* should or should not exist given the pleasure or happiness of *f, p,* and *b*, the failure of the ontological argument means that the actual *instantiation* of *b* is logically disconnected from a description of the present states of *f, p,* and *b*. The situation is, in fact, relatable to the concept of God where the actual instantiation of God is not derivable from consideration of God's putatively perfect attributes.[20] When it comes to denying the ontological argument, what is good for the goose is good for the gander.

Many more considerations can be added to this argument suggesting that *b* has a fundamental right to exist, but I am not adding them here. I am merely claiming that one cannot simply derive that it is morally permissible to terminate *b*'s existence on the basis of the happiness of *f, p,* and *b*. In fact, the ease by which some would reason to the morally permissible of terminating *b* given the likely happiness of *f,*

p, and *b* eerily recalls the *Dasein ohne Leben* reasoning of certain German doctors in the 1930s. They reasoned that the life of a person might be at such a low level of development and concomitant happiness that it is morally permissible to end the *fact* of *that* person's existence to save him/her (and their families) from the *what* of *that*'s likely existence. *Dasein ohne Leben* assumes that existence (or non-existence) can somehow be derived from essence. If existence is not a predicate, that is, if existence is not a property of a being, then there is clearly no conceptual way to argue to it (or away from it) by considering the relational and non-relational properties of that being.

IV

MARY IS CONSIDERING TERMINATING her pregnancy because the total amount of happiness for her, her family, and her fetus/baby will likely increase were she to terminate. She reasons to this in facile ways widely accepted by her culture. Clearly, the fetus/baby is at the stage where its immediate happiness or unhappiness is not profoundly relevant in comparison with Mary's own happiness, her partner's happiness, and the happiness of her family. She aborts the fetus/baby on strictly utilitarian grounds, seemingly including the happiness of the fetus/baby in the calculation. How does what we have discussed concern Mary's concrete decision?

I claim that consequentialism must respect the distinction between the *whatness* and *thatness* of the beings which it is considering. The consequences of events concern the existence or non-existence of properties instanced by the beings impacted by the event. Accordingly, the consequences of Mary's abortion concern which properties Mary, her partner, her family, and the fetus/baby instantiate. One reasons here from w*hatness* to *whatness*. The happiness, pleasure, and total human flourishing of all engaged may indeed increase on the termination of the pregnancy. What I am arguing, however, is that no amount of consideration of *whatness* can entail *that* any of the morally relevant beings *not exist*. *The fact of existence is of a different order entirely than the how or what of existence.* One cannot derive a *that* from a *what*.

This is not to say, however, that consequentialism should not be employed when comparing the *that* of the mother's life with the *that* of the life of the fetus/baby. Here considerations of the *what* of both mother and fetus/baby are relevant. *What-talk* can be helpful when comparing one *that* with another. It may well be that the consequences of not-aborting are decidedly worse for the mother facing possible death in delivery than for the fetus/baby. After all, the mother is conscious in a way that the fetus/baby is not. In addition, the mother has other children; she has a family who has known her for years and loves her. Given the choice between the existence of the mother or fetus/baby, one could likely construct consequentialist arguments showing that it better to abort than not abort. I am not, however, claiming this here.

I am only pointing out that while consequentialist arguments might be helpful in the adjudication between two or more *thats*, they are less helpful when comparing *whats* and *thats*.

But what about rape or incest? Does not the distinction between *that* and *what* mean that a fetus/baby can never be justifiably aborted? I am not claiming this here. What I am arguing is that a *consequentialist* argument cannot legitimately be employed to derive the justifiable non-existence of the fetus/baby from considerations of the happiness of the mother, her family, and friends. This does not mean the *deontological* considerations are not ethically relevant. Not everything in complicated issues of abortion can be decided based on consequentialist thinking. What I have argued is only that for a certain class of moral judgments based upon the likely consequences of aborting the baby/fetus for the happiness of the mother and her family/friends, it is *unjustified* to move from the *what* of their happiness to the *that* of the fetus/baby's existence.

A full defense of this view perhaps demands that one can distinguish degrees of goodness with respect to the *thatness* of a person, fetus/baby, pet, cricket, tree, or mountain. While the *that* cannot be directly derived from the *what,* our moral reasoning oftentimes is concerned with questions about whether or not something justifiably should exist given other things that exist. But considerations of degrees of goodness or rightness cannot be themselves based upon consequentialist reasoning but must employ other kinds of moral reasoning. My argument here is simply that consequentialist reasoning cannot justifiably conclude to the existence or non-existence of fetus/baby b based upon sum total of happiness of agents $f, p,$ and b.

An Epilogue

CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY HAS ALWAYS understood the preciousness of the individual. God created a particular world in which the kinds of animals were named. Human beings, however, carry particular names because God is interested in each and every particular human being. Particular human beings are baptized and gather around the communion rail where the Body and Blood of Christ is shared *for you.* God calls particular people in and through their walks in life and sometimes while they are in their mother's womb.

The distinction between the *what* of something (*quiddity*) and the *that* of it (*haecceity*) points to the importance of the particular, and Thomas' analysis of *esse* and *ens* speaks to the non-conceptual *grace* of existence itself. Things exist not because their existence is entailed by their essence, but because God has bestowed existence upon them. A Christian theology of existence is a theology of grace. Existence bespeaks contingency, and those things that exist when they might not have do so because of the *freedom* of God. God freely chooses both whom to save and whom to create.

Beginning with this understanding of God easily takes us to the realization of the general incommensurability of existence itself. I have sketched here an argument based upon the presumption that the existence of something is due to the freedom of God and is ultimately *grace*, and that *ceteris paribus*, we have no easy consequentialist argument that allows us to reject the existence of fetus/baby *b* from a consideration of the total utility or disutility of *b*.

That we can reject the existence of bacterium *s* based upon utilitarian grounds can be seen in the defeater provisions we have sketched. However, theologically considered, the defeater conditions carry with them an important property: Those entities we claim are immune to the incommensurability argument are not entities whose *particularity* makes them precious. One lamb feeds the family as well as another; one bacterium causes an illness as well as the next. There is nothing about the particular entities *qua* particular entities that place an incumbency on existence.

This is not so, one could argue, for the fetus. Here *particularity* is all-important. What will my child be like when he or she grows up? Considering the fetus *qua* fetus in isolation for whom that fetus might become is to eschew the presumption of particularity altogether. The argument I have sketched takes particularity and the grace of existence itself very seriously and suggests that we are better off to search for defeaters to the presumption of existence than to cast around for general ethical arguments that build to the notion that human life is precious and upon that basis must be protected.

Verba Vitae*'s **General Editor** Dennis Bielfeldt *is Founding President of the Institute of Theology, and Chancellor and Professor of Philosophical Theology at its Christ School of Theology. Having taught previously at Bethany College, Grand View University, and Iowa State University, Rev. Bielfeldt is currently Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at South Dakota State University, holding an M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Iowa. He has published books and many articles in academic journals and encyclopedias.*

Notes

1. Aristotle does not explicitly say this in *The Categories.*

2. See *Metaphysics,* Z10, Z15.

3. See *Metaphysics,* Z4. For more, see Marc Cohen, "Individual and Essence in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*," in George C. Simmons, ed., *Paideia: Special Aristotle Issue* (Buffalo, NY: State University College, 1978), 75-85.

4. As already stated, while a primary substance can for Aristotle exist in itself, accidents are "present-in" primary substances as *features* of those substances. Accordingly, they are *present-in another*, not *beings in themselves.*

5. Even raising the issue of Aquinas and his interpretation of existence as *esse* involves us in fundamental questions about Aristotle, his putative commitment to essentialism, and any

"conceptual imperialism" practiced both by Aristotle and the Neo-Platonic traditions in "forgetting" actual existence. I must confess that I have found the work of Etienne Gilson persuasive on Aquinas. See, inter alia, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 2nd ed. (Toronto, ON: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1952), *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (New York: Random House, 1955). In *De Ente et Essentia* Aquinas writes: "*Quicquid enim non est de intellectu essentiae vel quiditatis, hoc est adveniens extra et faciens compositionem cum essentia, quia nulla essentia sine his, quae sunt partes essentiae, intelligi potest. Omnis autem essentia vel quiditas potest intelligi sine hoc quod aliquid intelligatur de esse suo; possum enim intelligere quid est homo vel Phoenix et tamen ignorare an esse habeat in rerum natura. Ergo patet quod esse est aliud ab essentia vel quiditate, nisi forte sit aliqua res, cuius quiditas sit ipsum suum esse*"; and "*Unde relinquitur quod talis res, quae sit suum esse, non potest esse nisi una. Unde oportet quod in qualibet alia re praeter eam aliud sit esse suum et aliud quiditas vel natura seu forma sua. Unde oportet quod in intelligentiis sit esse praeter formam; et ideo dictum est quod intelligentia est forma et esse.*" See *Corpus Thomisticum*, Saint Thomas Aquinas, *De Ente et Essentia*. Text published by L. Baur of the Westphalian Monastery in 1933. Edited by J. Koch and transferred to magnetic tapes by Roberto Busa SJ. Revised and arranged by Enrique Alarcón, Chapter 3. 2011 Fundación Tomas de Aquino. OCLC nr. 49644264. https://www.corpusthomisticum.org/oee.html. Accessed January 15, 2024. See also Joseph Bobik's 1965 translation of the above Latin in his book, *Aquinas on Being and Essence: A Translation and Interpretation* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965), 159-160: "Whatever is not of the understood content of an essence or quiddity is something which comes from without and makes a composition with the essence, because no essence can be understood without the things which are parts of it. Now, every essence or quiddity can be understood without anything being understood about its existence. For I can understand what a man is, or what a phoenix is, and yet not know whether they have existence in the real world. It is clear, therefore, that existence is other than essence or quiddity, unless perhaps there exists a thing whose quiddity is its existence" (159-160). "Whence it is necessary, that in every thing other than this one its existence be other than its quiddity, or its nature, or its form. Whence it is necessary that existence in the intelligences be something besides the form, and this is why it was said that an intelligence is form and existence" (160).

6. Obviously, my way of speaking suggests that there are *possible* beings, beings that otherwise lack actual existence. The ontological status of *possibilia* was an important question in medieval theology. The debate now is between *possibilism* and *actualism*, of which there are many kinds. Issues arising here go to the heart of questions of identity, namely, the identity of individuals across possible worlds. See Christopher Menzel, "The Possibilism-Actualism Debate," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* Fall 2023, Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman, eds. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2023/entries/possibilism-actualism/. Accessed December 18, 2023.

7. Paraphrasing Max Black ("The Identity of Indiscernibles," *Mind* 61:153-164), imagine a universe with only two exactly similar balls. Since there is nothing more in the universe than these two balls, all relational properties of the first would have to be that of the second. Accordingly, all qualitative and relational properties are the same for b_1 and b_2. So what makes the first different than the second? While Black holds that the example refutes the principle of the identity of indiscernibles $[\forall x \forall y \forall P(Px \leftrightarrow Py) \rightarrow x = y]$, one might claim it does not do this because there is a haeccity that b_1 has that b_2 does not

have, a thisness that is *constituent* in b_1 that is not in b_2. Trying to give an *account* of haeccity is, of course, notoriously difficult. See Richard Cross, "Medieval Theories of Haecceity," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* Winter 2022, Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman, eds. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2022/entries/medieval-haecceity/. Accessed January 6, 2024: "The reason is that a haecceity is clearly something like a property of a thing – hence like a form – but is at the same time wholly devoid of any correspondence to any conceptual contents. It is not at all a qualitative feature of a thing – not at all a 'quidditative' feature, in the technical vocabulary. As irreducibly particular, it shares no real feature in common with any other thing. This does not mean that haecceities cannot fall under the extension of a concept. *Being an individuating feature* is not a real property of a haecceity (it cannot be, since any haecceity is wholly simple, and shares no real features with any other thing); but any concept of what a haecceity is certainly includes among its components *being an individuating feature*. A concept of a haecceity includes representations merely of logical, not real, features of any haecceity."

8. The so-called ontological argument is usually interpreted as an argument from the perfections of God to divine existence. Anselm is generally regarded as having two ontological arguments. The first reasons that since it is greater for a thing to exist than not exist, that which has perfection – that which none greater can be thought – cannot not exist. The second argues that since it is greater to exist necessarily than to exist contingently, that which none greater can be thought cannot exist merely contingently. On this reading, if that which none greater can be thought can possibly exist, that which none greater can be thought cannot exist non-necessarily.

9. Generally, the second version of the ontological argument has caught the most interest recently. Consider the contingent existence of a necessary being: either it does not possibly exist or does not possibly not exist (~possibly p v ~possibly ~p). From this we derive (possibly p → necessarily p), that if it possibly exists it necessarily exists. It turns out that if p is possible, that is, exists in some world, then it exists in all possible worlds including the actual one. Therefore, from the mere possibility of God's existence we can conclude that God exists.

10. An easy way to grasp the difference between the conceptuality of an individual and the instantiation of it is to imagine oneself on a committee to select a new Dean. Everybody on the committee has contributed to the list of characteristics that this new Dean is to have. He/she must be kind, brilliant, organized, a published scholar well-known in his/her field, a paragon of virtue in the community, etc. Think how odd it would be to add to this list, "he/she must *exist*." Arguably, the concept of the successful candidate does not change when adding or subtracting existence. Consider how odd it would be were the concept itself to change when moving from possibility to actuality. The actual thing would always be a different individual than the possible thing and one could never think of *this* thing not existing. What does not exist could not be *this* thing, though it could be a close counterpart to it.

11. An essential unfolding of what is out of an Absolute Idea (*a la* Hegel) stands far removed from the Aquinas-inspired interpretation I am sketching here. The move from possible existence to actual existence is not conceptual, but deeply *contingent*, and is ultimately dependent upon God and what God finally actualizes.

12. This is the question Heidegger (1889-1776) takes up in his 1929 *Was ist Metaphysic?* In Heidegger's hands, however, the question is reinterpreted as asking why there is the lighting up process of Be-ing itself. How and why is it that Be-ing allows beings to be the beings they are without itself being a being that is?

13. We must accordingly distinguish functions and relations within first-order logic. A function like "father of Mike" uniquely picks out an individual within the set over which the language is quantifying. For instance, for any y and z, + is the sum of y and z, x. Accordingly, + determines a unique x for any y and z. '>' in 'x > y' however is a *relation* because given that x ∈ X and y ∈ Y, it does not follow that for each and every x ∈ X, there is some distinct y ∈ Y to which x maps.

14. One could modify Wittgenstein's assertion 2.024 in the *Tractatus*: "Substance is what exists independently of what is the case" to "existence is what is independently of any description."

15. One might avert here again to Heidegger's efforts to reawaken the ontological question as it has laid dormant under the general "forgetfulness of Being." Heidegger famously argues that in its preoccupation with beings – ontic questions – the Western tradition has passed over the transcendental horizon making possible such beings, a passing over that has ignored phenomenological evidence of Being itself, that "lighting" (*Lichtung*) that cannot be a being, nor the general Being of those beings, but shows itself as that by virtue of which beings are beings for that being (*Dasein*) for whom Being is at issue. Heidegger's emphasis on the process of Be-ing which itself grounds beings but is itself not a being recalls the irreducibility of existence to essence generally. Just as the essentialist tradition stemming from Aristotle has covered up existence, so has it obscured Be-ing generally, interpreting that which is rightfully ontological and transcendental as itself a denizen of the realm of *Vorhandensein*.

16. The question of deriving an *ought* from an *is* is fundamental in ethics, and the controversy rages on. While Hume famously argued that factual statements ("is" statements) cannot entail value statements ("ought" statements), many philosophers challenge the distinction nowadays, with John Searle giving the example of *institutional* statements such as promise-making. Here, clearly, "x promises to do y" logically entails "*ceteris paribus*, x ought to do y." A. N. Prior pointed out that if P is an is-statement and Q an ought-statement, and P entails P v Q, then we must ask if P v Q is an is-statement or and ought-statement. If P v Q is an ought statement, then we have derived an ought from an is. So assume P v Q is an is-statement. But now P v Q on the supposition of ~P, gives Q, which is an ought statement.

17. All utilitarian or consequentialist ethics have the formal structure of "given that act *x* likely produces consequences Y, we ought to (or ought not to) do *x*." The problem, of course, is that while *x* likely produces Y, one never knows for sure that Y will obtain given *x*. The problem of *unforeseen* consequences is, I believe, a profound one for consequentialism, although it is often not thematized in consequentialist argumentation.

18. One might quibble with my statement that *b*'s existence is beneficial for *f* herself, because many women have died during childbirth. A rejoinder might point to the traditional role that children played in the survivability of their parents, but it is unclear that this response is strong enough to overcome the objection. It is, however, uncontroversial that having *b* is necessary for the continued existence of the species.

19. We can provide more defeaters, of course. These were the three that occurred to me.

20. We can argue that the Christian God and God's relation to creation cannot be understood in terms of Neo-Platonic categories, or in the way of Spinoza whose embrace of the ontological argument is well known.