Why start a discussion of Aquinas' metaphysics with semantics?

(1) Aquinas does so. (See *De Ente et Essentia*, c.1.)

(2) There is no genuine, rational argument in general without proper understanding. If there is no understanding, there is no communication, and if there is misunderstanding, there is miscommunication, leading to *ignoratio elenchi*, philosophers talking past each other. (See Kenny on real distinction or Plantinga on divine simplicity.)

(3) Since metaphysical arguments concern first principles involving our most universal concepts, the clarification of meanings required for proper understanding is possible only through an explication of the semantic principles governing the interpretation of our metaphysical principles. (How do you define/clarify the meanings of 'and' or 'no' or 'existence' or 'essence'?) This is especially crucial when the semantic principles of the parties involved are radically different; but even "a slight divergence/error concerning the principles grows vast in the conclusions" (*parvus error in principio magnus est in fine* – see Aquinas, Henry, Scotus, Siger, etc.).

(4) Especially in the contemporary context of "competing paradigms", semantic clarification is the only intelligent way out of separate "metaphysical ghettoes" walled from each other by unexamined semantic intuitions. Otherwise we are just left with the brutal Darwinian scene of competing professors' "reproductive fitness" (reproducing themselves in their PhD students) deciding whose ideas survive.

(5) Since the semantic reconstruction merely lays down "the rules of the language game" relevant to a proper understanding of Aquinas' metaphysics without prejudging the results of particular metaphysical arguments, it allows us to enter the game with minimal, *prima facie* acceptable metaphysical commitments and even fewer particular scientific assumptions. Thus, we do not have to regard Aquinas' metaphysics as inextricably tied to an obsolete physics, which therefore can have only historical, but no serious theoretical relevance in contemporary thought.