

# THE ORDER BETWEEN SUBSTANCE AND ACCIDENTS IN AQUINAS'S THOUGHT

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Among Aristotelian philosophers, it is a commonplace to say that substance is prior to accidents, because while accidents inhere and are said of substance, substance is independent.<sup>1</sup> However, this priority-relation is not always carefully analyzed and is not fully plain even in Aristotle's own texts. Indeed, it is not clear in what sense substance is prior: does it come first in the temporal process of generation? Or in the logical process of definition? Or is substance more fundamental as an ontological constituent of reality and hence is it prior to accidents inasmuch as accidents are ontologically dependent on substance? All these claims are consistent with Aristotle's texts, but it is rather difficult to see how they could jointly be assumed: for instance, priority in time presupposes an already constituted world, in which time can exist (as an accident), whilst reference to the ontological structure of things – which explains the third, more abstract notion of priority – does not posit any presupposition. What is even more puzzling is Aristotle's explicit reference to priority in time<sup>2</sup> in itself: if substance is temporally prior to accidents, then it is temporally prior even to time, which is an accident. But such an assumption seems to be meaningless. Furthermore, if time is the measure of change in respect of before and after,<sup>3</sup> and change is the acquisition or the loss of a property with respect to a subject,<sup>4</sup> if someone knows that the

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<sup>1</sup> Aristotle famously expands the relations “to be said of” and “to be in” in *Cat.* 5 and defines primary substance as what is not said of anything else and what is not in anything else in *Cat.* 5, 2a11–14: “Οὐσία δὲ ἐστὶν ἢ κυριώτατά τε καὶ πρώτως καὶ μάλιστα λεγομένη, ἢ μήτε καθ' ὑποκειμένου τινος λέγεται μήτε ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ τινὶ ἐστὶν, ὅσῳ ὁ τις ἄνθρωπος ἢ ὁ τις ἵππος.”

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Met.* VII, 1, 1028a31–b7: “πολλαχῶς μὲν οὖν λέγεται τὸ πρῶτον ὅμως δὲ πάντως ἢ οὐσία πρῶτον, καὶ λόγῳ καὶ γνώσει καὶ χρόνῳ. τῶν μὲν γὰρ ἄλλων κατηγορημάτων οὐθὲν χωριστόν, αὐτῆ δὲ μόνῃ· καὶ τῷ λόγῳ δὲ τοῦτο πρῶτον (ἀνάγκη γὰρ ἐν τῷ ἐκάστῳ λόγῳ τὸν τῆς οὐσίας ἐνυπάρχειν) καὶ εἰδέναι δὲ τότε οἰόμεθα ἕκαστον μάλιστα, ὅταν τί ἐστὶν ὁ ἄνθρωπος γινώμεν ἢ τὸ πῦρ, μᾶλλον ἢ τὸ ποιὸν ἢ τὸ ποσὸν ἢ τὸ πού, ἐπεὶ καὶ αὐτῶν τούτων τότε ἕκαστον ἴσμεν, ὅταν τί ἐστὶ τὸ ποσὸν ἢ τὸ ποιὸν γινώμεν. καὶ δὴ καὶ τὸ πάλα τε καὶ νῦν καὶ ἀεὶ ζητούμενον καὶ ἀεὶ ἀπορούμενον, τί τὸ ὄν, τοῦτό ἐστι τίς ἢ οὐσία (τοῦτο γὰρ οἱ μὲν ἐν εἶναι φασιν οἱ δὲ πλείω ἢ ἐν, καὶ οἱ μὲν πεπερασμένα οἱ δὲ ἄπειρα), διὸ καὶ ἡμῖν καὶ μάλιστα καὶ πρῶτον καὶ μόνον ὡς εἰπεῖν περὶ τοῦ οὕτως ὄντος θεωρητέον τί ἐστὶν.”

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Physics*, IV, 11, 219b1–2.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Physics*, I, 7.

thing A is prior in time to the thing B (namely, A exists before B), he must also know that there has been a change from A to A<sub>1</sub> and A<sub>1</sub> is contemporary to B.<sup>5</sup> But how is it possible to grasp that A has changed into A<sub>1</sub> (or that C has changed into C<sub>1</sub>)? It is obviously necessary to presuppose that A<sub>1</sub> has acquired a property, which was not predicated of A, or that A has lost one of its properties. And men can know such a change only by means of perception. In this sense, if (1) A is temporally prior to B, and (2) men are aware that A is temporally prior to B, it is necessary to presuppose a series of perceptions by means of which the mental state (2) might have been caused. Aristotle in *Met.* VII, 1, 1028a31–b7 seems to endorse this view, and this is problematic in particular for Aquinas, who clearly and consistently maintained, instead, that metaphysical distinctions, like the one concerning priority of substance over accidents, do not involve any reference to sensibility and to perception. It is then worthwhile to understand how Thomas could solve this problem, without any rejection of this possible reading of Aristotle's text.

However, even though things may seem obscure, the relation among substance and accidents deserves our attention, because it invests a core notion of Aristotelian philosophy and plays a crucial role in the context of the discussion of the object of metaphysics. As is well known, the question about the object of metaphysics was particularly important in medieval thought and in Thomistic philosophy. Aristotle's doctrine on this topic is not crystal-clear and many commentators have tried to solve this problem.<sup>6</sup> The Stagirite states in *Met.* IV, 1, 1003a20–21 that metaphysics considers being *qua* being and what belongs to being *qua* being. Even if this were the only place in which Aristotle outlines the object of metaphysics or if all other passages were plainly consistent with it,<sup>7</sup> there would still be a considerable puzzle: Aristotle states that metaphysics

<sup>5</sup> Alternatively, it may be thought that there is a certain C, contemporary to A, which has changed into C<sub>1</sub>, which is contemporary to B.

<sup>6</sup> A discussion of the texts of medieval thinkers on this topic may be found in A. Zimmermann, *Ontologie oder Metaphysik? Die Diskussion über den Gegenstand der Metaphysik im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert. Texte und Untersuchungen* (Leiden: Brill, 1965).

<sup>7</sup> Aristotle speaks about metaphysics as the science of the first causes and of the first principles of things in *Met.* I, 2, 982b8–9; in *Met.* VI, 1 metaphysics is described as the science of separate substances, and hence is labeled as first philosophy or theology (*Met.* VI, 1, 1026a10–17); but it is also presented as the science of being (cf. *Met.* VI, 1, 1026a24–30). All these presentations can hardly be presented in a consistent picture. On this topic see M. Ferejohn, *Aristotle on Focal Meaning and the Unity of Science*, in: *Phronesis* 25 (1980): 117–128; R. Bolton, *Aristotle's Conception of Metaphysics as a Science*, in: T. Scaltsas, D. Charles, and M. L. Gill (eds.), *Unity, Identity, and Explanation in Aristotle's Metaphysics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 321–354; A. Code, "Aristotle's Metaphysics as a Science of Principles", in: *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 51 (1997): 357–378.

considers being as its subject, but every science must have a genus as subject of inquiry,<sup>8</sup> and being is not a genus.<sup>9</sup> Aristotle's solution of this puzzle assumes that although being is not a genus, it has a certain unity, which is granted by the fact that the secondary ways in which being is said refer to something which is prior and fundamental. This unity allows for the task of the metaphysician.<sup>10</sup> According to Aristotle's metaphysical realism, the relation among the various meanings of being outlined in *Metaphysics* IV, 2 must reflect a relationship *in ipsa rerum natura* among the distinct entities which these meanings refer to. Now, since substance is really prior to accidents, as Aristotle maintains, there is a first meaning of being, namely being in the sense of substance, which all other meanings of being refer to. This theory is able to grant at least the unity of general metaphysics, as science of being *qua* being, which turns out to

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, I, 28, 87a38–b4: “Μία δ' ἐπιστήμη ἐστὶν ἡ ἐνὸς γένους, ὅσα ἐκ τῶν πρώτων σύγκειται καὶ μέρη ἐστὶν ἡ πάθη τούτων καθ' αὐτά. ἑτέρα δ' ἐπιστήμη ἐστὶν ἑτέρας, ὅσων αἰ ἀρχαὶ μήτ' ἐκ τῶν αὐτῶν μήθ' ἄτεραι ἐκ τῶν ἑτέρων. τούτου δὲ σημεῖον, ὅταν εἰς τὰ ἀναπόδεικτα ἔλθῃ· δεῖ γὰρ αὐτὰ ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ γένει εἶναι τοῖς ἀποδοδειγμένοις. σημεῖον δὲ καὶ τούτου, ὅταν τὰ δεικνύμενα δι' αὐτῶν ἐν ταῦτῳ γένει ὦσι καὶ συγγενῆ.”

<sup>9</sup> Aristotle frequently says that “being is said in many ways” (cf. *Met.* IV, 2; V, 7) and he clearly states (and tries to demonstrate) that being is not a genus in *Met.* III, 3, 998b22–28.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, IV, 2, 1003a33–b7. Aristotle in this passage clearly states that the object of metaphysics is being *qua* being. Even though being is not properly a genus, it has a certain unity, granted by the reference of all secondary meanings of being to the fundamental one. Only in virtue of this unity (which makes being similar to a genus), it is possible to build up a unified science of being. For a traditional presentation and analysis of this crucial topic of Aristotle's metaphysics see F. Brentano, *Von der mannigfachen Bedeutung des Seienden nach Aristoteles* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1862); J. Owens, *The doctrine of being in Aristotelian Metaphysics* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1951), especially p. 49–63; G. Reale, “L'impossibilità di intendere univocamente l'essere e la teoria dei significati di esso secondo Aristotele”, in: *Rivista di Filosofia Neoscolastica*, 56 (1965): 289–326; G. Reale, “Saggio introduttivo”, in: *Metafisica di Aristotele* (Milano: Bompiani, 2004), LV–LX. In recent times this aspect of Aristotle's doctrine has been labelled “theory of the focal meaning (of being)”; the first article which spoke about the focal meaning was “Logic and Metaphysics in some Earlier Works of Aristotle”, by G. E. L. Owen, in: I. Düring, G. E. L. Owen (eds.), *Aristotle and Plato in the Mid-Fourth Century* (Göteborg – Stockholm – Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1960), 162–190. The theory outlined in *Met.* IV, 1–2, which we now commonly refer to as the theory of “focal meaning”, has been considered by Thomist philosophers as the description of the so-called *analogia attributionis*; see e.g. Thomas de Vio Cardinalis Caietanus, “De nominum analogia”, II, 9, in: Idem, *Scripta philosophica*, edidit N. Zammit (Romae: Angelicum, 1934), 12: “*Quadrupliciter autem fieri potest huiusmodi analogia* [Caietanus speaks about the *analogia attributionis*]... *Contingit siquidem multa ad unum finem, et ad unum efficiens, et ad unum exemplar, et ad unum subiectum, secundum aliquam denominationem et attributionem diuersimode habere: ut patet ex exemplis Aristotelis, IV Metaph. II.*” This identification of Aristotle's theory of the focal meaning with the *analogia attributionis* was rejected by P. Aubenque in “Les origines de la doctrine de l'analogie de l'être”, in: *Les études philosophiques*, CIII (1978): 3–12.

consider firstly substance, which is being in a more proper sense.<sup>11</sup> This general interpretation, which is able to make sense of Aristotle's discussion about the object of metaphysics in *Met.* IV, 1–2, hence presupposes this priority relation of substance over accidents.

The picture is to some extent similar in Aquinas's metaphysics, even though his analysis is in many respects more detailed. Aquinas consistently maintained that the object of metaphysical inquiry is being *qua* being.<sup>12</sup> As is well known, according to the Dominican Master the metaphysician can prove the existence of God,<sup>13</sup> and hence being *qua* being proves to be an analogous concept, first because it applies both to the Creator and to creatures, and something can be

<sup>11</sup> This conclusion does not solve the more difficult problem of the unity of general metaphysics (as it is outlined in *Met.* IV, 1–2) and of special metaphysics (as the science which considers separate substances and which is outlined in *Met.* VI, 1). As is well known, this issue has been widely debated since W. Jaeger claimed that *Met.* IV, 1–2 and *Met.* VI, 1 were composed by the Stagirite at different stages of his philosophical career, cf. W. Jaeger, *Aristoteles. Grundlegung einer Geschichte seiner Entwicklung* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1923), especially p. 223–236. For an appreciated solution of this puzzle see M. Frede, "The Unity of General and Special Metaphysics: Aristotle's conception of Metaphysics", in: M. Frede, *Essays in Ancient Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 81–95.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *In Met.* I, l. 2, 44, editio a M.-R. Cathala OP exarata (Taurini: Marietti, 1964), 13: "*Quicumque enim scit universalia, aliquo modo scit ea quae sunt subiecta universalibus, quia scit ea in illa: sed his quae sunt maxime universalia sunt omnia subiecta, ergo ille qui scit maxime universalia, scit quodammodo omnia*"; *In Met.* IV, l. 1, 533, *ibid.*, 151: "... ostendit, quod ista scientia, quae prae manibus habetur, habet ens pro subiecto, tali ratione. Omne principium est per se principium et causa alicuius naturae: sed nos quaerimus prima rerum principia et altissimas causas, sicut in primo dictum est: ergo sunt per se causa alicuius naturae. Sed non nisi entis. Quod ex hoc patet, quia omnes philosophi elementa quaerentes secundum quod sunt entia, quaerebant huiusmodi principia, scilicet prima et altissima; ergo in hac scientia nos quaerimus principia entis in quantum est ens: ergo ens est subiectum huius scientiae, quia quaelibet scientia est quaerens causas proprias sui subiecti"; *In Boethii De Trinitate*, p. 3, q. 5, a. 1, c., editio Leonina (Roma–Paris, 1992): "*Quaedam ergo speculabilia sunt, quae dependent a materia secundum esse, quia non nisi in materia esse possunt. Et haec distinguuntur, quia quaedam dependent a materia secundum esse et intellectum, sicut illa, in quorum diffinitione ponitur materia sensibilis; unde sine materia sensibili intelligi non possunt, ut in diffinitione hominis oportet accipere carnem et ossa. Et de his est physica sive scientia naturalis. Quaedam vero sunt, quae quamvis dependeant a materia secundum esse, non tamen secundum intellectum, quia in eorum diffinitionibus non ponitur materia sensibilis, sicut linea et numerus. Et de his est mathematica. Quaedam vero speculabilia sunt, quae non dependent a materia secundum esse, quia sine materia esse possunt, sive numquam sint in materia, sicut Deus et Angelus, siue in quibusdam sint in materia et in quibusdam non, ut substantia, qualitas, ens, potentia, actus, unum et multa et huiusmodi. De quibus omnibus est theologia, id est scientia divina, quia praecipuum in ea cognitorum est Deus, quae alio nomine dicitur metaphysica, id est trans physicam, quia post physicam discenda occurrit nobis, quibus ex sensibilibus oportet in insensibilia devenire. Dicitur etiam philosophia prima, in quantum aliae omnes scientiae ab ea sua principia accipientes eam consequuntur. Non est autem possibile quod sint aliquae res quae secundum intellectum dependeant a materia et non secundum esse, quia intellectus, quantum est de se, immaterialis est. Et ideo non est quartum genus philosophiae praeter praedicta.*"

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *ST* I, q. 2, a. 2; *ST* I-II, q. 74, a. 10, ad 3; in *Sent.* III, dist. 24, q. 1, a. 2, qc. 2; *SCG* I, 12; *De Pot.* q. 7, a. 3.

predicated of both God and a creature only analogically.<sup>14</sup> The region of created being (*ens praedicamentale*) is also an analogous concept, because it groups the beings listed in the ten categories and there is no common genus above them.<sup>15</sup> But since Aquinas shares with Aristotle the persuasion that a science must consider as a subject something which has a certain unity, the Dominican Master introduces the notion of analogy of being, which grants this unity.<sup>16</sup> According

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, in *Sent.* I, Prol., a. 2, ad 2; dist. 2, q. 1, a. 3; dist. 19, q. 5, a. 2, ad 1; dist. 35, a. 4; ST I, q. 13, a. 5; *De Ver.* q. 2, a. 3, ad 4; q. 2, a. 11; q. 3, a. 1, ad 7; SCG I, 32–34; *Compendium Theol.*, 27.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*, q. 2, a. 2, c. (Taurini: Marietti, 26b): “*Ens, secundum quod importat rem cui competit huiusmodi esse, sic significat essentiam rei, et dividitur per decem genera; non tamen univoce, quia non eadem ratione competit omnibus esse; sed substantiae quidem per se, aliis autem aliter.*” *De Pot.*, q. 7, a. 7, c.: “*Ens non dicitur univoce de substantia et accidente, propter hoc quod substantia est ens tamquam per se habens esse; accidens vero tamquam cuius esse est inesse. Ex quo patet, quod diversa habitudo ad esse impedit univocam praedicationem entis. Deus autem alio modo se habet ad esse quam aliqua alia creatura; nam ipse est suum esse: quod nulli creaturae competit. Unde nullo modo univoce de Deo et creatura dicitur; et per consequens nec aliquid aliorum praedicabilem, inter quae est ipsum primum ens. Existente enim diversitate in primo, oportet in aliis diversitatem inveniri.*”

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *In Met.* IV, l. 1, 535–536 (ed. Cathala 151–152): “*Dicit ergo primo, quod ens sive quod est, dicitur multipliciter. Sed sciendum quod aliquid praedicatur de diversis multipliciter: quandoque quidem secundum rationem omnino eandem, et tunc dicitur de eis univoce praedicari, sicut animal de equo et bove. Quandoque vero secundum rationes omnino diversas; et tunc dicitur de eis aequivoce praedicari, sicut canis de sidere et animali. Quandoque vero secundum rationes quae partim sunt diuersae et partim non diuersae: diuersae quidem secundum quod diuersas habitudines important, unae autem secundum quod ad unum aliquid et idem istae diuersae habitudines referuntur; et illud dicitur analogice praedicari, idest proportionaliter, prout unumquodque secundum suam habitudinem ad illud unum refertur. Item sciendum quod illud unum ad quod diuersae habitudines referuntur in analogicis, est unum numero, et non solum unum ratione, sicut est unum illud quod per nomen univocum designatur. Et ideo dicit quod ens etsi dicatur multipliciter, non tamen dicitur aequivoce, sed per respectum ad unum; non quidem ad unum quod sit solum ratione unum, sed quod est unum sicut una quaedam natura.*” Aquinas’s theory of analogy has been largely debated among Thomists: see Thomas de Vio Cardinalis Caietanus, *De nominum analogia*; Sylvester Ferrariensis, *Comm.* in Thomas Aquinas, SCG I, 34, editio Leonina (Grottaferrata: Editori di san Tommaso, 1918); Iohannes a sancto Thoma, *Ars logica seu de forma et materia ratiocinandi*, edidit B. Reiser (Taurini: Marietti, 1930), q. 13, a. 3–5, 481–499; Salvatore Maria Roselli, *Summa philosophica ad mentem Angelici Doctoris Sancti Thomae Aquinatis*, Pars Prima, t. I (Romae: Typis B. Cano, 1777), 338–347; I. Gredt, *Elementa philosophiae aristotelico-thomisticae*, Vol. I (Barcinone–Friburgi Brisgoviae–Romae–Novi Eboraci: Herder, 1941), 149–153; M. Deandrea, *Praelectiones metaphysicae iuxta principia D. Thomae. Introductio in Metaphysicam. De ente et eius transcendentalibus proprietatibus* (Romae: Angelicum, 1951), 140–175; C. Fabro, *Partecipazione e causalità secondo S. Tommaso d’Aquino* (Torino: SEI, 1960), 499–526; I. M. Ramirez, *De analogia secundum doctrinam aristotelico-thomisticam*, in V. Rodriguez (ed.), *Opera omnia*, t. XI, 4 vol. (Madrid–Salamanca, 1970–1972); T. Tyn, *Metafisica della sostanza. Partecipazione e analogia entis* (Verona: Fede e Cultura, 2009), especially p. 581–624. For a modern historical reconstruction of Aquinas’s theory of analogy of being see B. Montagnes, *La doctrine de l’analogie de l’être d’après saint Thomas d’Aquin* (Louvain–Paris: Publications Universitaires, 1963); J. F. Wippel, *The metaphysical thought of Thomas Aquinas. From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 65–93. See also R. McNerny, *The logic of analogy. An interpretation of St. Thomas* (The Hague: M. Nijoff, 1961); Idem, *Aquinas and Analogy* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996).

to John of St. Thomas and to the majority of Aquinas commentators,<sup>17</sup> the Dominican Master maintained that the analogy of created being is “*analogia proportionalitatis propriae formaliter, licet virtualiter analogiam attributionis seu proportionis includat*”.<sup>18</sup> The analogy is of this kind because being is intrinsically predicated of both substance and accidents,<sup>19</sup> and hence it is possible to find a proportion between the different, yet similar proportion of substance to being and of each accident to being. But this analogy implicitly presupposes an *analogia attributionis*, since accidents receive their being from substance, and thus are in a certain proportion to substance. Since Aquinas too is a realist, these relations, which we find in the predication of terms, must reflect certain real relationships among entities. Now, the *analogia proportionalitatis* of being reflects the different *habitus ad esse* of substance, quality, quantity, relation etc.;<sup>20</sup> the *analogia attributionis*, on the other hand, expresses the idea that the essence of accident refers to the essence of substance.<sup>21</sup> In other words, analogy expresses the priority of the terms for substances over the terms for accidents, but this priority reflects a more fundamental relation, viz. the extra-mental priority of real substance over

<sup>17</sup> Besides John of St. Thomas, we can count as supporters of this interpretation T. de Vio Caietanus, S. Roselli, I. Greder, R. Garrigou-Lagrange, L.-B. Geiger, I. M. Ramirez, T. Tyn.

<sup>18</sup> Iohannes a sancto Thoma, *Ars logica seu de forma et materia ratiocinandi*, edidit B. Reiser (Taurini: Marietti, 1930), qu. XIV, art. 3, 512.

<sup>19</sup> Aquinas clearly states this in his commentary on Aristotle's *Ethics*, where the Dominican Master speaks of an *analogia proportionalitatis* of the good: “... *ea in quibus invenitur prius et posterius, non videntur esse unius ordinis, et per consequens nec aequaliter unam ideam participare. Sed in bonis invenitur prius et posterius. Quod manifestat ex hoc, quod bonum invenitur in eo quodquidest, id est in substantia, et similiter in qualitate et etiam in aliis generibus; manifestum est autem, quod illud quod est ens per seipsum, scilicet substantia, est naturaliter prior omnibus his quae non habent esse nisi in comparatione ad substantiam, sicut est quantitas, quae est mensura substantiae, et qualitas, quae est dispositio substantiae, et ad aliquid, quod est habitudo substantiae. Et idem est in aliis generibus, quae omnia assimilantur propagini entis, id est substantiae, quae est principaliter ens, a qua propaginantur et derivantur omnia alia genera. Quae etiam in tantum dicuntur entia, in quantum accidunt substantiae. Et ex hoc concludit, quod non potest esse quaedam communis idea boni.*” Thomas Aquinas, *In decem libros Ethicorum Aristotelis ad Nicomachum expositio*, cura ac studio A. M. Pirota (Taurini: Marietti, 1934), I, l. 6, n. 80, 27. Since *ens et bonum convertuntur* (cf. in *Sent.* II, dist. 34, qu. 1, art. 4, sed c.), this analogy may also be applied to being – and this is what Thomists have mostly done. For Aquinas's distinction between *analogia proportionalitatis* and *analogia attributionis* (or *proportionis*) see Thomas Aquinas, in *Sent.* I, dist. 19, q. 5, a. 2, ad 1; *De Ver.*, q. 2, a. 11, c; *SCG* I, 64.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *De ente et essentia*, 7; *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*, q. 9, a. 5, ad 2.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *In Met.* VII, l. 3, 1322 (ed. Cathala 328–329): “*Patet, quod si album habet quod quid erat esse et definitionem, non habet aliam quam illam quae est albi hominis: quia cum in definitione accidentis ponatur subiectum, oportet quod hoc modo definiatur album, sicut albus homo, ut dictum est. Et hoc sic patet: quia hoc quod est album non habet quod quid erat esse, sed solum hoc de quo dicitur, scilicet homo vel homo albus. Et hoc est quod dicit: ergo est quod quid erat esse aliquid aut totaliter, aut non: id est, ergo ex praedictis sequitur quod quid erat esse, non est nisi eius quod est aliquid, siue illud aliquid sit totaliter, id est compositum, ut homo albus, siue non totaliter, ut homo. Album autem non significat aliquid, sed aliquale.*”

real accidents. It is thus clear, that analogy cannot explain why real substance is prior to real accidents, if we want to avoid a *petitio principii*. How can this latter real priority be accounted for?

In order to answer this question, we could analyze the type of order we discover between substance and accidents: it seems indeed that these real relations between substance and accidents, which are expressed in predication by the *analogia proportionalitatis et proportionis* of being, do not make any reference to materiality. Being, substance, accidents, and participation are the only notions involved in the two analogies, and they do not make reference to perception in their definition. *Prima facie*, every Aristotelian philosopher could share Aquinas's opinion that the priority of substance over accidents is not conceptually linked to perception or to perceptual experiences.<sup>22</sup> But the picture is more complicated, because, as we have already seen, Aristotle seems to mention some sensory order as explanatory of this priority-relation of substance over accidents: substance, according to him, is temporally prior to accidents.<sup>23</sup> How could this be the case if substance were not a changeable subject? And how could substance be changeable, if it does not have material parts? But material parts are perceivable, and thus the notion of time seems to involve a reference to perceivability. Aquinas, as an Aristotelian commentator, must be able to make sense of Aristotle's claims; even though it seems that they are in conflict with his own theory.

First, it is useful to ask how Aristotle could have expanded this priority-relation. It might be thought that this order is determined by the principle according to which created being is distributed into the ten categories; in other words, the principle, if any, in virtue of which substances constitute a category distinct from those of qualities, quantities, relations etc., is the same principle in virtue of which substance is prior to either quality or quantity or relation etc. Of course, such a proposal presupposes an agreement on the identification of this very principle. But, as is well known, some interpreters thought that Aristotle developed his doctrine of the ten categories out of grammatical considerations;<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> I say that this priority is not "conceptually" linked to perceptual experiences, because I take for granted that for an Aristotelian philosopher all concepts (even abstract concepts such as "participation", "being" etc.) come from a reflection of the human soul on sensorial data. I mean, instead, that these abstract concepts do not have in their definition material parts, like those which figure in a definition of a primary material substance according to Aristotle (cf. *Met.* VII, 10–11).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Met.* VII, 1, 1028a31–b7.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. A. Trendelenburg, *De Aristotelis Categoriais prolesio* (Berlin: Typis Augusti Petschii, 1833), *Historische Beiträge zur Philosophie, Erster Band, Geschichte der Kategorienlehre* (Berlin: Verlag von G. Bethge, 1846). Trendelenburg explicitly states that the categories are grammatical functions, and substance

according to others, he took logic as the basis for the discovery of the categories,<sup>25</sup> since each category plays a different logical role in a proposition; other scholars<sup>26</sup> have thought that Aristotle was guided by ontological considerations to the distinction of the categories, viz. that the Stagirite thought that the order among categories could be discovered on the basis of experience, since reality itself (and not language or grammar) appears to be ordered in those categories of beings. It could be suggested that whereas the first two positions appear to be compatible with the claim that the priority of substance over accidents does not involve any relation to perceivability, the third, with its reference to ontology and experience, seems to imply that the order between substance and accidents is perceivable and does not abstract from sensible reality, from which it can be inferred. In sum, the puzzle appears not to find a commonly shared solution, so far as Aristotle is concerned.

The situation is clearer with regard to Thomas Aquinas: he claimed both that (a) the ten categories are primarily ontological partitions of reality<sup>27</sup> and that

corresponds to the substantive, quality to the adjective etc. (See e.g. A. Trendelenburg, *Elementa logices Aristoteleae* (Berlin: W. Weber, 1878), 57: “*Ita Aristoteles categoriarum genera ex grammaticis fere orationis rationibus inuenisse uidetur, inuentas autem ita pertractauit, ut, relicta origine, ipsam notionum et rerura naturam spectaret.*”)

<sup>25</sup> Cf. O. Apelt, “Die Kategorienlehre des Aristoteles”, in: *Beiträge zur Geschichte der griechischen Philosophie* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1891), 140 ff. Apelt maintains, against Trendelenburg, that “*denn nicht grammatischen, sondern logischen Ursprungs, nicht von grammatischen, sondern von logischen Bedeutung sind die Kategorien, und darum muss man, um sie zu verstehen, den Satz von seiner logischen Seite, d. h. als Urteil fassen*” (*ibidem*, 159).

<sup>26</sup> Cf. e.g. G. Reale, “L'impossibilità di intendere univocamente l'essere e la teoria dei significati di esso secondo Aristotele”, in: *Rivista di Filosofia Neoscolastica*, 56 (1965): 289–326.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *In Met.* V, l. 9, 889–891 (ed. Cathala 238–239): “*Deinde cum dicit secundum se distinguit modum entis per se: et circa hoc tria facit. Primo distinguit ens, quod est extra animam, per decem praedicamenta, quod est ens perfectum. [...] Dicit ergo primo, quod illa dicuntur esse secundum se, quaecumque significant figuras praedicationis [...]. Oportet, quod ens contrabatur ad diversa genera secundum diversum modum praedicandi, qui consequitur diversum modum essendi; quia quoties ens dicitur, idest quot modis aliquid praedicatur, toties esse significatur, idest tot modis significatur aliquid esse. Et propter hoc ea in quae dividitur ens primo, dicuntur esse praedicamenta, quia distinguuntur secundum diversum modum praedicandi. Quia igitur eorum quae praedicantur, quaedam significant quid, idest substantiam, quaedam quale, quaedam quantum, et sic de aliis; oportet quod unicuique modo praedicandi, esse significet idem; ut cum dicitur homo est animal, esse significat substantiam. Cum autem dicitur, homo est albus, significat qualitatem, et sic de aliis. Sciendum enim est quod praedicatum ad subiectum tripliciter se potest habere. Uno modo cum est id quod est subiectum, ut cum dico, Socrates est animal. Nam Socrates est id quod est animal. Et hoc praedicatum dicitur significare substantiam primam, quae est substantia particularis, de qua omnia praedicantur. Secundo modo ut praedicatum sumatur secundum quod inest subiecto: quod quidem praedicatum, vel inest ei per se et absolute, ut consequens materiam, et sic est quantitas: vel ut consequens formam, et sic est qualitas: vel inest ei non absolute, sed in respectu ad aliud, et sic est ad aliquid. Tertio modo ut praedicatum sumatur ab eo quod est extra subiectum: et hoc dupliciter. Uno modo ut sit omnino extra subiectum: quod quidem si non sit mensura subiecti, praedicatur per modum habitus, ut cum dicitur, Socrates est calceatus vel vestitus. Si autem*



(b) the priority of substance over accidents abstracts from our sensorial experience and cannot be explained in terms of a sensory order.<sup>28</sup> This latter claim is not uncontroversial, even among Aristotelian philosophers. Indeed, Aristotle's brief observations in *Met.* VII, 1 and in *Met.* XII, 1 do not seem to rule out the possibility of an order linked to perception. He speaks of a priority in time and considers substance as the first part in a whole in which there are also accidents. As we shall see, many commentators have understood these claims as referring to certain sensible orders; but Aquinas was firm in maintaining that the order between substance and accidents has no link with sensibility. This assumption plays a crucial role in Aquinas's philosophy, because it proves to be consistent with his theory of abstraction, according to which metaphysics abstracts not only from *materia signata* (as physics does) or from matter as a part of definition (as mathematics does): the metaphysician abstracts from every kind of materiality.<sup>29</sup> As a consequence, metaphysical statements, like those concerning the relationship between substance and accidents, cannot mention matter or something which turns out to be linked to matter, such as perceivability. Thus it is crucial, within Aquinas's system, to reject the idea of an ordering between substance and accidents which relies on materiality. In order to expand this thesis, I shall consider Thomas's commentary on *Met.* XII, 1, where Aristotle briefly discusses the question of the order between substance and accidents.

### Aristotle's text: *Metaphysics*, XII, 1 (1069a18–30)

Aristotle's text, in which the priority of substance over accidents is explained, is rather brief and concise and figures at the very beginning of *Metaphysics* XII. Modern scholars agree in maintaining that *Met.* XII was an autonomous treatise devoted to substance, which occupies the place it has in the *Metaphysics* because of the complex redaction of the Aristotelian work. It is plausible that Aristotle himself put this treatise in this position in order to fill a gap in his exposition, but we cannot have evidence in favor of or against this proposal. Here is the text:

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*sit mensura eius, cum mensura extrinseca sit vel tempus vel locus, sumitur praedicamentum vel ex parte temporis, et sic erit quando: vel ex loco, et sic erit ubi, non considerato ordine partium in loco, quo considerato erit situs. Alio modo ut id a quo sumitur praedicamentum, secundum aliquid sit in subiecto, de quo praedicatur. Et si quidem secundum principium, sic praedicatur ut agere. Nam actionis principium in subiecto est. Si vero secundum terminum, sic praedicabitur ut in pati. Nam passio in subiectum patiens terminatur.*" According to Aquinas, "ens completum" is being divided into the ten categories.

<sup>28</sup> The present article is designed to prove that Aquinas consistently maintained this claim.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. e. g. Thomas Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 85, a. 1, ad 2.

Περὶ τῆς οὐσίας ἡ θεωρία· τῶν γὰρ οὐσιῶν αἱ ἀρχαὶ καὶ τὰ αἷτια ζητοῦνται. καὶ γὰρ εἰ ὡς ὅλον τι τὸ πᾶν, ἡ οὐσία πρῶτον μέρος· καὶ εἰ τῷ ἐφεξῆς, κἂν οὕτως πρῶτον ἡ οὐσία, εἶτα τὸ ποιόν, εἶτα τὸ ποσόν. ἅμα δὲ οὐδ' ὄντα ὡς εἰπεῖν ἀπλῶς ταῦτα, ἀλλὰ ποιότητες καὶ κινήσεις, ἡ καὶ τὸ οὐ λευκὸν καὶ τὸ οὐκ εὐθύ· λέγομεν γοῦν εἶναι καὶ ταῦτα, οἷον ἔστιν οὐ λευκόν. ἔτι οὐδὲν τῶν ἄλλων χωριστόν. μαρτυροῦσι δὲ καὶ οἱ ἀρχαῖοι ἔργῳ τῆς γὰρ οὐσίας ἐζήτουν ἀρχὰς καὶ στοιχεῖα καὶ αἷτια. οἱ μὲν οὖν νῦν τὰ καθόλου οὐσίας μᾶλλον τιθέασιν (τὰ γὰρ γένη καθόλου, ἃ φασιν ἀρχὰς καὶ οὐσίας εἶναι μᾶλλον διὰ τὸ λογικῶς ζητεῖν)· οἱ δὲ πάλαι τὰ καθ' ἕκαστα, οἷον πῦρ καὶ γῆν, ἀλλ' οὐ τὸ κοινόν, σῶμα (Aristotle, *Met.* XII, 1, 1069a18–30).

We may ask what the opening sentence “Περὶ τῆς οὐσίας ἡ θεωρία” refers to: the expression seems to suggest that the term *θεωρία* refers backward and this is puzzling, since we assume that this is a sort of fresh start of a new treatise. Therefore some scholars, such as H. Bonitz,<sup>30</sup> have held that the *θεωρία* has no reference backward, but is rather the subject of the treatise we are going to read; M. Frede,<sup>31</sup> on the other hand, has proposed to interpret the “*θεωρία*” as the consideration which the hearers of Aristotle were accustomed to discuss, namely the consideration of being *qua* being and the consideration of substance as the core meaning of being. Both interpretations are compatible with the fact that the treatise is an independent one. However, there is an interesting difference: if Aristotle is only presenting what he is going to expand, namely a complete theory of sensible and separate substance, as Bonitz seems to suggest, the situation is plain; but if Frede is right in claiming that Aristotle was addressing people accustomed to discuss the nature of being, then it turns out that the very object of metaphysical consideration is being in a proper sense, namely substance: in this perspective it is crucial to stress that substance is truly prior to accidents, in order to prove the implicit claim made by saying that “our inquiry concerns substance”: indeed, our metaphysical inquiry concerns substance if, and only if, every being distinct from substance refers to substance as to something which is prior.

Aristotle, after having proposed the core subject of his inquiry, tries to explain why substance must be the primary object of investigation. In doing so, he

<sup>30</sup> See H. Bonitz, *Commentarius in Aristotelis Metaphysicam* (Hidesheim–Zürich–New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1992), 469: “*Quo spectet uniuersa haec disputatio, prius significat verbis: Περὶ τῆς οὐσίας ἡ θεωρία, substantiarum autem varia quum sint genera, ad immobilem potissimum et aeternam substantiam hanc pertinere quaestionem [...] apparet.*” W. D. Ross in his paraphrase of this opening sentence also seems to endorse this view; cf. W. D. Ross, *Aristotle's Metaphysics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948), vol. 2, 348: “Our subject is substance”.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. M. Frede, “Metaphysics Lambda 1”, in: M. Frede, D. Charles (eds.), *Aristotle's Metaphysics Lambda. Symposium Aristotelicum* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 55: “*This inquiry' can be understood as backward looking, rather than as forward looking. Aristotle might be referring to an already ongoing enterprise.*”

says that if we consider being as a whole, then substance must be the first part, and if beings are arranged in a series, then substance must be the first of the list, too. This remark has embarrassed many interpreters. Among the modern scholars Hermann Bonitz understands this “whole” as the composite of form and matter and, as a consequence, the primary part of it must be understood as the form-substance.<sup>32</sup> David Ross, on the other hand, points out that Aristotle might be referring to the doctrines of his predecessors, namely to those who consider the universe to be a compact whole and to those, like Speusippus, according to whom the universe is a loosely connected series of beings.<sup>33</sup> According to Michael Frede there is not only Speusippus among the philosophers addressed by Aristotle, but probably also Xenocrates and the Plato of the middle dialogues.<sup>34</sup> Both Frede and Ross thus held that Aristotle is referring to someone else's philosophy in these lines. As we shall see, the ancient commentators and Averroës and Aquinas did not consider this possibility, but either viewed these lines as introducing a possible line of thought, which may be endorsed by an Aristotelian philosopher (Alexander, Averroës), or, more simply, as a comparison useful to make Aristotle's point clear (Aquinas and probably Themistius).

### Aquinas's commentary

According to Aquinas's systematic presentation of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* XII presents a survey of the theory of substance. As *Met.* XI was a recollection of the doctrines about imperfect beings, deriving its content from *Physics*, book XII is also intended to be a recollection of what Aristotle said in *Physics* I, VII and VIII about the principle of sensible substances, about movement and the necessity of positing an unmoved Mover; but we also find in this treatise what is lacking in those books. In the first chapter, up to line 1069a30 there is an exposition of the reasons why the study of substance belongs to metaphysical science. In the remainder of the book there is such a theory of substance.

We are faced with a “*theoria*” (θεωρία), that is, with a “consideration” (*consideratio*) of substance and of causes and of principles of substances. It is interesting that Aquinas links the *consideratio* to what follows: this implies that he had in

<sup>32</sup> Cf. H. Bonitz, *Commentarius in Aristotelis Metaphysicam*, 469: “Reputandum est, voc. ὅλον *Ar.* fere significare id, quod per certam formam finitum ac consummatum est [...]. Illa si tenetur vocabuli vim, hoc videtur *Ar.* dicere: si universitatem rerum cogitamus esse quasi totum aliquod corpus, definita per formam materia, substantia, nimirum ἡ κατὰ τὸν λόγον οὐσία [...], sive forma, prima esse pars putanda est.”

<sup>33</sup> W. D. Ross, *Aristotle's Metaphysics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948), vol. 2, 349.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. M. Frede, “*Metaphysics Lambda 1*”, 64–65.

mind the discrepancies between the preceding treatise and the following one, since the preceding books did not directly consider the theory of substance, apart from books VII–VIII, in which, according to Aquinas's reconstruction, Aristotle offers his philosophy of substance. But Aquinas has a philosophical explanation of the juxtaposition of book XII to the preceding treatises of the *Metaphysics*: while in the former Aristotle outlines a theory of being *qua* being (book IV), of imperfect being (books VI and XI), of that particular being which is substance (books VII–VIII), of being in terms of potentiality and actuality (book IX) and of being *qua* convertible with the one (book X), here Aristotle tries to go back to the causes of being, namely to substance and to the causes of substance. It is evident that substance is analyzed in at least two sections of the *Metaphysics*, and Aquinas admits indeed that in this book Aristotle summarizes the results he has already obtained elsewhere.<sup>35</sup>

Since Aristotle said that the metaphysical inquiry will concern the principles and the causes of substance, the commentator has to prove this assumption, and he therefore tries to develop four lines of argument in order to establish that substance must be the object of such a consideration. These four lines of argument are drawn from Aristotle's text, which seems to propose some suggestion in order to maintain that the proper object of metaphysics is *primarily* substance.

We say that substance comes first in the list of beings, and that therefore metaphysics, which is *scientia prima*, must have substance as its proper object. But how we can prove the priority of substance? Aristotle only said that “καὶ γὰρ εἰ ὡς ὅλον τι τὸ πᾶν, ἡ οὐσία πρῶτον μέρος· καὶ εἰ τῷ ἐφεξῆς, καὶ οὕτως πρῶτον ἡ οὐσία, εἶτα τὸ ποιόν, εἶτα τὸ ποσόν” (Aristotle, *Met.* XII, 1, 1069a19–21), “*si totum quoddam omne, substantia est prima pars. Et si eo quod consequenter, et ita primum substantia, deinde qualitas, aut quantitas.*”<sup>36</sup> According to Aquinas this is a reference to the two orders we may discover in the sensible world, but this reference introduces only a simile:

Primo per hoc quod substantia est prior aliis entibus. Unde scientia prima, de primo ente debet principaliter determinare. Quod autem substantia sit prima inter omnia entia, manifestat per simile in rebus sensibilibus, in quibus

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *In Met.* XII, l. 1, 2416 (ed. Cathala 567): “*Postquam philosophus in praecedenti libro recollegerat quae ante dicta erant tam in hoc libro quam in libro physicorum de entibus imperfectis, in hoc libro intendit colligere quae dicta sunt de ente simpliciter, idest de substantia, tam in septimo et in octavo huius, quam etiam in primo physicorum, et addere id quod deest ad complendam considerationem de substantiis.*”

<sup>36</sup> William of Moerbeke's translation of Aristotle, *Met.*, XII, 1, 1069a19–21, in: *Aristoteles Latinus XXV 3.2. Metaphysica. Lib. I–XIV. Recensio et translatio Guillelmi de Moerbeke*, edidit G. Vuillemin-Diem (Leiden–New York–Köln: Brill, 1995), 246.

invenitur ordo inter aliqua dupliciter. Uno modo secundum quod partes aliquius totius habent ordinem adinvicem, sicut in animali pars prima est cor, et in domo fundamentum. Alio modo secundum quod aliqua sunt consequenter se habentia, ex quibus non fit unum vel continuitate vel contactu. Sicut in exercitu dicitur prima acies, et secunda acies. Sicut igitur in aliquo toto est aliqua prima pars, et sicut iterum in his quae consequenter se habent, est aliquod primum, ita substantia est primum inter omnia alia entia. Et hoc est quod dicit, *quod si omne*, idest universitas entium sit quoddam totum, substantia est prima pars, sicut fundamentum in domo. Et si entia se habent sicut ea quae sunt consequenter, ita etiam substantia erit primum, et deinde quantitas, et qualitas, et alia genera.<sup>37</sup>

This consideration is a doctrine peculiar to Aquinas: if substance is prior to accidents, this priority is a non-sensible one.

At this stage we may ask how Aquinas had reached the conclusion that Aristotle was making a simile with the orders of the sensible world, if there are no clear signs of such a reference in the Stagirite's text. There are theoretically two plausible solutions to this question: either (i) Aquinas found this presentation of Aristotle's line in one of the commentators he had read, or (ii) he autonomously developed this solution on the basis of other Aristotle's texts.

The textual evidence leads us to state that the thesis that substance is prior in a non-sensible sense of priority is an autonomous and original contribution of Aquinas, although some intuitions could have been developed on the basis of Alexander's explanation.

The preceding commentators had held these views:

- a) Alexander said that the expression "si totum quoddam" probably had a metaphorical sense, although it could also be understood in a proper sense; while the expression "consequenter" introduced Aristotle's own opinion on the topic.<sup>38</sup>
- b) Averroës criticized Alexander for having said that Aristotle in the first case expressed himself in a metaphorical sense: according to the Arabic

<sup>37</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In Met.* XII, l. 1, 2417 (ed. Cathala 567).

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Aristotelis *Metaphysicorum libri XIII cum Averrois Cordubensis in eisdem commentariis et epitome Theophrastii Metaphysicorum liber* (Venetiis: apud Iunctas, 1562), 290vb-291ra: "Dixit Alexander: intendit per totum ens [...] quoniam, si aliquis fuerit opinatus, quod ens est quasi unum universuum continuum, credendum est quod substantia est pars prima, et si opinatus fuerit, quod quiddam prius est quodam in esse, et quod ex eo hoc est primum, hoc autem secundum, dignius est credere quod substantia principaliter est ens. Et iste modus prioritatis est quem intendit Aristoteles et est quod prius declaravit. Et cum de ente quiddam est primum, scilicet substantia, et quiddam secundum, necesse est ei, qui consideravit de principiis entis, in eo quod est ens, ut consideret de principiis substantiae."

commentator, Aristotle spoke in both expressions in a proper sense, and hence substance is prior to accidents according to a certain sensory order.<sup>39</sup>

- c) It is uncertain what Themistius thought about this matter. From Averroës's commentary we may notice that, in order to explain the two Aristotelian expressions ("*si totum quoddam*", "*consequenter*"), he used examples which clearly refer to sensible ways of ordering.<sup>40</sup>

It is clear that Aquinas distanced himself from the literal interpretation of Averroës.<sup>41</sup> We may think that Thomas's interpretation is an extension of Alexander's idea of considering the first expression to be metaphorical;<sup>42</sup> according to Aquinas, both the expressions are similes.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 291rb–291va: "*Iam declaravit [Aristoteles] superius modum, quo substantia praecedit alia praedicamenta; sed tamen Aristoteles non intendebat ponere istos duos modos prioritatis nisi ad confirmandum suum sermonem contra adversarium: cum adversarius non possit ponere, quod substantia antecedit alia praedicamenta, nisi his duobus modis, in quibus necesse est ut substantia sit prior. Et, cum dixerimus quod intentio Aristotelis est ista, quod reputat aliquis quod dispositio substantiae cum aliis praedicamentis est sicut dispositio continui ex partibus consimilibus? Nisi intelligat quod prioritas rerum huiusmodi sit prioritas rerum, quae sunt eiusdem generis. Membra enim corporis sunt in eodem genere, sed cor antecedit ea. Et secundum hoc, nulla differentia est inter hanc prioritatem et prioritatem numerorum, et superficialium: sed hoc in continuo et hoc in discreto.*" However, it must be stressed that Averroës thinks that Aristotle, though he is speaking in a proper sense, is answering the objections of an adversary. Averroës' claim is exclusively metaphysical, but antithetical to that of Aquinas: "*Dico ergo quod intendebat Aristoteles dicere apud me, quod ens aut demonstrat unum genus et unam naturam, aut genera diversa. Et quocumque sit, manifestum est quod substantia est prior ceteris.*" Cf. *ibid.*, 291ra.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 291ra–b: "*Themistius autem exponit sic dicendo: Totum enim, siue fuerit adunatum, sicut est coadunatio membrorum in corpore humano et partium in corpore plantae; aut fuerit compositum ex rebus contingentibus se adinuicem, sicut domus et nauis; aut fuerit compositum ex rebus segregatis, sicut ciuitas et exercitus: necesse est ut prima suarum partium si substantia et quod loco eius sit de toto, sicut locus cordis de corpore animalis. Si autem non fuerit huiusmodi, sed sicut unum inuenitur in numero, deinde duo, deinde tria; aut sicut in figuris rectorum linearum primo inuenitur triangolus, deinde quadratus, etiam secundum hoc substantia inuenitur prima, deinde quantitas et qualitas. Substantia enim prior est istis sicut unum alio numero et triangulus aliis figuris.*"

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *In Met.* XII, l. 1, 2418 (ed. Cathala 567): "*Averrois autem non attendens hoc secundum similitudinem dici, quia consideravit non posse cadere in alicuius mentem, quod omnia alia genera entium essent sicut partes unius totius continui, diuertit a plano sensu litterae in aliam expositionem, dicens per haec duo Aristotelem intendisse duplicem habitudinem quam contingit opinari in entibus; scilicet vel quod habeant se sicut ea quae sunt unius naturae et unius generis, quod esset si ens esset commune genus eorum vel qualitercumque communitatem habens ad ea. Et hoc intelligit cum dicit, si ut totum quoddam. Vel quod habeant se adinuicem sicut quae in nullo communi conveniunt. Et hoc intellexit cum dixit, et si in eo quod consequenter et cetera. Utrolibet enim modo sequitur quod substantia sit prior aliis entibus.*"

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Aristotelis *Metaphysicorum libri XIII cum Averrois Cordubensis in eosdem commentariis*, 290vb–291ra: "*Dixit Alexander: intendit per totum ens [...] quoniam, si aliquis fuerit opinatus, quod ens est quasi unum universuum continuum, credendum est quod substantia est pars prima.*" It seems that Alexander does not endorse the view according to which being is a whole: according to the commentator of Aphrodisias, Aristotle is only presenting a dialectical argument, without saying anything about the truth of the supposition made (namely that being is a whole).

From Averroës's commentary Aquinas could indeed have been acquainted with Alexander's opinion about this point: if this is the source from which Aquinas developed this idea, we must think that Aquinas follows the line of argument advanced by Alexander and criticized by the Arabic philosopher: Alexander also rejects a cautious acceptance of the first Aristotelian simile, where being is compared to a whole and substance proves to be the first part of this whole (καὶ γὰρ εἰ ὡς ὅλον τι τὸ πᾶν, ἡ οὐσία πρῶτον μέρος, 1069a20–21). Alexander, after having said that this view cannot be literally ascribed to Aristotle, says that maybe it is possible to think that the “whole” is a sort of “genus”, namely being, and the first part of it may be its first species, namely substance. But this is impossible, since species are not ranked within the same genus according to priority and posteriority. And Aquinas might have extended the same line of thought also to the second Aristotelian comparison, which was accepted as genuine, and not metaphorical, by both Alexander and Averroës.

But I think that it is more likely that Aquinas developed his interpretation for reasons internal to Aristotle's text. At least, even if we suppose that he developed his view on the basis of preceding commentaries, we must also suppose a philosophical reason in order to explain the quite original solution which Aquinas gave to this problem. As we shall see, Aquinas is very careful in fitting his interpretation with a close reading of Aristotle's texts, although it appears plausible that the philosophical thesis that he infers from that reading is not properly Aristotelian, but constitutes a piece of Aquinas's own philosophy.

We know from his commentary that the Dominican Master saw the arguments developed by Aristotle in *Met.* VII, 1, 1028a31–b7 as the true explanations of the priority of substance over accidents. This priority, according to Aquinas, is in no way linked to any sensible order, but is rather a more basic and fundamental relation. This claim may be controversial, since according to the Stagirite – as we have already shown – substance is primary in many of the senses according to which we say that something is primary (πρῶτον, *prima*): for definition (λόγῳ, *ratione*), knowledge (γνώσει, *notitia*) and time (χρόνῳ, *tempore*). Although priority in definition may be easily accounted for as abstracting from the distinction between sensible and non-sensible orders, priority in knowledge seems to be more problematic, since what is prior in itself is actually what people grasp at the end of their process of getting to know things. This objection may be avoided by saying that in this case we are looking for what is prior in knowledge *per se*, namely the universals. Aquinas indeed seems to follow this line of argument when he says that “*illud enim est primum secundum cognitionem, quod est magis notum et*

*magis manifestat rem*".<sup>43</sup> The more difficult term introduced by Aristotle is time, which appears to refer necessarily to sensible order, since time is the measure of change and only sensible substances are changeable. In other words, it seems that time must be accounted for in terms of that succession of instants which is described by one of Aristotle's categories. And in this sense Aristotle's reference to priority in time (χρόνω) was understood by Aquinas's master Albert the Great. The German philosopher wrote his paraphrastic commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* in those very years and hence it is a precious example of a reading in some sense alternative to that of his pupil Thomas, but contemporary with it.

Albert follows the same line of argument as Aquinas in claiming a priority-relation which rests precisely on the ontological status of substance and accidents:

Cum autem multipliciter dicatur ipsum primum, substantia est omnium entium primum tripliciter, notitia uidelicet, et ratione, et tempore. Et quod omnibus his modis primum sit, probatur una ratione: aliorum enim categorematium siue praedicamentorum nullum est separabilis secundum esse aut secundum intellectum a substantia: sed substantia sola secundum esse et intellectum separata est ab aliis in seipsa et intelligitur in seipsa.<sup>44</sup>

Following this perspective, it might be thought that priority in time of substance over accidents must be understood in some metaphorical sense, as referring to such a priority in the orders of knowledge and of being. However, Albert also claims that substance is temporally prior (a thesis which is plainly consistent with Aristotle's text in *Metaphysics* VII, 1), but this priority is literally understood as referring to time as an accident:

[S]ubstantia enim, in eo quod substantia, duratione et tempore est ante omne accidens [...]. Prima materia per quam substantia prima substat, est ante quodlibet suum accidens tempore, ita quod etiam est ante hoc accidens quod est tempus et locus primae substantiae gratia materiae ex qua est.<sup>45</sup>

Aquinas is well able in his commentary to avoid this difficulty and he resolves this sense of priority in a metaphysical notion with these words:

Quod [substantia] sit prima tempore aliis, ex hoc probatur, quod nullum aliorum praedicamentorum est separabile a substantia, sola autem substantia est separabilis ab aliis: nullum enim accidens inuenitur sine substantia, sed aliqua substantia inuenitur sine accidente. Et sic patet, quod non quandocumque

<sup>43</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In Met.* VII, l. 1, 1259 (ed. Cathala 317).

<sup>44</sup> Alberti Magni *Metaphysicorum libri VII*, tract. 1, cap. 3 (Lugdunii, 1651), 246b.

<sup>45</sup> Ibidem.



est substantia, est accidens, sed e contrario: et propter hoc substantia est prior tempore.<sup>46</sup>

As is clear from this passage, Aquinas thinks that Aristotle is referring to time only insofar as time is needed if we want to give a modal account of the difference between a substance and its accidents: these can *never* be separated from substance, because substance is *always* present if there are accidents, but it is possible that substance may exist without these accidents. In other words: even though there is a substance, there are *not always* accidents (“*non quandocumque est substantia est accidens*”).

So far, we have stated that Aquinas thinks that priority of substance to accidents refers to an order which abstracts from sensibility, and therefore when Aristotle speaks of priority in a whole or in a continuous series, as he does in *Met.* XII, 1, he cannot be speaking properly, since the sense of priority which applies to substance has been described in proper terms in *Met.* VII, 1.

Now, we may ask how Aquinas could have thought that the sense of priority introduced by Aristotle in *Met.* XII, 1 was referring to a sensible order; or rather, we may wonder if there are, according to Aquinas, senses of priority which refer to perception and senses of priority which abstract from perception.

The answer may have been found again in Aristotle's text, as Aquinas appears to suggest in his commentary on it (the preceding commentators do not seem to have developed such clear distinctions with respect to the senses of priority and hence it is arguable that they are not the sources of this elucidation given by the Dominican Master).

a) When Aristotle speaks in *Met.* VII, 1 of the senses according to which substance may be said to be prior, Aquinas sees a reference to *Met.* V, 11, where Aristotle speaks in general of the senses of priority: the idea is that among these many senses, Aristotle chose three, namely priority in definition, in knowledge and in time. This reference to book V may also help us understand what Aquinas had in mind, introducing the idea that where Aristotle refers to sensible orders, he is simply making a simile. As we have shown, this idea appears not to be present in the preceding commentaries on the *Metaphysics*. In *Met.* V, 11, 1018b 12–13, b 19–20 we indeed find senses of priority in movement and in space, which can be more appropriate to the sensible orders. While in *Met.* VII, 1 we are faced with the other senses of priority (in definition, in time and in knowledge), in XII, 1 we have priority in something as a whole and in a continuous series. This may

<sup>46</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In Met.* VII, l. 1, 1257 (ed. Cathala 317).

be the reason that induced Aquinas to consider these senses of priority not proper.<sup>47</sup> According to him, Aristotle is merely saying that if the being were a whole, substance would be its primary constituent, as in a building the basement is the fundamental part; and if beings were ordered like the divisions of an army, then substance would be the first division (*prima acies*) too.

This aspect is easy to understand (*planus litterae sensus*), but, according to Aquinas, Averroës misunderstood it, thinking that with the expression “as in a whole” Aristotle meant a sort of genus of all beings, and in that sense substance is prior within this *quasi*-genus, and with the expression “*in eo quod consequenter*” (ἐν τῷ ἐφεξῆς) Aristotle would have meant that if all the categories of being had nothing in common, then in this case too substance would be the first one. Aquinas may have thought that Averroës misunderstood the metaphorical sense of the two Aristotelian comparisons because of the Arabic philosopher’s attack on the paraphrases by Themistius: while Themistius seems to have endorsed a view similar to the one proposed by Thomas (indeed we find the same examples for the two similes: the building for the whole and the army for that which is said as in a sequence, *consequenter*), Averroës objected to his interpretation on the grounds that these examples are “*superflua: nullus enim existimat quod partes entis, quae sunt decem praedicamenta, sint contingentes se aut segregatae loco*”.<sup>48</sup> Aquinas would of course concede that the categories are not extended in space, but, according to him, we must therefore suppose that Aristotle is simply using a metaphor; and in the metaphor, the elements which correspond to the ten categories may be distributed in space or can form a continuum.

b) The second way in which, according to Aquinas, Aristotle shows that substance is prior to accidents and is, therefore, the proper object of investigation in *Metaphysics* refers to lines 1069a21–24: accidents cannot be said to be “*simpliciter entia*”; they are rather “qualities and movement”, “*qualitates et motus*”. With these two terms Aristotle clearly refers to accidents, in Aquinas’s view; therefore Thomas is easily able to justify why they are not “*simpliciter entia*”: only substances are of this sort, while accidents properly inhere in other things. It is not appropriate to say that accidents *are*; rather things *are in a certain way*, because

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *In Met.* V, l. 13, 950–953 (ed. Cathala 252–253). In this passage Aquinas speaks of priority in being, and he distinguishes three senses of this priority: a) A is prior in being to B, if A may exist without B; b) the sense according to which substance is prior to accidents; c) the sense according to which actuality is prior to potentiality. Aquinas adds that b) and c) refer to a), which is the core sense according to which something is said to be prior in being. And hence we do not find any reference to perceivability in the proper sense of priority in being.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Aristotelis *Metaphysicorum libri XIII cum Averrois Cordubensis in eosdem commentariis*, 291rb.

of the accidents. The subsequent lines contain a comparison with intentional beings, like negations and privations, which also properly *are not*, although we are accustomed to say that a certain thing *is not* white, or *is not* orthogonal, etc. According to Averroës, the Stagirite introduced this comparison between accidents and pure intentional beings in order to answer a possible objection: how is it possible that the other categories are “less beings” than substance, if all of them are beings? Introducing the case of privations and negations, Aristotle maintains that there are many ways in which “is” may be predicated: as privations and negations differ from actual being, so accidents differ from substance. This possibility of an objection may be echoed by the introductory words of Thomas’s explanation: “nec est mirum”. Aquinas indeed wants to show what accidents and privations and negations have in common, namely a required subject of predication in virtue of which they are both called “beings”. If we say, for example, that something is not white, we do not state the existence of “non-white”, but the existence of a subject which is not white. But there is also a difference between the two kinds of relative beings: while accidents confer on the subject in which they inhere a *being-in-a-certain-way* (*esse aliquale*), privations and negations deny to the subject of which they are said a certain being.

From this argument, too, it follows that accidents are not “*simpliciter entia*”, and that thus metaphysical science considers primarily (*principaliter*) substances, since its proper object is being *qua* being.

c) What Thomas considers a further argument is for Averroës an explanation of the sense in which substance and accidents differ from each other as actual beings and privations and negations differ from each other. Accidents in fact are not separate, while substance, as Aristotle said in *Met.* VII, 3, 1029a27–28, is. The notion of “separate” is a rather complex matter in Aristotle.<sup>49</sup> While Averroës seems to refer to the ontological status of substances (*substantia est constans et ens per se et alia sunt in substantia*), Aquinas has an epistemic difference in mind, which mirrors an ontological dependence: if accidents are not separate from the substance in which they inhere, their consideration must also include a reference to substance. This doctrine has been developed in particular in the commentary on *Metaphysics* book VII. Here Aquinas develops an ontological account of the term, saying that accidents cannot be separated from substance, whilst substance may be separated from accidents; cf. *In Met.* VII, l. 2, 1291 (ed. Cathala 323): “*accidens enim non separatur a substantia, sed substantia potest separari ab accidente*”.

<sup>49</sup> On this topic see in particular G. Fine, “Separation”, in: *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 31–88.

Since the definition and the conceptual account of an essence mirror the essence itself, it is not surprising that, commenting on book XII, 1, Aquinas says that the consideration of accidents must include a reference to substances.

d) The fourth argument which supports the thesis according to which the present inquiry concerns substances comes from the research begun by ancient philosophers, namely the Presocratics, and the modern ones, namely the Platonists. But while the ancient philosophers had thought that the principles of things were material, like fire or earth, the modern ones developed their research following logical abstraction. But since they do not think that universals are abstracted, they pose them as principles of substances. Even though in doing so they are mistaken, their inquiry shows that the object of metaphysical research must primarily be substance.

Averroës does not count this section as a further argument, but rather as exemplification (*testimonium dedit*) of what Aristotle stated above.

## Conclusion

Our close reading of Aquinas's text has shown that according to him the order between substance and accidents cannot have any relation to sensibility, and such an interpretation has been defended with extreme consistence by the Dominican Master also commenting on other Aristotelian passages, which might at a first glance be in conflict with this reading. Why did Aquinas maintain this position? I think that the core reason is philosophical: metaphysics abstracts not only from sensibility, but also from the distinction between the sensible and the not sensible. Therefore, since the distinction between substance and accidents and the order among them is a crucial piece of metaphysical doctrine, it is impossible at this stage to insert any reference to sensibility. But this reference would have been introduced, if time were the key notion in order to explain the priority of substance over accidents. We understand the presence of a flow of time only insofar as we perceive that things change (e.g. that things acquire or lose their perceptual properties, etc.). Hence, *quoad nos*,<sup>50</sup> a reference to time

<sup>50</sup> I say "*quoad nos*", because, as is well known, Aquinas also speaks of a time for angels, which is different from the time for corporeal bodies (cf. *ST I*, q. 53, a. 3, c.: "*Relinquitur quod motus angeli sit in tempore. In continuo quidem tempore, si sit motus eius continuus; in non continuo autem, si motus sit non continuus [...]. Sed istud tempus, siue sit tempus continuus siue non, non est idem cum tempore quod mensurat motum caeli, et quo mensurantur omnia corporalia, quae habent mutabilitatem ex motu caeli. Motus enim angeli non dependet ex motu caeli.*" Cf. also *Quodl. IX*, q. 4, a. 4; *XI*, q. 4, a. un.), even though angels do not know things through perception (cf. *ST I*, q. 55, a. 2-3). In other words, according to Aquinas,

presupposes a reference to sensibility. Aquinas probably thought that Averroës's interpretation of these Aristotelian texts could represent a misinterpretation of the Stagirite's true intention, because the Dominican Master supposes that in Averroës's commentary it is not clearly stated that Aristotle speaks metaphorically, when he expands the priority of substance over accidents in terms of a priority of a part in a perceivable continuum or in a perceivable whole. Even though Aquinas's claim may appear rather obvious to modern readers of Aristotle, I am persuaded that the Dominican Master did not think that his remark was pleonastic, since he believed that the Stagirite had to be vindicated from possible misinterpretations of his doctrine.

This paper indirectly confirms that Aquinas's commentaries on Aristotle can be considered useful sources also in order to understand Thomas's own thinking, with respect to fundamental themes of his metaphysics. The idea of a non-sensible priority of substance over accidents, derived by the Dominican Master from his reading of Aristotle, plays a crucial role in Aquinas's own metaphysical thinking, too.<sup>51</sup>

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there are intelligent beings, namely angels, that can understand priority in time without any reference to sensibility. But human beings cannot do this, as I have tried to show.

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## ABSTRACT

### The Order Between Substance and Accidents in Aquinas's Thought

*In this paper I examine Aquinas's commentary on a text of Aristotle in which the type of order between substance and accidents is discussed. I claim that Aquinas maintains that there cannot be any reference to sensibility, despite any prima facie interpretation of Aristotle's texts, according to which it could be thought that substance is temporally prior to accidents and, hence, that we must presuppose a perceivable change in the world on the basis of which it is possible to consider something temporally prior to something else. This interpretation – which is possible on the basis of Aristotle's texts – would be a misinterpretation, according to Aquinas. Aquinas's assumption is philosophically worthwhile because it confirms that every metaphysical proposition must abstract from sensibility.*

## SUMMARIUM

### De D. Thomae circa substantiae ad accidentia ordinem doctrina

*In hac dissertatione commentarium Divi Thomae in locum quoddam Aristotelis Metaphysicae considero, ubi Philosophus de ordine accidentium ad substantiam et e converso disseruit. Thesis mea est, Divum Thomam docere hunc ordinem nullam dicere sensibilitatem, licet hanc interpretationem Philosophi dicta prima facie videantur fovere. Opinatur enim Philosophus, substantiam priorem esse accidentibus etiam tempore; et tenet prioritatem temporis non dari sine aliquo perceptibili motu vel mutatione in rebus. Quae tamen interpretatio, etsi Aristotelis dictis congruat necnon rationabilis videatur, reprobata est ab Aquinate. Haecce Divi Thomae sententia non parvi momenti esse videtur; confirmat enim, omnes propositiones metaphysicas a sensibilitate omnino abstrahere.*



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