

A Mereological Construal of the Primary Notions Being and Thing in  
Avicenna and Aquinas

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Abstract.

This study has two goals. First, to show that Avicenna's account of being and thing significantly influenced Aquinas's doctrine of the primary notions. Second, to establish the value of adopting a mereological construal of these primary notions in the metaphysics of Avicenna and Aquinas. I begin with an explication of the mereological construal of the primary notions that casts these notions in terms of wholes and parts. Being and thing refer to the same entitative whole and have the same extension, but they are distinct in intension according to the different entitative parts they signify. Existence and essence constitute the two most fundamental entitative parts of every entitative whole. Being is taken to mean that which has existence, and thing signifies that which has essence. I then show how this mereological construal of the primary notions clarifies a number of texts in Avicenna and Aquinas. Finally, I address a few arguments against employing this mereological interpretation of the primary notions.

Many scholars have recognized the importance of the metaphysical first principles *being* and *thing* in the thought of Avicenna and Thomas Aquinas. Indeed, countless studies have emphasized their significance with respect to the famous metaphysical distinction and composition of existence and essence. These studies rightly take note of the terminology employed by Avicenna and Aquinas, and accurately interpret their respective doctrines of the primary notions in terms of *being* or *thing* having existence or essence and of existence or essence belonging to *being* or *thing*. Helpful as these descriptions are, they leave unclear the precise extensional and intensional distinctions that can be demarcated among these terms. What has been unappreciated or overlooked by many scholars, is that for both Avicenna and Aquinas *being* and *thing* function as whole terms, and existence and essence, along with their various synonymous, can be construed as part terms. Said otherwise, the extensional and intensional distinctions that can be drawn with respect to *being*, *thing*, existence, and essence can be made more perspicuous by employing a mereological model that construes the doctrine of the primary notions in terms of wholes and parts.

Mereology is the study of parts and wholes. By metaphysical mereology I mean the distinction between parts and wholes that concern the primary ontological notions, such as *being* and *thing*, *mawjūd wa shay'*, *ens et res*, in the metaphysics of Avicenna and Thomas Aquinas.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, by *metaphysical* mereology I mean neither the parts

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<sup>1</sup> All citations from Avicenna will be taken from Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, trans. and ed. Michael E. Marmura (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2005) (=MH). All quotations are from this translation unless noted otherwise. Marmura's translation is based on the Cairo edition of the MH (i.e., the *Ilāhiyyāt*), Ibn

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Sīnā, *Al-Shifāʾ, Al-Ilāhiyyāt*, ed. G.C. Anawati and Saʿid Zayed, Organisation Générale des Imprimeries Gouvernementales (Cairo, 1960). For the Latin translation of the Arabic, I have used the Avicenna Latinus, *Liber de philosophia prima sive Scientia divina*, ed. S. Van Riet, 3 vols. (Leiden and Louvain, 1977–83) (= *Scientia divina*). References to *MH* will include the book, chapter, and Marmura’s paragraph numbers, followed by the page number to the Arabic Cairo edition in brackets, and in parentheses I provide the page and line numbers to the *Scientia divina*. All citations from Thomas Aquinas are taken from following editions, unless noted otherwise. *Scriptum super libros sententiarum* eds. P. Mandonnet and M. F. Moos, 4 vols. (Paris: Lethielleux, 1929–1947) (= *In Sent.*); *Summa theologiae* (Rome: Editiones Paulinae, 1962) (= *ST*); *Liber de veritate catholicae Fidei contra errores infidelium seu Summa contra Gentiles*, t. 2–3. eds. P. Marc, C. Pera, P. Caramello (Rome: Marietti Editori, 1961) (= *SCG*); *In Duodecim Libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis Exposito*, eds. M.-R. Cathala and R. M. Spiazzi (Rome: Marietti Editori, 1950) (= *In Meta.*); *Quaestiones disputatae*, t. 2, *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia*, (= *de Pot.*), ed. P. M. Pession (Rome: Marietti Editori, 1965). I have used the following editions from the Leonine, *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera omnia*, Leonine ed. (Rome, 1882 –) Vol. 1\*.1, *Expositio libri Peryermenias* (= *In Peri*); Vol. 22. 1–3, *Questiones disputatae de veritate* (= *DV*); Vol. 24.1, *Questiones disputatae de anima* (= *DQdA*); Vol. 24.2, *Quaestio disputata de spiritualibus creaturis* (= *DQSC*); Vol. 25.1–2, *Questiones de quolibet* (= *Quod.*). All translations from Thomas Aquinas are my own, unless noted otherwise. For the dating of Thomas Aquinas’s works I have used the chronologies found in R.-A. Gauthier’s 1996 edition of the *Questiones de quolibet* (Leonine, vol. 25.2), 479–500 (Henceforth: Gauthier) and in Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas, vol. 1, The*

and wholes considered by medieval natural philosophy, such as physical substances composed of form and matter or the integral parts of substances, nor the various kinds of parts and wholes that can be classified by or reduced to the ten Aristotelian categories of being.

The aim of the present study is to argue for the value of adopting a mereological model for interpreting the doctrine of the primary notions in Avicenna and Aquinas. It will be shown that a mereological construal of the primary notions provides an illuminating heuristic model for understanding the metaphysical thought of Avicenna and Aquinas, even though they did not articulate their own doctrines in mereological terms. Establishing this thesis will require that we explore a number of passages in Aquinas that clearly reveal the influence of Avicenna's doctrine of the primary notions on the metaphysics of Aquinas. Accordingly, this study will also show that Avicenna's metaphysical doctrine of the primary notions *being* and *thing* is, in many respects, appropriated by Thomas Aquinas's doctrine of the transcendental notions *being* and *thing*.

The essay is divided into four parts. (I) I introduce a number of terminological clarifications and articulate further what I mean by a metaphysical mereological construal of *being* and *thing*. I then present a close reading of a number of texts (II) in Avicenna and then (III) in Aquinas, which introduce and explicate their respective understandings

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*Person and His Works*, rev. ed., trans. Robert Royal (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005) (Henceforth: Torrell). Square brackets [...] within quotations are from the texts or editions being quoted; curly brackets {...} indicate significant alterations I have made to the quotation.

of the primary notions *being* and *thing*. Finally, (IV) I conclude by examining reasons in favor of and against this mereological construal of the metaphysical primary notions in Avicenna and Aquinas.

## I.

*Metaphysical Mereology of Being and Thing.* Let us begin with a few regimented terminological distinctions. By “*being*” I mean *mawjūd* or *ens*, by “*thing*” I mean *shay’* or *res*, by “existence” or “to be” or “to exist” I mean *wujūd* or *esse*, and by “essence” and “quiddity” I mean, respectively, *ḥaqīqa* or *dhāt* and *māhiyya*, or *essentia* and *quidditas*. Avicenna and Aquinas frequently use *being* and *thing* as concrete terms, whereas existence and essence are commonly used as abstract terms. I recognize, however, that there are many exceptions to these terminological remarks and that Avicenna and Aquinas use *mawjūd*, *ens* and *wujūd*, *esse*, as well as the other notions, both as concrete and abstract terms.<sup>2</sup> They also use these terms in both technical and non-technical ways

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<sup>2</sup> For example, on rare occasions Avicenna and Aquinas both take note of various uses of the term existence (*wujūd*, *esse*), and both mention “essence” or “quiddity” as one of the senses that can be ascribed to the term existence. In the Latin Avicenna there is the infamous and nearly always misinterpreted distinction between *esse proprium* and *esse affirmativi*, see *Scientia divina*, I. 5 (34:54–35:65). For an English translation of the Arabic, see *MH* I.5.9–10 [24]. Aquinas makes a similar identification of one of the senses of *esse* with quiddity or nature in his commentary on the *Sentences*, see *In I Sent.*, d.33.1.1, ad 1 (Mand., I, 766); *In III Sent.*, d. 6.2.2, sol. (ed. Moos, III, 238). Such examples are not objections to my thesis, but show that Avicenna and Aquinas were both sensitive to the various ways in which their predecessors as well as themselves might use

depending on the context; all technical uses of the terms *being* and *thing* to indicate the primary notions are italicized. I shall follow this regimented terminology in order to bring some order and exegetical clarity to the more relaxed and fluid terminology of Avicenna and Aquinas.

Finally, I shall use the term “entity” as a neutral ontological term that can be applied to both *being* and *thing* which, as we shall see, are convertible notions. Similarly, when discussing my own interpretation, I shall use the turn of phrase, “entitative parts”, as a neutral term that can be applied to either existence or essence, both of which I shall

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the term existence. For valuable studies that address these uses of existence in Avicenna and Aquinas, see Amos Bertolacci, “The Distinction of Essence and Existence in Avicenna’s Metaphysics: The Text and Its Context,” in *Islamic Philosophy, Science, and Religion: Studies in Honor of Dimitri Gutas*, ed. Felicitas Opwis and David Reisman (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2012), 257–88; Olga Lizzini, “*Wugud-Mawgud* / Existence-Existent in Avicenna: A key Ontological Notion in Arabic philosophy,” *Quaestio* 3 (2003), 111–38; Joseph Owens “The Accidental and Essential Character of Being in the Doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas” *Mediaeval Studies* 20 (1958): 1–40; Gyula Klima, “The Semantic Principles underlying Saint Thomas Aquinas’s Metaphysics of Being,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 5 (1996): 87-141; John Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000) (= *Metaphysical Thought*).

argue are constitutive ontological parts or intrinsic confluent metaphysical principles of all *beings* or *things*.<sup>3</sup>

Let us now clarify what is meant by a mereological construal of the primary notions. The well known wholes and parts of substance, form and matter, respectively, belong to the mereology of substances, but the wholes and parts of *being* and *thing*, existence and essence, belong to a properly metaphysical mereology. The metaphysical mereology of the primary notions *being* and *thing* consists in the view that *being* and *thing* principally refer to one and the same whole, that is, to an individual entity, whereas existence and essence refer to the entitative parts of one and the same whole or individual entity. For Avicenna and Aquinas, *being* and *thing* are co-extensional but not co-intensional notions, that is to say, they are the same in reference but distinct in meaning. This is because *being* means or highlights the entitative principle of existence (*wujūd*, *esse*) which belongs to every entitative whole, while *thing* means or directs our attention to the entitative principle of quiddity (*māhiyya*, *quidditas*) or essence (*dhāt*, *essentia*), which is also possessed by all entitative wholes.<sup>4</sup> Taken as concrete terms *being* and *thing*

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<sup>3</sup> I realize some scholars of Avicenna and Aquinas would not call existence and essence parts, principles, constituents, components, or properties of a whole. I shall deal with these reasonable concerns in the last section. I only use this locution, “entitative parts” to describe my own interpretation.

<sup>4</sup> Attempts to talk about the notion of thing (*shayʿ*, *res*) and its meaning or the entitative part it implies, are complicated by the fact that Avicenna prefers to speak of quiddity (*māhiyya*), whereas Aquinas prefers to talk about the essence (*essentia*) of the thing. Many scholars simplify the matter by translating both *dhāt* and *māhiyya* as “essence,”

refer to the same entitative whole, but the more abstract terms existence and essence indicate entitative parts that belong to, i.e., are *sui generis* properties of, one and the same entitative whole, i.e., a *being* or a *thing*.

In contrast to *being* and *thing*, the entitative part of existence is neither co-extensional nor co-intensional with essence or quiddity. But since existence and essence are both entitative parts of the same co-extensional entitative whole, i.e., the same *being* or *thing*, and since every whole term includes all of its parts in its extension, existence does not escape the reference of *being* or *thing*, just as essence is always extensionally covered by *being* or *thing*. Said otherwise, even though the notion *being* explicitly signifies and is intensionally linked to existence, it nevertheless refers to a whole entity that is composed by both existence and essence, and so the notion *being* at least implicitly implies that which has an essence. Likewise, *thing* principally signifies an entitative whole that has essence as an entitative part, but since it refers to an entitative whole that only exists because its essence is composed with existence, it also implies an entity that has existence as an entitative part. To use the language of the Latin Scholastics, the distinction between existence and essence consists in a minor real distinction insofar as both principles are diverse, but they are not two distinct realities composing one complete entity, in the way that Socrates and Plato are two distinct realities and so are distinct by

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even though *māhiyya* literally means whatness. Later we will incorporate into our account of the metaphysical mereology of primary notions of Avicenna and Aquinas the additional entitative part terms that they also frequently employ, such as established existence, nature, thingness, and truth-nature (*ḥaqīqa*, *certitudo*).



way of a major real distinction. In short, *being* and *thing* refer to one and the same entitative whole and existence and essence are the entitative parts of this entitative whole.

In contrast to the mereological construal of *being* and *thing*, existence and essence, there are a number of accounts of the primary notions in Avicenna and Aquinas that simply do not recognize any distinction between the terms being and existence on the one hand, and thing and essence on the other.<sup>5</sup> Such interpretations often recognize that *being* and existence go together and that *thing* and essence form some kind of semantic unit; however, the mereology demarcation of whole terms and part terms is overlooked.<sup>6</sup>

As was noted above, some exegetes observe that Avicenna and Aquinas frequently use *being* and *thing* as concrete terms and employ existence and essence as abstract terms. This distinction between concrete and abstract terms is sometimes

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<sup>5</sup> Bertolacci surveys a number of interpretations of Avicenna's doctrine, See Bertolacci "The Distinction of Essence and Existence in Avicenna's Metaphysics," 258–263. For Aquinas, see Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought*, ch. 8.

<sup>6</sup> Wisnovsky's extended study of Avicenna's metaphysical doctrine takes note of a variety of ways in which Avicenna associates being and thing, existence and essence, he does not, however, attempt to analyze the primary notions in Avicenna in terms of wholes and parts. See Robert Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics in Context* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003). Joseph Owens' many erudite studies on Thomas Aquinas never explicate being and thing, existence and essence in mereological terms, see, for example, his *Aquinas on Being and Thing*, Niagara University Publications in Honor of Jacques and Raissa Maritain (Niagara Falls, N.Y.: Niagara University Press, 1981).

connected with texts that describe existence and essence as being akin to properties or accidents of *being* and *thing*.<sup>7</sup> While such descriptions are certainly correct, they do not provide any deeper insights into how we should understand, for example, the extensional and intensional relations among the primary notions. I shall argue that the advantage of the mereological construal of the doctrine of the primary notions is that it does provide a more explanatory interpretation of this doctrine.

Finally, we should note that in addition to *being* and *thing* Avicenna and Aquinas introduce a number of other primary notions that are also transcategorical and convertible or coextensive with *being* and *thing*, such as the one, truth, goodness, and Avicenna's the necessary, to mention a few. Such primary notions are now known as the medieval doctrine of the transcendentals of being. Although it is beyond the aims of the present study to treat these in detail, their relevance to the issues at stake should not be ignored.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Bertolacci, "The Distinction of Essence and Existence in Avicenna's Metaphysics: The Text and Its Context"; Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics in Context*; Owens, *Aquinas on Being and Thing*; idem, "The Accidental and Essential Character of Being in the Doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas"; Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought*.

<sup>8</sup> Note that in omitting a detailed treatment of these other primary notions from any account of being and thing in Avicenna and Aquinas is no small matter. This is because the primary notion one (*wāḥid*, *unum*) and Avicenna's the necessary (*wājib*, *necesse*), bear directly upon the controversial doctrine of the real distinction and composition of existence and essence. Furthermore, the salient differences between the metaphysics of Avicenna and Aquinas are rooted in their different understandings of the necessary as a first principle. Cf. Etienne Gilson, "Avicenne en Occident au moyen âge" *Archives*

## II.

*Avicenna on Being and Thing*. Let us now turn our attention to the texts to see whether this mereological interpretation is borne out by the works of Avicenna and Aquinas. Here I shall focus my study on Avicenna's treatment of the primary notions in his *Metaphysics of the Healing* (*al-Ilāhiyyāt ash-Shifā'*) and Thomas Aquinas's account of the primary notions in his commentary on the *Sentences*, his *Questiones disputate de veritate*, q. 1, a. 1, and his commentary on *Metaphysics* IV.2.

Avicenna introduces the primary notions *being* and *thing* within the context of the first principles of his metaphysical science.<sup>9</sup> After establishing that the subject of

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*d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 36 (1969): 89–121; idem, “Quasi Definitio Substantiae,” in *St. Thomas Aquinas 1274–1974: Commemorative Studies*,<sup>[P]<sub>SEP</sub></sup> vol. 1, ed. Armand Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1974), 111–129; Jan Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals: the Case of Thomas Aquinas*, (Leiden: Brill, 1996), (= *Aquinas and the Transcendentals*).

<sup>9</sup> Avicenna's doctrine of *being* and *thing* is frequently misunderstood by exegetes who do not pay attention to the context of the passages they are examining. This is significant, because the order of the topics addressed in Avicenna's *MH* are the result of his intentional systematic reorganization of Aristotelian first philosophy. Bertolacci addresses this common exegetical oversight in, “The Distinction of Essence and Existence in Avicenna's *Metaphysics*.” See also Amos Bertolacci, *The Reception of Aristotle's Metaphysics in Avicenna's Kitāb al-Shifā': A Milestone of Western Metaphysical Thought* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2006) (= *Reception*); R.E. Houser, “The Real Distinction and the Principles of *Metaphysics*: Avicenna and Aquinas,” in

metaphysics is being qua being in *MH* I.1–4, Avicenna proceeds to present his metaphysical principles as primary notions in *MH* I.5, primary hypotheses in *MH* I.6–7, and axioms in *MH* I.8. This threefold division of scientific first principles follows Aristotle’s division from the *Posterior Analytics*.<sup>10</sup> The fifth chapter of book one begins as follows:

[The] notions of “being” (*mawjūd*) “thing” (*shay’*), and “necessary” (*ḍarūrī*) are impressed in the soul in a primary way. This impression does not require better known things to bring it about. [This is similar] to what obtains in the domain of assent, where there are primary principles found to be true in themselves, causing [in turn] assent to the truths of other [propositions].<sup>11</sup>

These memorable opening lines from *MH* I.5 declare that the first and most fundamental notions impressed upon the intellect are *being* (*mawjūd*, *ens*), *thing*, (*shay’*, *res*), and the *necessary* (*ḍarūrī* / *wājib*, *necesse*), and as we learn a few lines later, the one

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*Laudemus viros gloriosos: Essays in Honor of Armand Maurer CSB*, ed. R.E. Houser (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 75–108 (= “Real Distinction”).

<sup>10</sup> *MH* 1.1.8 [5] (*Scientia divina* 3: 37–40). See Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* 1.2.72a15–24; 10.76a33–77a4; Avicenna, *Kitāb al-Burhān* (*Book of Demonstration*), 2.6 [155: 4–12] (English trans. in Bertolacci, *Reception*, 134; see also 193–6); idem, *Avicenna’s Deliverance: Logic*, trans. Asad Q. Ahmed (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011), sect., 119–35. See also Houser, “The Real Distinction.”

<sup>11</sup> *MH* I.5.1 [29], Marmura trans., slightly modified (*Scientia divina*, 31:2–32:5).

(*wāḥid, unum*) also belongs among these primary notions.<sup>12</sup> Next, and in order to set-up his extended treatment of the first principles of metaphysics in *MH* I.5–8, Avicenna

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<sup>12</sup> See the following studies on Avicenna's primary notions in the *MH*: Michael E. Marmura, "Avicenna on Primary Concepts in the *Metaphysics* of his *al-Shifa*" in *Logos Islamikos: Studia Islamica in honorem Georgii Michaelis Wickens*, ed. Savory Roger and Agius Dionisius (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), 219–39; Deborah Black, "Avicenna on the Ontological and Epistemic Status of Fictional Beings," *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 8 (1997), 425–53; Robert Wisnovsky, "Notes on Avicenna's Concept of Thingness (*shay'iyya*)" *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 10 (2000), 181–221; idem, *Avicenna's Metaphysics in Context*; Thérèse-Anne Druart, "'Shay' or 'Res' as Concomitant of 'Being' in Avicenna," *Documenti e Studi sulla Tradizione Filosofica Medievale* 12 (2001), 125–42; Lizzini, "Wugud-Mawgud / Existence-Existent in Avicenna," Houser, "The Real Distinction," Jan Aertsen, "'Res' as Transcendental: Its Introduction and Significance," in *Le problème des transcendants du XIVe au XVIIe siècle*, ed. G. Federici Vescovini (Paris: 2002), 139–56; idem, "Avicenna's Doctrine of the Primary Notions and its Impact on Medieval Philosophy," in *Islamic Thought in the Middle Ages: Studies in Text, Transmission and Translation: in Honour of Hans Daiber*, ed. Anna Akasoy & Wim Raven (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2008), 21–42 (Henceforth: Avicenna and Primary Notions); Amos Bertolacci, "Albert the Great, *Metaph.* IV, 1, 5: From the *Refutatio* to the *Excusatio* of Avicenna's Theory of Unity," in *Was ist Philosophie im Mittelalter*, eds. Jan A. Aertsen and Speer Andreas (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1998), 177–192; idem, "'Necessary' as Primary Concept in Avicenna's Metaphysics," in *Conoscenza e contingenza*, ed. Stefano

contends that just as there are first principles within the order of assent, so also there are first principles in the order of conceptualization. For if there were not first principles in conception and assent, then there would be an infinite regress or circularity of notions defining notions and propositions demonstrated by propositions, which is impossible. It is the difficult task of *MH* I.5–8 to draw our attention to, articulate, and dialectically defend the first principles of metaphysics, beginning with the first principles of conception in *MH* I.5, namely, the primary notions *being*, *thing*, the *necessary*, and the *one*.<sup>13</sup>

Avicenna's introduction of these primary notions in *MH* I.5 immediately follows his extended treatment of problems related to the subject of metaphysics as being qua being in *MH* I.1–4. This should remind us of Aristotle's own progression from the subject of first philosophy as being qua being in *Metaphysics* IV.1, to the introduction of the most universal notions of *being* and *one* as in *Metaphysics* IV.2. No less important,

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Perfetti (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2008), 31–50; idem, "The Distinction of Essence and Existence in Avicenna's Metaphysics;" Stephen Menn, "Avicenna's Metaphysics," in *Interpreting Avicenna: Critical Essays*, Peter Adamson ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 143–169.

<sup>13</sup> For studies on the argumentative strategies Avicenna employs for establishing these primary notions and the other first principles, see Druart, "'Shay' or 'Res' as Concomitant of 'Being' in Avicenna;" Houser, "Real Distinction;" Bertolacci, "'Necessary' as Primary Concept in Avicenna's Metaphysics;" idem, "The Distinction of Essence and Existence in Avicenna's Metaphysics;" Daniel De Haan, "Where Does Avicenna Demonstrate the Existence of God?" *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* (Forthcoming).

moreover, is Avicenna's addition of *thing* and the *necessary* to Aristotle's *being* and *one*. For, whereas *being* meant essence for Aristotle, it now means to be or to exist for Avicenna. Given *being's* association with existence, the vacancy for the placeholder of essence is filled by the Avicennian primary notion *thing* (*shay'*, *res*). The connections between *being* and *thing* to the *one* and the *necessary* are very significant; however, since the first two primary notions occupy most of Avicenna's attention in *MH* I.5, we shall follow suit.<sup>14</sup>

As primary notions neither *being* nor *thing* can be defined, for they are the most general notions or meanings that are implicitly or explicitly involved in all of our definitions and descriptions of entities. Instead of attempting the futile task of defining *being* and *thing*, Avicenna has recourse the alternative method of directing our attention to *being* and *thing* and their respective meanings by introducing various less common

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<sup>14</sup> Again, the significance of the *necessary* and the *one* in Avicenna's metaphysics should not be overlooked, but we do not have the space to address them here. Concerning *being* and *thing*, Druart observes that Avicenna has three fundamental aims in *MH* I.5: (1) to show that *being* and *thing* are primary notions, (2) that they have distinct meanings, and (3) that they are necessary concomitants of each other. Cf. Druart, "'Shay' or 'Res' as Concomitant of 'Being' in Avicenna." Bertolacci also focuses on *being* and *thing* in "The Distinction of Essence and Existence in Avicenna's Metaphysics" and responds to the interpretations of Wisnovsky and Aersten who both suggest that *thing* is conceptually prior to and more extensive than *being* in Avicenna. Bertolacci shows that *being* and *thing* are mutually concomitant (ibid. 271–272), that *being* has logical priority over *thing* (ibid. 273–275), and that *being* has equal or greater extension than *thing* (ibid. 275–277).

notions as well as synonyms that are for some reason or other more known to us and turn our thoughts to the most common and more known in themselves notions of *being* and *thing*.

Following a brief illustration of the difficulties involved in trying to define *being* and *thing* by less common notions, Avicenna introduces a number of synonyms for the primary notions *thing* (*shay'*, *res*) and *being* (*mawjūd*, *ens*). He observes that,

“something,” a “whatever,” or a “that which”—all of these being like synonyms of the word “thing.” ... {for} the meaning of “whatever,” “that which,” and “the thing” is one and the same.<sup>15</sup>

We say that the notion (*ma'nā*) of “being” and the notion of “thing” (*shay'*) are conceptualized in the soul as two [distinct] notions. “Being,” “established” (*muthbat*) and “realized” (*muḥaṣṣal*) are synonyms [that signify] a single notion (*ma'nā wāḥid*). We have no doubt that their notion is already present in the soul of the reader of this book.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *MH* I.5.6 [30] (*Scientia divina*, 34:41–42, 47–48).

<sup>16</sup> *MH* I.5.8 [31] (*Scientia divina*, 34:50–54). Modified translation from Bertolacci, “The Distinction of Essence and Existence in Avicenna’s Metaphysics,” 266–267.



The primary notion *thing* is synonymous with “something” (*‘amr*), “what” or “whatever” (*mā*), and “that which” (*alladhī*). The primary notion *being* (*mawjūd*) is taken to be synonymous with the “established” (*muthbat*) and the “realized” (*muḥaṣṣal*).<sup>17</sup>

Even though Avicenna frequently reminds us that *being* is convertible and coextensive with the primary notions *thing*, the *one*, and the *necessary*, in this text he makes clear that *being* is not synonymous with these other primary notions. Furthermore, it is significant that while Avicenna holds *being* is synonymous with the “established” and the “realized,” that is, *being* has the same extension and a similar intension with the established and the realized, he neither mentions nor even suggests that *being* (*mawjūd*) is synonymous with existence (*wujūd*). So what is the connection between *being* and existence if they are not synonyms? This is related to a similar question: how should we understand the association between *thing* and quiddity? In order to answer these questions we must consider what Avicenna maintains is the intension or meaning of *being* in contrast to the meaning or intension of *thing*.

With “thing” and its equivalents another notion {other than “being”} is signified in every language. For anything (*li-kull ‘amr*) has a truth-nature (*ḥaqīqa*) by means of which it is what it is. Thus the triangle has as [its] truth-nature that it is a triangle, and the whiteness has as [its] truth-nature that it is whiteness. This is what we call sometimes “specified existence” (*wujūd khāṣṣ*). We do not mean by

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<sup>17</sup> Avicenna also seems to identify the notions “being” (*huwiyya*, *identitas*) and “entity” or “anity” (*annīya*, *anitas*) as synonymous with “being” (*mawjūd*, *ens*) or as meaning an individual being with existence.

it the notion of “established existence” (*wujūd ithbātī*). For the term “existence” (*wujūd*) is also used to signify many notions, one of which is the truth-nature according to which a thing is. That according to which a thing is, therefore, is like its specified existence.

To resume: We say to be clear that every thing (*shayʾ*) has a proper truth-nature (*ḥaqīqa khāṣṣ*), which is its quiddity (*māhiyya*). Now, it is known that the proper truth-nature of every thing is other than the existence that is synonymous with “being established” (*ithbāt*).<sup>18</sup>

In this passage Avicenna identifies a number of notions that he attaches to the meaning of *thing* (*shayʾ*, *res*), such as “truth-nature” (*ḥaqīqa*, *certitudo*), “quiddity” (*māhiyya*, *quidditas*), and “specified existence” (*wujūd khāṣṣ*, *esse proprium*), which he contrasts with the apparent or obvious meanings of being (*mawjūd*, *ens*), such as “existence” (*wujūd*, *esse*) or “established existence” (*wujūd ithbātī*, *esse affirmativi*).

At this point Avicenna seems to anticipate that his readers might be confused, for immediately after he insists that *being* and *thing* have distinct meanings, he introduces two different notions of existence (*wujūd*, *esse*), namely, “established existence” and “specified existence,” to help describe the distinct meanings of *being* and *thing*, respectively. To avoid unnecessary misunderstandings, Avicenna quickly points out that existence (*wujūd*, *esse*) is polysemous; that is to say, it has many meanings and we should

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<sup>18</sup> *MH* I.5.9–10 [31] (*Scientia divina*, 34:54–35:61). Modified translation from Bertolacci, “The Distinction of Essence and Existence in Avicenna’s Metaphysics,” 266–267.

not fail to distinguish between the proper or specified existence that is the meaning of *thing*, and the established existence that is the meaning of *being* or the established.<sup>19</sup>

The meaning of specified existence is identified with the truth-nature according to which a *thing* is what it is; for example, the truth-nature of a triangle is that by which it is a triangle. Avicenna seems to intimate that his readers still might not be clear about what this truth-nature or specified existence is, so he introduces one more meaning of the notion *thing*: quiddity or whatness. Every *thing* has a truth-nature that is its quiddity, and this quiddity or proper truth-nature of every *thing* is other than or distinct from its existence, that is to say, its established existence, which is the meaning of the primary notion *being*.

Thus far Avicenna has identified three terms as synonymous with the notion *thing*: something, whatever, and that which. Each of these notions is the same in extension and is similar in intension with the notion *thing*, which means each of them are also identical in extension and distinct in intension from the notion *being* and its synonyms the established and the realized. What *thing* and its synonyms *mean* is captured by Avicenna's "has" and "proper to" locutions. For each *thing* has a quiddity or truth-nature or specified existence, which are just a few of the meanings he ascribes to the

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<sup>19</sup> By specified or proper existence Avicenna means the quidditative principle in any entity by virtue of which it is specified to be what it is as an *infima species*. This specified existence of any thing is synonymous with the quiddity and truth-nature proper to any thing and so it should not be confused with the established existence of a being. Cf. Wisnovsky, "Notes on Thingness;" Bertolacci, "The Distinction of Essence and Existence in Avicenna's Metaphysics;" Menn, "Avicenna's Metaphysics."

notion *thing*. Later on Avicenna will introduce some additional meanings for the primary notion *thing* (*shay'*, *res*), such as “essence” (*dhāt*, *essentia*),<sup>20</sup> “thingness” (*shay'iyya*, *similitudo*),<sup>21</sup> and the “nature” (*ṭabī'a*, *natura*)<sup>22</sup> proper to a *thing*. I take it that each of these meanings of the primary notion *thing* are co-extensive with each other and some are semantically synonymous with one another.<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, in later chapters Avicenna extends the meanings of *being* (*mawjūd*, *ens*) as existence (*wujūd*, *esse*) and established existence (*wujūd ithbātī*, *esse affirmativi*)<sup>24</sup> to include “realized subsistence” (*mutaḥaṣṣal qiwām*, *existentia*)<sup>25</sup> and

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<sup>20</sup> *MH* I.6.7 [40] (*Scientia divina*, 46:76). Cf. *MH* VIII.5.1 [349] (*Scientia divina*, 405:9).

<sup>21</sup> *MH* VI.5 [292–294]. In *MH* I.5 thingness (*shay'iyya*) is translated into Latin as *similitudinem* (*Scientia divina*, I.5, 38:21), but in *MH* VI.5 thingness (*shay'iyya*) is systematically mistranslated into Latin as *causalitatem*, (*Scientia divina*, I.5, 337:88). For an extended study of this translation error, see Wisnovsky, “Notes on Thingness.”

<sup>22</sup> *MH* V.1.16–30 [200–206] (*Scientia divina*, 233:19–238:56); *MH* V.2.

<sup>23</sup> There are some important qualifications to be made here. While Avicenna is comfortable with talking about God’s essence (*dhāt*, *essentia*) or truth-nature (*ḥaqīqa*, *certitudo*), he explicitly denies that we can say God has a quiddity (*māhiyya*, *quidditas*). This is because Avicenna identifies quiddity with definitions and God cannot be defined. Cf. Edward Macierowski, “Does God have a Quiddity according to Avicenna?” *The Thomist* 52 (1988): 79–87; Bertolacci, “The Distinction of Essence and Existence in Avicenna’s Metaphysics,” 275–278.

<sup>24</sup> *MH* I.5.9–10 [31] (*Scientia divina*, 34:54–35:61).

<sup>25</sup> *MH* II.2 [57] (*Scientia divina*, 65:10).

subsistence (*qiwām, existentia*).<sup>26</sup> In other words, for Avicenna, the “realized subsistence” of a *being*, its “existence,” and its “established existence,” are all meanings, though not synonyms, of *being* (*mawjūd, ens*) that are identical in extension with each other.

Towards the end of his extended comparison of the distinct meanings of *being* and *thing*, Avicenna comes to the following conclusion with respect to the connection between these two primary notions:

With “thing” (*shay*) therefore, this notion is meant {i.e., that which has a quiddity}. The concomitance (*luzūm*) of the meaning “being” (*mawjūd*) does not separate itself (*lā yufāriqu*) from it [i.e., from the notion of “thing”] at all (*al-battata*). On the contrary, the notion of “being” always (*dā’iman*) accompanies it inseparably (*yalzamu*), since it [i.e., “thing”] is either a “being” in concrete objects, or a “being” in the estimative faculty and the intellect. Were it not so, it would not be a “thing.”<sup>27</sup>

Here Avicenna clearly contends that despite the different meanings of *being* and *thing*, these two primary notions are nevertheless inseparable from each other; every created entity that is a *thing* is also a *being* and vice-versa. A *thing* is always a *being* either in reality or in a cognitive power, because if its quiddity is to exist, the quiddity of a *thing*

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<sup>26</sup> *MH* II.2 [57] (*Scientia divina*, 65:17; 67:47).

<sup>27</sup> *MH* I.5.11 [32] (*Scientia divina*, 36:79–83). Modified translation from Bertolacci, “The Distinction of Essence and Existence in Avicenna’s Metaphysics,” 266–267.

must be a *being* that exists in reality or exists in a cognitive agent. In other words, all of the ways in which the quiddity of a *thing* can exist, either in reality or in an estimative or intellectual power, involve some mode of existence, which is the principal meaning of the notion *being*. Without existence, no quiddity *is*, and if there is no quiddity, then there is no *thing*; consequently, the existence of a *thing*'s quiddity implies that it is also a *being*. Hence, it is wrong to hold that Avicenna takes *thing* to have a wider extension than *being*, or to hold that the primary notion *thing* is in any sense prior to *being*. There is no *thing* without a quiddity, and for Avicenna, there are no quiddities without existence, which is the hallmark of *being*. Furthermore, as Amos Bertolacci points out, it is far more reasonable to maintain that the primary notion *being* has a wider extension and priority over *thing*, for there is one important exception to the co-extensionality of *being* and *thing* in Avicenna. For while Avicenna countenances calling God a *being*, albeit, in an exceptionally qualified analogical way, he does not call God a *thing*. Hence, there is a sense in which *being* has greater extension than *thing*.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. Bertolacci, "The Distinction of Essence and Existence in Avicenna's Metaphysics," 275–277. Recently, Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics in Context* and Aertsen, "Avicenna's Doctrine of the Primary Notions and its Impact on Medieval Philosophy" have argued that *thing* is more extensional and logically prior to being in Avicenna's metaphysics. This view has been refuted by Bertolacci in "The Distinction of Essence and Existence in Avicenna's Metaphysics." Let us note two additional problems with the interpretation of Wisnovsky and Aertsen. First, it is not inconsequential that the subject of the metaphysics for Avicenna is *being qua being*, not *thing qua thing*, or any other one of the primary notions for that matter. Second, even though we are not addressing

Thus far Avicenna's ontological account of *being* and *thing* has revealed that these two notions co-imply one another (except in the case of God) and that *being* is inseparable from *thing*, even though these two primary notions have radically distinct meanings from each other. And it is on the basis of these distinct meanings that the primary notions *thing* and *being*, along with their myriad synonymous representatives, are distinguished from each other. We also know that despite the fact that *being* and *thing* are identical in extension but not in intension, what they mean distinctly cannot be the same in extension. This is because Avicenna also maintains that quiddity (*māhiyya*) is other than existence (*wujūd*). Said otherwise, a *thing*'s truth-nature or specified existence (i.e., synonyms of quiddity) is other than its established existence (i.e., a synonym of existence).

Avicenna's doctrine concerning the distinction and composition of existence and quiddity continues to be clarified and insisted on throughout the rest of his *MH*. It is first taken up at length in an extended dialectical argument that aims to establish the first principles qua primary hypotheses of Avicenna's metaphysical science. It is by virtue of establishing these primary hypotheses that Avicenna also established his doctrine of the real distinction and composition of quiddity and existence. In *MH* I.6–7, Avicenna casts the distinction in terms of the necessary: (1) there is the being that is necessary existence

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Avicenna's primary notions the *one* and the *necessary*, it is worth noting here, that Avicenna does not call God a *thing* but he does frequently describe God as *necessary*, *one*, and is being itself. Hence, *being*, *one*, and the *necessary* clearly have greater extension than *thing*, and given that they all describe God, they also have greater metaphysical priority over the primary notion *thing*.

in itself and (2) there are the beings that are possible existence in themselves and necessary existence through another. The quiddities of the latter kind of beings are distinct from their existence and insufficient to bring about their own existence, which is why they are necessary existents through another.<sup>29</sup> In short, for Avicenna, all beings that are possible existences in themselves are compositions of quiddity and the caused necessary existence they receive from another, for “that whose existence is always necessitated by another is also not simple in its truth-nature. [This is] because what belongs to it [when] considered in itself {i.e., its quiddity} is other than what belongs to it from another {i.e., its caused necessary existence}. It establishes its being (*huwiyya*) in existence from both together.”<sup>30</sup>

Avicenna clarifies these distinctions more in his extended treatment of the problem of universals in *MH* V. In his famous account of the quiddity horseness considered in itself, Avicenna again distinguishes between the quiddity and the various aspects that attach to it.

For, in itself, it is nothing at all except “horseness”; for, in itself, it is neither one nor many and exists neither in concrete things nor in the soul, existing in none of these things either in potency or in act, such that [these] are included in

“horseness.” Rather, in terms of itself, it is only “horseness.” Rather, oneness is an

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. *MH* I.6.4–6 [38–39] (*Scientia divina*, 44:38–45:58).

<sup>30</sup> *MH* I.7.14 [47] modified translation from Marmura, (*Scientia divina*, 55:50–55). Cf. Houser, “Real Distinction”; De Haan, “Where Does Avicenna Demonstrate the Existence of God?”



attribute that conjoins with “horseness,” whereby “horseness” with this attribute becomes one. Similarly, in addition to this attribute, “horseness” has many other attributes that enter it.<sup>31</sup>

Based on the primary notions introduced above, we can see that *thing’s* quiddity in itself receives existence in reality or in the soul and thereby becomes many or one, particular or universal. Still, without existence the quiddity in itself is a mere manner of consideration, and is neither a *being* nor a *thing*. It is only as existing in some way or other that a quiddity is a part of a *thing*.

This doctrine is articulated again in *MH* VI.5, in Avicenna’s treatment of final causality.

There is a difference between a thing and a being (even though a thing can only be an being) that is similar to the difference between something and its necessary concomitant. You have already known and ascertained this. Resume, then, reflecting on this as regards the human. For there belongs to the human a truth-nature which is his definition and quiddity without the condition of [its having] particular or general existence (whether in outer reality or the soul), nothing of this being either in potency or in act.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> *MH* V.1.4 [196] (*Scientia divina*, 228:24–229:42).

<sup>32</sup> *MH* VI.5.27 [292], modified translation from Marmura (*Scientia divina*, 336:85–87).

*Being* and *thing* are co-extensional necessary concomitants, but what belongs to *thing* is a quiddity or truth-nature that is not identical to, but is distinct from its existence. This is because Avicenna holds that quiddity of a *thing* can exist, and so be a *being*, only as a particular in reality or as a universal in the mind. If quiddity in itself were identified with existence in reality, then that same quiddity could not also exist as known in the mind, which would undermine the conformity of knowledge with reality. It is because the quiddity in itself is existentially neutral and so not identified with existence in reality or in the mind that the quiddity can receive existence so as to be a *being* or *thing* in reality or in a cognitive agent.

A number of scholars have highlighted the importance of Avicenna's descriptions of the way *being* and existence or *thing* and quiddity are associated, such as *thing having* quiddity, or existence *belonging* to *being*. Deborah Black writes, "To call any object a 'thing' is to recognize it as having a quiddity or essence"<sup>33</sup> Commenting on Avicenna's various ways of describing the primary notions *being* and *thing*, Bertolacci notes that, "Since 'existent' {i.e., being} and 'thing' are *grosso modo* equivalent to the notions of 'item having existence' and 'item having essence' respectively, the account of their distinction (and connection) in this chapter {i.e., *MH* I.5} encompasses, in its turn, the distinction of essence and existence."<sup>34</sup>

Given Bertolacci's clear statements that Avicenna holds *being* and *thing* have existence and essence, respectively, that *being* and *thing* are the same in extension though

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<sup>33</sup> Black, "Avicenna on the Ontological and Epistemic Status of Fictional Being," 450.

Cf. Druart, "'Shay' or 'Res' as Concomitant of 'Being' in Avicenna," 135.

<sup>34</sup> Bertolacci, *The Distinction of Essence and Existence in Avicenna's Metaphysics*, 258.

distinct in intension (except as applied to God), and that existence and essence are mutual inseparable concomitants of all *beings* and *things*, one might also expect Bertolacci to describe *being* and *thing* in terms of entitative wholes to which existence and essence belong as intrinsic entitative parts. Still, he does not describe the connection between *being* and existence or *thing* and essence in terms of wholes and parts. Why not?

One reason might be that Avicenna himself does not employ explicit mereological language to describe *being* and existence or *thing* and essence. His explicit metaphysical treatment of mereological topics is very short and comes at the end of his brief account of the perfect and imperfect in *MH* IV.3.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, his few brief remarks are instructive.

Anything composed of different things—such as animal—is spoken of as a “whole,” since it is composed of soul and body... Of the part, there is that where a thing divides, not in quantity, but in existence—as with soul and body, for the animal; hyle and form, for the composite thing; and, in general, that from which the thing whose principles are different is composed.<sup>36</sup>

These minimal conditions for being a whole seem to apply to the notions *being* and *thing*, for *being* and *thing*, as we have seen, are composed of different “things,” so long as we take “thing” here in a non-technical sense, as we should, for soul and body are not

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. *MH* V.7–9.

<sup>36</sup> *MH* IV.3 [190–191], modified translation from Marmura (*Scientia divina*, 218:80–219:87).

“things” as primary notions for Avicenna. And just as soul and body or form and matter are composed into a whole, so also existence and essence are united or composed into a *being* or *thing*. Similarly, existence and essence are not distinct items of a *being* or *thing* according to a quantitative division, but according to a division in existence or being, analogous to Avicenna’s examples of soul and body for a living animal, or form and matter for composite substances. Indeed, Avicenna’s final general qualification of parts applies the notion of a part to any distinct principles of a composite and, as we have seen, this general condition certainly applies to existence and essence.

Hence, there are some cogent reasons for describing Avicenna’s doctrine of *being* and *thing*, existence and essence, in mereological terms, so long as we are clear about what we mean by these ontological wholes and parts as distinct from substantial, integral, universal, potential, quantitative, and other kinds of wholes and parts. Accordingly, it seems reasonable to construe Avicenna’s doctrine of the primary notions *being* and *thing*, as follows: All created *beings* or *things* are composed of two distinct ontological parts, viz., existence and quiddity. *Being* and *thing* are identical in extension, but not intension, that is to say, *being* and *thing* are neither really distinct nor composed. Finally, *being* and existence are related to each other as whole to part, just as *thing* and quiddity or truth-nature or essence are related as whole to part. Of course, many additional nuances would be required to establish in detail the ramifications of this mereological construal of Avicenna’s doctrine of *being* and *thing*, existence and essence, but that is beyond the scope of discussion here. Let us turn now to Thomas Aquinas.

### III.

*Aquinas on Being and Thing*. In the modest account which follows here I point out the ways in which Thomas's doctrine tracks with its Avicennian predecessor and also highlight passages in which Thomas's doctrine can be illuminated by providing it with a mereological construal. Given the Avicennian background of Thomas's doctrine, a few brief remarks concerning these two thinkers' common approach to Aristotelian metaphysics is instructive.

Regarding the order of the Aristotelian science of first philosophy, Thomas Aquinas agrees with Avicenna's overall account of the subject, principles, and objects of inquiry of metaphysics.<sup>37</sup> Thomas, of course, never wrote a systematic metaphysical

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. Daniel De Haan, "Why the Five Ways? Aquinas's Avicennian Solution to the Problem of Unity in the Aristotelian Metaphysics and *Sacra Doctrina*," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association: Philosophy in the Abrahamic Traditions*, Vol. 86 (2013): 141–158; R.E. Houser, *Real Distinction*; idem, "Aristotle and Two Medieval Aristotelians on the Nature of God," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 51, 3 (2011): 355–375; idem, "Why the Christian *Magistri* turned to Arabic and Jewish *Falāsifa*," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association: Philosophy in the Abrahamic Traditions*, Vol. 86 (2013): 33–55; John F. Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas and Avicenna on the Relationship between First Philosophy and Other Theoretical Sciences: A Note on Thomas's *Commentary on Boethius's De Trinitate*, Q. 5, art. 1, ad 9," in *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas I*, (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1984), ch. 2, 37–53; idem, "The Latin Avicenna as a Source for Thomas Aquinas's Metaphysics," in *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas II*, (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), ch. 2,

treatise of his own; nevertheless, it is not difficult to find numerous passages where he articulates his own views of the subject of metaphysics or texts where he discusses the primary notions of first philosophy or the fundamental importance of the axioms of being, such as the first principle of demonstration. Our interest in this study is on Aquinas's account of *being* and *thing*, which are the first principles as primary notions of his metaphysics.

Many scholars have observed that Aquinas's introduction of the primary notions *being* and *thing* in *De Veritate* q. 1, a. 1 (1256–1259), is remarkably similar to Avicenna's treatment of the primary notions from *Metaphysics of the Healing* I.5.<sup>38</sup> There Thomas follows Avicenna's distinction between first principles in the order of notions conceived and first principles in the order of *per se* known propositions. He notes that there must be first principles in both orders, that is, of conception and of judgment, or else there would be an infinite regress. Thomas then contends that he agrees with Avicenna and holds that within the order of conception *being* (*ens*) is that which is first

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31–65; idem, “Thomas Aquinas, Siger of Brabant, and Their Use of Avicenna in Clarifying The Subject of Metaphysics,” in *Metaphysics. The Paideia Project: Proceedings of the 20th World Congress of Philosophy*, Vol. II (1999), 15–26; Aertsen, *Aquinas and the Transcendentals*, 136–151.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Gilson, “Avicenne en Occident au moyen âge”; Aertsen, *Aquinas and the Transcendentals*; idem, “‘Res’ as Transcendental: Its Introduction and Significance”; idem, “Avicenna's Doctrine of the Primary Notions and its Impact on Medieval Philosophy”; Houser, *Real Distinction*.

conceived by the intellect and that all concepts can be resolved into *being*.<sup>39</sup> What this means is that other concepts are added to *being*, and Thomas stakes out two ways in which other concepts are able to express some mode of being that is not expressed by the notion of *being*. The first are the special limited modes of being expressed by categorical terms substance and accident. The second consists of the notions that express modes of being that are common and consequent upon all beings. This second group of notions, common to all beings, includes *thing* (*res*), *one* (*unum*), *something* (*aliquid*), the *good* (*bonum*), and the *true* (*verum*).<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. *DV* 1.1. See also a parallel treatment from the commentary on the *Sentences*: “Primum enim quod cadit in imaginatione intellectus, est ens, sine quod nihil potest, apprehendi ab intellectu; sicut primum quod cadit in credulitate intellectus, sunt dignitates, et praecipue ista, contradictoria non esse simul vera: unde omnia alia includuntur quodammodo in ente unite et distincte, sicut in principio; ex quo etiam habet quamdam decentiam ut sit propriissimum divinum nomen.” *In I Sent.* d. 8.1. 3 (Mand., 200). Thomas is fond of reciting the Avicennian dictum that being is that which is first grasped by the intellect, see *De Ente*. Prol.; *In I Sent.*, d. 1.38.1, obj. 4; *In de Trinitate* q.1, a. 3, obj. 3; q. 6, a. 1; *DV* 21.1; *De potentia*, 9.7, ad15; *In I Meta.* lect. 2, n. 46; *ST I.* 5.2; 11.2, ad4; I–II. 94.2. For a discussion and further references see, Gilson “Quasi Definitio Substantiae,” 116–121; Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought*, 41, nn. 56–59 ff.

<sup>40</sup> While the term “transcendentals” was a later scholastic appellation for these, St. Thomas does refer to transcendental notions as *transcendentia*, see *In I Sent.*, d. 2.1.5, ad 2; *In II Sent.*, d. 34.1.2, ad 1; *DV* 21.3; *ST I.* 30.3, et ad 1; 39.3, ad 3; 93.9; *QDVC*, q. 1 a. 2, ad 8. For the history of the Scholastic doctrine of the transcendentals, see Aertsen,

Thomas focuses his attention on ways to demarcate these latter common notions. There are two ways to think about these notions common to *being*: we can either consider what follows upon every being in itself or we can consider it as related to another. With respect to the former there are notions that express what is affirmed of every being (viz., *being* and *thing*) and what is negated of every being (viz., *one* and *something*). The only aspect that we can affirm of every being in itself, that expresses or highlights some feature of being not indicated by the notion *being* (*ens*) is essence (*essentia*), and essence is expressed by the term *thing* (*res*). In order to clarify the distinction between *being* and *thing*, he turns to Avicenna's way of distinguishing between the two common notions. Thomas says that the notion of *being* is taken from the act of existence (*actus essendi*), whereas the name *thing* expresses the quiddity or essence of the *being*.<sup>41</sup> In other words,

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*Aquinas and the Transcendentals*, esp. 91, n. 52; idem, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought. From Philip the Chancellor (ca. 1225) to Francisco Suárez*, (Leiden: Brill, 2012). It is important to recognize that Thomas does count *thing* (*res*) among the *transcendentia*, see *In I. Sent.* 2.1.5, ad2; *In I. Sent.* 8.1.3; *In I. Sent.*, 33.1.1, ad1; *DV* 1.1; *SCG* III.8–9; *ST.* I. 39.3, ad 3; 48.2, ad2; *In IV Meta.*, lt. 2, n. 553; Aertsen, *Aquinas and the Transcendentals*, 193–199.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. *DV* 1.1 (Leonine, vol. 22.1, 4:95–5:161). “...cum dicitur ‘diversum est esse et quod est’ distinguitur actus essendi ab eo cui ille actus convenit; nomen autem entis ab actu essendi sumitur, non ab eo cui convenit actus essendi...” *DV* 1.1, ad3 (Leonine, vol. 22.1, 7:281–285). “Cum autem in re sit quidditas ejus et suum esse, veritas fundatur in esse rei magis quam in quidditate, sicut et nomen entis ab esse imponitur...” *In I Sent.*, d. 19.5.1 (Mand., 486). Cf. *In I Sent.*, d. 8.1.3.



we can affirm two metaphysical aspects or entitative parts of every entity, its act of existence and its quiddity or essence. The first ontological part is indicated by the name *being* (*ens*) and the second entitative part is signified by the name *thing* (*res*). Hence, even though *being* and *thing* refer to the same whole or individual entity, they do not signify the same entitative parts of that whole. For it is in virtue of the distinction between the ontological parts of the act of existence of the *being* and the essence of the *thing* that Thomas is able to show that *being* and *thing* are distinct insofar as they mean or intensionally signify these two distinct entitative parts affirmed of every entity.

In his earlier commentary on the *Sentences* (c. 1252–1256), Thomas develops his doctrine of *being* and *thing* in a number of different contexts. Aquinas explicitly distinguishes between the signification of the primary notions *being* and *thing* as follows.

According to Avicenna...the name *being*(*ens*) and *thing* (*res*) differ inasmuch as two items must be considered in any reality (*in re*), namely, its quiddity or notion, and its existence (*esse ipsius*). [Now] it is from the quiddity that the name *thing* (*res*) is taken. And because the quiddity can have existence (*habere esse*) both in the singular (which is independent of the soul), and in the soul (insofar as it is apprehended by the intellect), the name *thing* (*nomen rei*) therefore applies to both. [*Thing* is applied] to that which is in the soul, for “thing” is [etymologically] said from “*reor reris*.” [*Thing* is applied] to that which is independent of the soul, for *thing* is said of that which is determinate and stable in nature (*ratum et firmum*

*in natura*). But the name *being* is taken from the existence of a thing (*nomen entis sumitur ab esse rei*).<sup>42</sup>

Note the following three points in this rich text. First, Thomas cites his agreement with Avicenna and maintains that in every entity in reality there are two aspects that must be distinguished, the entity's quiddity and its existence. Second, Thomas then observes that the name *thing* (*res*) is taken from the quiddity of an entity, which can exist in singular wholes in reality or can exist in a cognitive agent. Third, he points out that the name *being* (*ens*) is taken from the existence of a thing (*esse rei*).

We find a similar account of *being* and *thing* in a passage from Thomas's commentary on the second book of the *Sentences*. He states that *thing* can be taken in two ways: absolutely, that is, as it is in reality, and as cognizable in the intellect. The first way pertains to the existence of a thing as determinate and stable in nature (*ratum et firmum in natura*) and the second concerns thing as it is thought or opined (*reor reris*). Thomas explains that the first sense of the name *thing* means that which has a quiddity or essence, in contrast to the name *being* (*ens*), which means that which has existence (*quod habet esse*). And this, Thomas notes, is the view of Avicenna, who also distinguishes between the signification of *being* and *thing*.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *In I Sent.* d. 25.1.4, sol. (Mand., 611–612). See more detailed treatments of this passage in Gilson "Quasi Definitio Substantiae," 118 and in Aertsen, *Aquinas and the Transcendentals*, 196–197.

<sup>43</sup> "Similiter autem et nomen « rei » dupliciter sumitur. Simpliciter enim dicitur res quod habet esse ratum et firmum in natura; et dicitur res hoc modo, accepto nomine « rei »

Thomas also addresses these distinctions between *being* and *thing* in his treatment of God's essence in *Sentences* book one, distinction eight. In the first question he considers whether being (*esse*) is properly said of God. His fourth reason for affirming that being is properly said of God is taken from Avicenna.

Since in everything that is, it is possible to consider its quiddity, through which it subsists in a determinate nature, and its *being* (*esse*), through which it is said of that which actually is, the name "thing" (*res*) is imposed on a thing from its quiddity, according to Avicenna *Metaph.* II, chap. 1, and the name "He Who is" or "a being" (*ens*) is imposed by the very act of *being*. But, although it is the case that in any created thing its essence differs from its *being*, the thing is properly denominated from its quiddity and not from the act of *being*, e.g., a man from humanity. In God, however, His very *being* is His quiddity: and so the name that is taken from *being* properly names Him and is His proper name, just like the

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secundum quod habet quidditatem vel essentiam quamdam ; ens vero, secundum quod habet esse, ut dicit Avicenna, *Metaph.*, tract. I, cap. VI, distinguens entis et rei significationem. Sed quia res per essentiam suam cognoscibilis est, transumptum est nomen « rei » ad omne id quod in cognitione vel intellectu cadere potest, secundum quod res a « reor reris » dicitur ; et per hunc modum dicuntur res rationis qua; in natura ratum esse non habent, secundum quem modum etiam negationes et privationes res dici possunt, sicut et entia rationis dicuntur..." *In II Sent.*, d. 37.1.1, sol. (Mand., 944). Cf. *In I Peri* c.5 (Leonine, vol. 1\*.1, 30:355–31:376)

proper name of man, which is taken from his quiddity.<sup>44</sup>

Thomas first distinguishes between the quiddity and existence (*esse*) of everything that is, and notes that the former is that by which something “subsists in a determinate nature”, while the latter is that by which something actually is. The name *thing* (*res*) captures the notion of quiddity, and the name *being* (*ens*) is taken from the very act of existence (*ipso actu essendi*). Now in all creatures, their existence is distinct from their quiddity, and *thing* denominates the quiddity, whereas the act of existence is signified by the notion *being* (*ens*). This is why creatures take their name from their quiddity; however, because God’s quiddity is His existence, and the name *being* is taken from existence, being is proper to God.

A few questions later Thomas employs his doctrine of *being* and *thing* in his treatment of the question, Is God a substance? The objector has argued God is a substance and so is in the genus of substance, because the category of substance is defined as being *per se* or being not in a subject and God is being *per se* and is not in a subject. Thomas’s response to this objection begins by denying that this is the proper formulation of substance as a category.

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<sup>44</sup> *In I Sent.*, d. 8.1.1 (Mand., 195). English translation from, *Thomas Aquinas’s Earliest Treatment of the Divine Essence: Scriptum super libros Sententiarum, Book I, Distinction 8*, trans. E. M. Macierowski (Binghamton: Binghamton University Press, 1998), 43, emphasis in the original, translation modified (Henceforth: Macierowski, *Thomas Aquinas’s Earliest Treatment of the Divine Essence*).

One ought to say that this definition—according to Avicenna...cannot belong to substance: “substance is that which is not in a subject.” For a being (*ens*) is not a genus. But the negation “not in a subject” does not posit anything; hence, my saying “not in a subject” does not express any genus, since in any genus one must signify some quiddity, as has been said, and *being* is not involved in the understanding of it. A being, however, states not a quiddity but only the act of *being*, since it is the principle itself; and so to say “it is not in a subject; therefore, it is in the genus of substance” does not follow, but “it is something having a quiddity upon which *being* not in a subject follows” must be added; therefore, it is in the genus of substance. But this saying does not apply to God, as has been said.”<sup>45</sup>

*Being* is not involved in the understanding of what an entity is, because it signifies the act of existence, not the quiddity; understanding the quiddity of a *thing* never informs one about its act of existence. The proper formulation of substance that is a category is that which has a quiddity upon which existence not in a subject follows, and because God neither has a quiddity nor receives his act of existence, God fails to fall within the category of substance.

Thomas addresses the proper formulation of the notion of substance in many passages throughout his career and his various articulations of the proper quasi-definition of substance often enlists the distinction between quiddity or essence and existence. He

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<sup>45</sup> *In I Sent.*, d. 8.4.2, ad2 (Mand., 222–23). Translation from Macierowski, *Thomas Aquinas’s Earliest Treatment of the Divine Essence*, 101.

holds that a substance is a *thing* (*res*) that has a quiddity to which it belongs to exist in itself or to exist not in a subject.<sup>46</sup> What is of note for us is the way Thomas associates quiddity and essence to *thing* (*res*) and existence (*esse*) to *being* (*ens*) in his quasi-definition of substance as a *thing* that has a quiddity, which receives its act of existence. Thomas repeats in various ways that a substance is a *thing* that *has a quiddity* (*res quidditatem habens*, *res habens quidditatem*, *habere quidditatem*, *res cuius nature, quod habeat quidditatem*), and in some of these passages, as well as others, Thomas observes that all *beings*, or the essence, nature, or quiddity of *things* *have existence* (*habere esse*, *habens esse*, *esse habens*).<sup>47</sup> He even notes that every entity in the category of substance has or possesses a composition of quiddity and existence (*habeat compositionem quidditatis et esse*). Thomas's myriad uses of this "to have" locution, like in Avicenna, illustrates the metaphysical mereology we are endeavoring to uncover.

Given these similarities to the Avicennian doctrine considered above, it seems reasonable to hold, that for Thomas, *being* and *thing* are notions that refer to one and the same entitative wholes. As whole terms they refer to entities that possess or have certain metaphysical principles or ontological parts. Said otherwise, *being* and *thing* refer to wholes or entities that *have* as entitative parts an act of existence and an essence. Indeed, Thomas is only able to distinguish these two whole terms, *being* and *thing*, by stipulating

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<sup>46</sup> Cf. *In II Sent.* d. 3.1.1; *In II Sent.* d. 3.1.5; *In II Sent.* d. 3.1.6; *In IV Sent.* d. 12.1.1.1, ad 2; *In IV Sent.* d. 12.1.1.1, ad 3; *Quod.* 9.3.1, ad2; *SCG* I.25; *De Pot.* 7.3, ad4; *ST* I.3.5, ad 1; *ST* III.77.1, ad 2.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. *Quod* II. q. 2, a. 1 (Leonine, vol. 25. 2, 214: 37–38); *In XII Meta.*, lect. 1, n. 2419 (Mari, 567); *ST* I–II. 26.4.

that *being* signifies the part of the whole that is the act of existence and that *thing* signifies the part of the very same whole entity that is the essence or quiddity. This is why we are able to say that every *being* (*ens*) has an act of existence and the very same *thing* (*res*) has an essence, quiddity, or nature.

Thus far we have only considered passages taken from the early works of Aquinas. But it is important to recognize that Thomas continues to deploy this doctrine of *being* and *thing* in his later works. This is significant, for some scholars have suggested that the later Thomas distances his metaphysics from that of Avicenna's.<sup>48</sup> A brief look at Thomas's commentary on the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle (c. 1271–1273) reveals that Avicenna's doctrine of *being* and *thing* continues to be integral to Thomas's metaphysics, even in his much later commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* IV.2.

The passage under consideration is Aristotle's well known account of the way in which the notions *being* and *one* are co-extensional. Aristotle, of course, does not mention the notion *thing*, but that does not prevent Aquinas from introducing his Avicennian primary notion *thing* alongside the primary notions of *being* and the *one*. Indeed, St. Thomas is so committed to these three primordial notions *ens*, *res*, *unum*, that he even goes so far as to focus most of his attention on *thing* (*res*) within his commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* IV.2.

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<sup>48</sup> It is well known that Aquinas cites Avicenna less in his later works, but as Gilson has shown, this does not demonstrate that Avicenna's influence on Thomas's metaphysics diminishes in his later works. Gilson discusses such points at length in, Gilson, "Avicenne en Occident au moyen âge"; idem, "Quasi Definitio Substantiae."

It should be known that the name “man” is imposed from the quiddity or from the nature of man, and the name “thing” (*res*) is imposed from the quiddity only. But the name “being” (*ens*) is imposed from the act of existence, and the name “one” (*unum*) [is imposed] from order or indivision. For the one is undivided being. Moreover that which has an essence and a quiddity through that essence, and that which is undivided in itself, are the same. Hence these three: *thing* (*res*), *being* (*ens*), *one* (*unum*), signify altogether the same [entity], but according to diverse notions (*rationes*).<sup>49</sup>

Thomas’s brief presentation of his doctrine of *being*, *thing*, and *one* is remarkably similar to his earlier accounts of the primary notions. Here we are told, just as in *De Veritate* q. 1, a.1, that *being* is taken from the act of existence, *thing* signifies the nature or quiddity, and the *one* means undivided. The final sentence ties the three primary notions together and clarifies that while all three primary notions refer to the same whole or individual entity, i.e., they are all co-extensional, they are not co-intensional for they each highlight distinct notions with respect to the whole. *Being* and *thing* signify the entitative parts of existence and essence, respectively, while the one signifies the undividedness of these two ontological parts in any whole and complete entity.

In sum, what these texts reveal is that Thomas holds that the notion *thing* is common and follows every *being*, but it also expresses or highlights an aspect about every entity not captured by the notion of *being*. *Being* and *thing* are co-extensional

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<sup>49</sup> *In V Meta.*, lect. 2, n. 553. (Mari. 155).



insofar as they both refer to the same whole entity, but they are not co-intensional, because they both signify distinct entitative parts of that whole entity. The whole term *being* signifies the act of existence of the whole, and the whole term *thing* signifies the essence of the whole.

#### IV.

*Being and Thing in Avicenna and Aquinas.* Thus far we have considered a number of passages from Avicenna and Aquinas wherein they articulate their understanding of *being* and *thing*, existence and essence. In nearly every passage of Aquinas that we investigated he cited Avicenna, and in those he did not, the influence of Avicenna on his own doctrine was nevertheless unmistakable. It was shown that both thinkers hold that the notion *being* principally signifies existence and the notion *thing* highlights the quiddity or essence of an entity. This much is undisputable. But I have also defended the value of adopting a mereological construal of their respective doctrines of the primary metaphysical notions. In this final section I consider some objections to this mereological construal before concluding that the problems raised by these challenges do not undermine my interpretation, but provide headings for future research avenues to pursue.

The best reason for objecting to my characterization of *being* and *thing*, existence and essence in mereological terms is that neither Avicenna nor Aquinas explicitly formulated their own accounts of the primary notions in these terms. Another objection is based upon a common understanding of parts and wholes. Because parts are often conceived as items within a whole that stand outside each other as distinct and separate items within a whole, it seems very infelicitous to describe existence and essence as parts within a *being* or a *thing*. These are two very important objections and each of them

could be developed into more sophisticated versions, which is beyond the limits of this article. In lieu of that, I will conclude by presenting a brief response to these two objections and show why I do not think we should completely abandon the mereological construal of the primary notions of Avicenna and Aquinas.

Concerning the first objection, even though Avicenna and Aquinas never use explicit mereological terminology in their treatments of the primary notions, I have argued that the mereological construal of the primary notions provides a more insightful and clearer model for understanding the distinctions between *being*, *thing*, existence, and essence. Furthermore, even a brief comparison their respective doctrines of wholes and parts with what they do say in fact say about the primary notions reveals that the doctrines of Avicenna and Aquinas are open to a mereological construal of *being* and *thing*.

Indeed, as we have already seen, applying Avicenna's brief treatment of the conditions for being a whole or part to his doctrine of *being* and *thing*, existence and essence, shows that his account of primary notions admits of a mereological construal. What of Aquinas?

Thomas addresses mereological topics throughout his corpus and in a variety of different contexts.<sup>50</sup> Here let us focus on his frequent characterization of essence, form,

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. *In I Sent.*, d. 3.4. 2, ad1; *SCG* II.72; *ST* I.8.2, ad3; 76.8; 77.1, ad1; II-II.48.1; 143.1; *QDdA* 10; *QDSC* 4; 11, ad2; *In V Meta.*, lect. 20, nn. 1080–1084; lect. 21, nn. 1085–1118. For recent studies of Aquinas's mereology that do not address existence and essence *per se*, see Christopher M. Brown, *Aquinas and the Ship of Theseus: Solving Puzzles about Material Objects* (London: Continuum, 2005); idem, "Souls, Ships, and

and matter in mereological terms. Thomas, following Avicenna, distinguishes two senses of the notion form. There is the form of the whole (*forma totius*) and the form of the part (*forma partis*).<sup>51</sup> For substances composed of matter and form, the form of the whole is another term for the essence; it signifies the species and includes both matter and form. For example, the form of the whole or essence of human includes both the soul and body, that is, form and common matter, but the form of the part is identified with the substantial form, that is, the soul.<sup>52</sup>

Thomas's doctrine of the form of the whole and form of the part provides us with some textual justification for a mereological construal of the primary notions and undermines the second objection's appeal to a common conception of parts as standing outside of parts within the whole. First, Thomas does not eschew calling form and matter parts of the essence; indeed, this is precisely what the soul is, it is a form of the part.<sup>53</sup>

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Substances: A Response to Toner" *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 81, 4 (2007):656–668; Patrick Toner, "Thomas versus Tibbles: A Critical Study of Christopher Brown's *Aquinas and the Ship of Theseus*" *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 81, 4 (2007):639–653.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Armand Maurer, "Form and Essence in the Philosophy of St. Thomas." *Mediaeval Studies* 13 (1951): 165–76, reprinted in, Armand Maurer, *Being and Knowing: Studies in Thomas Aquinas and Later Medieval Philosophers* (PIMS, 1990), 3–18; Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought*, chs. 7 & 9.

<sup>52</sup> See his use of Avicenna in this manner at *In VII Meta.* lect. 9, n. 1469.

<sup>53</sup> In his treatment of the different sense of "to have" (*habere*), Aquinas clearly distinguishes between the sense of "to have" that is proper to having a form from the way

But neither form nor matter stand next to each other as parts outside of parts; rather, even though they are really distinct parts, they are untied as act and potency and so are fused together within one composite whole.<sup>54</sup> In short, Thomas clearly countenances describing form and matter, which are related as act and potency, as parts of a whole, even though they do not fit the common conception of parts as distinct items within a whole.

Second, Thomas's application of mereological terms to the compositions of form and matter united as act and potency, provides some additional justification for describing other kinds of composition by act and potency in mereological terms. This is significant because Avicenna and Aquinas both speak about the composition of essence with existence. Thomas even goes so far as to say just as form is the act of matter as potency, so also existence (*esse*) is the act of essence as potentiality.<sup>55</sup> Accordingly, like the union of form and matter, the composition of existence and essence do not stand outside each other but are entitative parts that are metaphysically fused and indivisibly untied in the entitative whole, since the *being* or *thing* that they constitute is *one*. One part depends upon the other part as act is to potency and the whole depends on the union of both parts which permeate the whole. Furthermore, existence and essence are mutually interdependent entitative parts that can never be entitative wholes in themselves; if separated they cease to be along with the *being* or *thing* they compose. Finally, and as

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in which a container is said to have or contain something. Cf. *In V Meta.*, lect. 20, nn. 1081–1082; *In V Meta.*, lect. 21, n. 1099.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. *In VIII Meta.*, lect. 5, n. 1767.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. *SCG* II.52–54; *De Pot.* 3.5, ad2; 3.1, ad17; 7.2, ad9; *ST* I.4.1, ad3; *QDdA* 1, ad1; ad6; ad13; ad17; 6, ad2; *QDSC* 1.

Thomas repeatedly notes, essence and existence are not that which is but are that by which a being is, that is to say, unlike *being* and *thing*, they are not *quod est*, but existence and essence are *quo est* any *being* or *thing* is.<sup>56</sup>

Hence, even if Avicenna and Aquinas do not describe their own accounts of the primary notion in terms of wholes and parts, there is both a considerable heuristic value in thinking of them in this way and a number of principled philosophical reasons found in Avicenna and Aquinas that justify construing the primary notions in mereological terms. In other words, the mereological construal of existence and essence as entitative parts and *being* or *thing* as an entitative whole at least provides a helpful heuristic that leads our intellect up to a still more precise way of understanding the connection between *being* and existence, *thing* and essence, *being* and *thing*, existence and essence and their various extensional and intensional relations. Once our intellectual understanding has arrived at this level of precision, it might be more exegetically accurate to transcend this mereological heuristic and utilize the less clear and distinct and more analogical terminology of having, belonging to, act and potency, perfection and imperfection to cash out the way in which Avicenna and Aquinas understand the primary notions.

In this study I have shown that Thomas Aquinas unquestionably drew upon Avicenna's doctrine of *being* and *thing* to formulate his own doctrine of the primary notions *being* and *thing*, existence and essence. While I have acknowledged that Avicenna and Aquinas do not explicitly set out their metaphysical teachings under a mereological model, I have nevertheless argued that there is sufficient principled textual justifications for adopting this model, and that this mereological construal of the primary

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. *QDSC* 1, ad8.

notions permits a more penetrating understanding of the distinctions between *being* and *thing*, existence and essence. These thinkers explicitly state that *being* and *thing* are the same in extension but distinct in intension insofar as *being* means or highlights the existence of an entity, and *thing* signifies the quiddity or essence of an entity. If existence and essence were not distinct in intension, then the grounds for distinguishing *being* and *thing* would be undermined. The grounding of the intensional distinction between *being* and *thing* is rooted in their significations with respect to the real distinction and composition of existence and essence. Both Avicenna and Aquinas maintain that a *being* or a *thing* has an existence and an essence and that existence and essence are neither the same in extension nor in intension, that is, they are distinct but composed. But unlike *being* and *thing*, existence and essence are not entities; rather they are had or belong to the entities that are composed by them. And to have existence or essence is not the same as to be existence or essence. This is because what belongs to an entity or is had by an entity is some sort of part of that entity. Such entities are called *beings* when we wish to emphasize the existence that belongs to them and they are called *things* when we are signifying the quiddity or essence they have. Based on such considerations it seems reasonable and fruitful to understand Avicenna's and Aquinas's distinctions between *being* and *thing*, existence and essence, in terms of mereological construal of entitative wholes and entitative parts.

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