On Kenny on Aquinas on Being

A critical review of *Aquinas on Being* by Anthony Kenny, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. Pp. x + 212. $45.00

Anthony Kenny's *Aquinas on Being*, according to Kenny's own description, is the completion of a project he began with his *Aquinas on Mind* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993). The entire project was to provide detailed arguments in two separate studies for the rather summary positive judgment on Aquinas' philosophy of mind and for the sternly negative one on Aquinas' theory of being, which Kenny had originally delivered in his booklet on Aquinas in Oxford's *Past Masters* series in 1980 (p. vii).

Despite the opposite character of the value-judgment it argues for, *Aquinas on Being* is, indeed, a consistent continuation of *Aquinas on Mind*, insofar as it inherits both the earlier book's merits of providing clear, no-nonsense explanations presented in a smoothly flowing conversational prose and its general methodological flaws, to which I drew attention in my review of that book in another journal (Klima, G. Review of A. Kenny: *Aquinas on Mind*, New York: Routledge, 1995, in *Faith and Philosophy*, 15(1998), pp. 113-117). To be sure, although the general methodological flaws of trying to squeeze Aquinas' thought into the conceptual straightjacket of post-Fregean logic and blaming *him* when it does not fit are the same, the particular problems materializing these general methodological flaws in this book are not quite the same. Nevertheless, as I will argue, the particular problems of this book bring the common methodological flaws of both books into an even sharper focus.[1]

In any case, this being a critical essay, I will focus here on what I take to be these fundamental methodological flaws of Kenny's approach in general, and the resulting problems of this book in particular. But before dealing with the problematic aspects of this book, I have to deal with its undeniable merits. Indeed, I have to deal especially with those of its merits that make it a worthy and genuinely challenging subject of criticism. Were it not for these merits, the book could just as well be ignored. But Kenny's work on Aquinas in this book as well as elsewhere absolutely cannot be ignored.

The book systematically surveys Aquinas' doctrine of being, moving in a chronological order through "the principal texts in which Aquinas addresses the topic of being" (p. 189). (*On Being and Essence*, *Commentary on the Sentences*, *Disputed Questions on Truth*, *Commentary on Boethius' De Hebdomadibus*, *Summa contra Gentiles*, *Disputed Questions on Power* and *on Evil*, *Summa Theologiae*, the *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, and *On Separate Substances*). Kenny concludes the book with a survey of twelve different senses of existence/being distinguished in the course of the discussion, and an Appendix comparing and contrasting

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[1] In this essay I will only deal with Kenny's charges against Aquinas' doctrine that directly concern Aquinas' doctrine *of being*, namely, the charge of the failure to distinguish "specific existence" from "individual being" *à la* Frege, and the charges against Aquinas' doctrine of God as *ipsum esse subsistens*. But I will not deal here with Kenny's objections to Aquinas' doctrine of separate substances based on what I take to be Kenny's inadequate grasp of Aquinas' distinction between the modes of signification of abstract and concrete terms, which I have dealt with in my review referred to in the previous note. See Kenny's summary of his three main charges on pp. 192-193.

Aquinas with Frege (who is prominently featured in the discussion of Aquinas' conception throughout the book).

Anthony Kenny is one of those historians of philosophy who have not only the necessary scholarly background to deal with their historical subject, but also the willingness and ability "to straddle different paradigms" (to adopt Kuhn's happy phrase), which is required for making their historical subject directly relevant to contemporary thought, as opposed to presenting them as merely historically interesting museum pieces. Kenny's work on Aquinas is always intriguing precisely for this reason. His application of the fundamental insights of the classics of analytic philosophy (Frege, Russell, Wittgenstein, Ryle, etc.) in explaining and critically evaluating Aquinas' thought is always thought-provoking both for the Aquinas scholar and for students making their first acquaintance with Aquinas.

In fact (if I may be allowed a personal remark in the vein of Kenny's personal remarks on his relationship to Aquinas), I for one can personally testify to this. More than twenty years ago, it was Kenny's thought-provoking criticism of Aquinas' proofs for God's existence that got me started on my own research project (despite several fundamental disagreements I had with Kenny's approach already at that time), which also involves a great deal of "paradigm-straddling" between medieval and modern logic and metaphysics. So, in general, I am not only thoroughly sympathetic to Kenny's goals of making Aquinas accessible and directly relevant to contemporary philosophy, but I am also personally indebted to Kenny's work for helping me realize the importance of these goals.

However, turning now to my critical observations concerning his approach, I find the *particular sort* of "paradigm-straddling" exercised by Kenny to be a rather risky business. For, as I will argue, *this* sort of approach essentially involves the danger of the rider's falling off on one side. In less metaphorical terms, when we engage a historical author by simply *applying our own* modern concepts in interpreting his claims, rather than trying to *acquire his* concepts, then there is always the serious danger of misinterpreting the author, who was thinking in a radically different conceptual framework. Indeed, this approach becomes especially precarious when the exposition turns into criticism. In such cases, simply *using our modern concepts* in interpreting and judging the author's claims set by the standards of those concepts often leads to simply *talking past* the author, instead of genuinely engaging, let alone refuting, his thought. As any good Wittgensteinian (and non-Wittgensteinian) ought to know, it is ludicrous to claim victory by yelling "Checkmate!" in a game of poker. But this is precisely what Kenny seems to be doing whenever he is yelling "You are not a good enough Fregean!" at Aquinas.

For what Kenny identifies as "the most fundamental" problem in "Aquinas' theory of *esse*" is indeed the worst crime one can commit against Frege in connection with the notion of existence, namely, "the failure to make a clear distinction between existence on the one hand, and being in its multiple forms on the other" (p. 195, cf. p. 192). However, it is precisely for this fundamental reason that, according to Kenny, Aquinas is "thoroughly confused" on being (p. v), and thus his doctrine is "one of the least admirable of his contributions to philosophy" (p. viii).

But in my view Kenny's perception of a fundamental problem here on Aquinas' part is precisely the *radix omnium errorum* [root of all errors] on *Kenny's* part. For, as I will argue, Aquinas' "failure to make a clear distinction between existence, on the one hand, and being in its multiple forms, on the other" is part and parcel of his markedly non-Fregean doctrine, which is in no way

inferior to Frege's, but which is absolutely inexplicable, indeed, becomes totally misinterpreted, in terms of the Fregean doctrine. For Frege's concepts of existence/being are radically different from Aquinas' concepts; and so the Fregean concepts simply cannot be used to "translate" Aquinas' claims into our modern logical idiom in the way Kenny attempts to do.

Obviously, to substantiate this claim, I should be able to provide some criteria for identifying and distinguishing Aquinas' and Frege's various concepts of being/existence. Luckily, Frege himself provides us with a general technique for identifying and distinguishing various concepts. For according to Frege, the concepts expressed by different phrases of our language can be characterized by means of the characteristic *semantic functions* associated with those phrases. In fact, for Frege the concepts expressed by these phrases *are* nothing but these semantic functions themselves. Accordingly, the characteristic semantic function associated (indeed, for Frege, identified) with the concept expressed by a (univocal) first-level predicate is a function from individuals to truth values (a Fregean "first-level concept"). For example, the Fregean concept expressed by the term 'centaur' could be defined in a model theoretical semantics as follows: $C(\text{'centaur'})(u) \in \{T, F\}$, where C is a function that assigns concepts to predicates (and so $C(\text{'centaur'})$ is the concept assigned to the predicate 'centaur'), u is an element of the domain or "universe of discourse" of the model, and T and F are the truth-values, True and False. The fact that this term is "empty" in our actual universe is represented in the model theory by the fact that for any individual in our universe this function yields the value False. Accordingly, the characteristic function associated with a concept expressed by a second-level predicate, such as the Fregean existential quantifier, is a function from first-level concepts to truth-values (a Fregean "second-level concept"). In the case of the existential quantifier, the function in question yields Truth for any first-level concept that yields Truth for some individual. Thus, the Fregean concept of the existential quantifier can be defined as follows: $C(\exists)((C(P)) = T$, if for some u, $C(P)(u) = T$, otherwise $C(\exists)((C(P)) = F$.[2] Therefore, that *there are no centaurs* is reflected in a model by the fact that $C(\exists)(C(\text{'centaur'})) = F$, since $C(\text{'centaur'})(u) = F$ for any u in that model. So, $C(\exists)$, the concept of the Fregean "existential quantifier" as defined here is a second-level concept that yields True for any first-level concept that is non-empty, and False for any first-level concept that is empty. But this concept, being a second-level concept, can be meaningfully applied only to first-level concepts, and never to individuals. Hence the analytic philosophers' mantra: "existence [the existential quantifier] is not a [first-level] predicate".

It is important to understand precisely what this claim says and what it is based on. For what it says is not merely that whoever would try to analyze an existence-claim differently is saying something false; rather, it says that such a person is not making any sense. Indeed, he is claimed not to make sense in the same way as someone who would try to calculate the value of y in the equation y = 1/0. For just as the hyperbolic function f(x) = 1/x is not definable for 0 under pain

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[2] The notation here simply uses the symbol '∃' as a place-holder for any expression of a natural language, in the present case English, that would be formalized by means of the existential quantifier. Exactly which phrases these are is what modern students of logic learn in a largely informal training of acquiring "formalization skills". Some such phrases are 'at least one', 'some', 'a', 'there is a', 'there are [some]', 'there exists a …', '… exists', etc. The relative murkiness of the business of "formalizing" (if we don't rely on some Montague-style "regimentation") is part of the trouble of precisely identifying and distinguishing concepts conveyed in natural language by means of a Fregean *Begriffsschrift*.

of contradiction, so too, in exactly the same, mathematically precise sense, *the concept of existence is not definable for individuals*.

One of the main arguments for this position is that *if* the concept of existence *were* a first-level concept, then all negative existential claims, denying the property of existence to their subject, would have to be contradictory. For example, if we understood the claim 'Santa Claus does not exist' in the sense that Santa has the property of not existing (or, equivalently, lacks the property of existing), then the claim would clearly have to be contradictory, for Santa has to be there to have (or lack) any property in the first place. But of course we can truly claim that Santa does not exist, whence this claim cannot be contradictory, and so the analysis according to which it *would be* is clearly wrong. Therefore, the *only* way we can make good sense of the true claim that Santa does not exist is by analyzing it as involving the Fregean second-level concept, asserting, for example, that the individual concept of Santa has nothing corresponding to it, that is to say, that nothing is identical with Santa: $\sim(\exists x)(x = \text{Santa Claus})$.[3]

Accordingly, for some analytic philosophers the *only* legitimate concept of existence is the Fregean second-level concept, and so, according to them, *any* metaphysical claim that cannot be made sense of using this concept is simply meaningless. A case in point is Rudolf Carnap's famous paper: "The Elimination of Metaphysics through the Logical Analysis of Language".[4] Given the contemporary flourishing of analytic metaphysics, it should be clear by now that this sort of aggressive application of the Fregean concept led into a *cul de sac* in the recent history of philosophy. But even without going into the issue of the changing attitudes towards metaphysics in analytic philosophy, it should be clear that in certain cases we *can* make good sense of existence (or non-existence) claims which obviously involve a first-level concept of existence.

For example, one certainly *can* truly say, talking about the ancient lighthouse: "The Pharos of Alexandria no longer exists". A similar idea is expressed even more vividly by the frustrated pet shop customer in Monty Python's famous "parrot-sketch", holding the stiff corpse of a bird in his hand: "This parrot is no more! He has ceased to be! 'E's expired and gone to meet 'is maker! 'E's a stiff! Bereft of life, 'e rests in peace! If you hadn't nailed 'im to the perch 'e'd be pushing up the daisies! 'Is metabolic processes are now 'istory! 'E's off the twig! 'E's kicked the bucket, 'e's shuffled off 'is mortal coil, run down the curtain and joined the bleedin' choir invisible!! THIS IS AN EX-PARROT!!"

In these cases, the speakers are clearly not claiming that nothing corresponds to the concepts of the grammatical subjects of their sentences. On the contrary, by means of these concepts, they are successfully picking out the individual things they are talking about. But of course not everything that one can talk about actually exists. That is precisely the idea expressed by the

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[3] Alternatively, we may take the name 'Santa Claus' as an abbreviation of a definite description that can then be eliminated *à la* Russell, or we may take it to express a common term intended to have one individual in its extension, *à la* Quine. In any case, the result is the elimination of an "apparent" first level concept attributing an "apparent" property of existence to an "apparent" individual referred to by an "apparent" singular term, in favor of an analysis involving a common term the extension of which is asserted to be empty by means of a second-level concept, an existential quantifier.

[4] Rudolf Carnap: "The Elimination of Metaphysics through Logical Analysis of Language" (trans. by Arthur Pap, 1932), In: *Logical Positivism*, A J. Ayer, ed., Glencoe: Free Press, 1960, pp. 60-81)

claim that the Pharos of Alexandria no longer exists, or by the claim that the parrot, the dead body of which the frustrated customer is holding in his hand, is no more. To exist, in this sense, is to be one of the things that presently populate our actual universe. But the Pharos (or the parrot), which used to be one those things, is no longer one of those things. (To be sure, the recently discovered ruins of the Pharos, or the carcass of the parrot, may still be one of those things; but the ruins are not the Pharos, and the carcass is not the parrot.) And of course we can certainly truly assert without any paradox that something that used to be one of the things present in our universe is no longer present in our universe.[5] Indeed, in the same way, we can just as truly claim that what will be or could be one of these things is not actually one of these things.

More recent analytic philosophers, including Kenny, therefore, take a more accommodating approach: they allow *some* legitimate uses of the words 'is', 'exists' and their derivatives, in which these phrases express a first-level concept. But they would still insist that *genuine* existential claims, such as 'There is a God' (as opposed to 'God *is* [alive]'), can only be made sense of as involving the Fregean second-level concept (cf. pp. 61-62). Accordingly, what Kenny calls 'existence' (or 'specific existence') throughout his book is this Fregean second-level concept, to be strictly distinguished from any first-level concept of 'being' (or 'individual existence').[6]

However, such a second-level concept is nowhere to be found in medieval philosophy. What might come the closest to it is the concept corresponding to what medieval logicians called *signa particularia* [particular signs], namely, the syncategoremata that prefixed to an *indefinite* proposition, such as 'Homo est currens' ('A man is running'), would yield a *particular* proposition, such as 'Quidam homo est currens' ('Some man is running'), as opposed to a *universal* proposition, which is the result of prefixing *signa universalia* [universal signs], such as 'Omnis homo est currens' ('Every man is running'). What medieval logicians would call a particular proposition, in modern logic classes we are taught to represent by an existentially quantified formula, and so it might seem that the *signum particulare* of a Latin proposition expresses the concept of the Fregean existential quantifier. The reason is that on the Fregean reading the proposition 'Quidam homo est currens' is to be analyzed as 'For some x, x is a man and x is running', which is then taken to be the same as 'There is/exists an x, such that x is a man and x is running', i.e., '$(\exists x)(x$ is a man and x is running)' – *voilà*, an "existence-statement".

However, despite the equivalence of this quasi-formula with the Latin proposition, this is definitely *not* the kind of analysis medieval logicians would have provided for this proposition. This is clearly shown by the simple fact that if we attach a negation to the copula of the Latin

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[5] For more discussion of this sense of 'exists' see Geach's classic paper: "What Actually Exists", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supp. vol. 42(1968), pp. 7-16.

[6] Cf.: "In the history of philosophy this distinction was most sharply emphasized by Gottlob Frege, who taught us to distinguish, under pain of gross fallacy, between first-level concepts corresponding to predicates and second-level concepts corresponding to quantifiers." p. 195. More recent work in free logic, as well as historical work on medieval logic, shows that the "gross fallacy" concerning the notion of existence need not emerge in logical systems that tie "existential import" not to the existential quantifier, but to the affirmative copula, and which distinguish propositional negation from term negation, as was generally the case in medieval logic. See the papers referred to in the next note.

proposition, then the resulting particular negative proposition cannot adequately be represented by simply adding a negation to the formula: it is a well-known fact about medieval logic that 'Quidam homo non est currens' is not adequately represented by 'For some x, x is a man and x is not running'. The reason is that medieval philosophers, who would in general (with the interesting exception of Abelard) take this particular negative proposition to be the contradictory of a universal affirmative construed with existential import, would regard this proposition as true when there are no humans, whereas the Fregean quasi-formula in that case would not be true.[7] Therefore, we can quite confidently assert that despite the fact that the Latin proposition and the Fregean formula express equivalent thoughts (in the sense that the one is true just in case the other is and *vice versa*), they do not have the same "logical syntax", and thus they do not involve the same concepts combined in the same ways, for what is taken to be the contradictory negation of the Latin proposition is not equivalent to what would be the corresponding negation of the quasi-formula.[8]

But however that may be, in general, the equivalence or non-equivalence of two thoughts cannot determine the identity or non-identity of the concepts making them up. Consider the following simple, modern example: (1) 'No x is such that x is a centaur' is equivalent to (2) 'For every x, if x is a centaur, then x is pink and x is not pink'. Both (1) and (2) are true just in case the extension of 'x is a centaur' is empty, that is, just in case there are no centaurs. Yet, could we on this basis assert that (1') 'No x is such that x is ____' expresses the same concept as (2') 'For every x, if x is ____, then x is pink and x is not pink'? Obviously not. Indeed, if someone were willing to bite the bullet and say that they do express the same concept, then he would also have to agree on the same grounds that (3') 'For every x, if x is ____, then x is blue and x is not blue' expresses the same concept as well. But this would clearly be absurd to accept (for then (2') and (3') would have to express the same concept, which is certainly not the case). In fact, since all logical truths are logically equivalent, someone holding that equivalence is sufficient for the sameness of conceptual structure would have to hold that all logical truths involve the same concepts combined in the same ways, which is again patently absurd. (Just compare the equivalent tautologies '$((A \supset A) \cdot (A \supset \sim A)) \supset (A \supset \sim A)$' and '$(A \supset (B \lor C)) \supset (\sim(\sim C \cdot \sim B) \lor \sim A)$' – do these have the same conceptual structure?). So, it is certainly possible to have equivalent thoughts with different conceptual structures, which means that the equivalence of thoughts is not sufficient for the identity of the concepts making up these thoughts. Therefore, we definitely need the "more fine-grained" technique for identifying and distinguishing concepts suggested by Frege's ideas, in terms of the characteristic semantic functions of the phrases expressing these concepts.

According to this "more fine-grained" technique, however, it should be clear that the *signum particulare* in 'Quidam homo est currens' cannot be characterized by means of the same

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[7] For detailed discussions of the issues involved see Parsons, Terence, "The Traditional Square of Opposition", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 1999 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr1999/entries/square/, and Klima, G. (2001) "Existence and Reference in Medieval Logic", in: A. Hieke and E. Morscher (eds.) *New Essays in Free Logic*, 2001, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht, pp. 197-226.

[8] Again, for more detailed discussions of this apparently tricky issue, see the articles referred to in the previous note.

semantic function as the quantifier of the Fregean quasi-formula (for both the arguments and values of that function would have to be different from those of the Fregean function),[9] whence it cannot possibly express the same concept.[10] But even if it did, in the medieval analysis the *signum particulare* of this proposition would certainly not be characterizable by the same semantic function as the verb 'est', whether used as a copula (*tertium adiacens*) or as an absolute predicate (*secundum adiacens*).

Indeed, as we have seen, just because concerning some substitutions one may claim that 'Something is __' and 'A__ exists' "do the same job", i.e., they yield equivalent sentences, it does not follow that these phrases mean the same, i.e., express the same concept.[11] So, even if the *particular sign* of the medieval analysis could be regarded as expressing the Fregean concept of the existential quantifier (although as a matter of fact it does not), that concept would in no way be regarded by any medieval philosopher as a concept of *existence* (something expressed by the *verbum substantivum*, the verb of existence 'est'). But then, without pre-existing Fregean biases, it might seem to be totally inexplicable why anyone would bring up the Fregean concept in connection with *any* claim concerning existence made by *any* medieval philosopher.

To be fair, Kenny does make an effort to justify his bringing up the Fregean concept in a medieval context by suggesting that some sort of "proto-Fregean" analysis can be read into Abelard. As he writes: "Abelard had said that in the sentence 'a father exists' we should not take 'a father' as standing for anything; rather, the sentence is equivalent to 'something is a father'." [p. 201.]

Unfortunately, Kenny did not identify his source for this remark. But upon my query two leading Abelard scholars, Peter King and John Marenbon, both pointed me to the same passage in Abelard's *Theologia Christiana*, where on a cursory reading Abelard does indeed appear to make a claim similar to the one Kenny attributes to him.[12] However, a closer look reveals that the passage has absolutely nothing to do with what Kenny wants it to say. In the first place, it says nothing about the proposition 'A father exists', nor does it say anything about whether we should take 'a father' in this proposition to stand for anything. Abelard's *trinitological* (as opposed to purely logical) concern in this passage is to establish that for *paternity* to exist is simply for

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[9] What the arguments and values of the function in question would be is dependent on the particular medieval logical theories concerning the semantic functions of the parts of the proposition and of the proposition as a whole. But even without going into the details, one can confidently assert that none of these theories would assign the semantic functions to these items that the Fregean analysis does. For a start, *all* medieval theories would assign a referring function (*suppositio*) to the subject term that Frege and especially his strictest follower in this regard, Peter Geach, would vehemently deny to it.

[10] And this is because the same concept has to determine the same function for the parts of speech that express it.

[11] In fact, these two phrases do not always yield equivalent sentences, since for certain substitutions the results would not be equivalent. For example, 'Something is destroyed' [*Aliquid est corruptum*] and 'A destroyed [thing] exists' [*Corruptum existit*] are not equivalent. For a discussion of the issue in relation to the medieval theory of *ampliation* see the Appendix of my paper referred to in n. 7.

[12] Abelard: *Theologia Christiana*, IV, section 157, lines 2489-2492, p. 343, in *Petri Abaelardi Opera Theologica*. Cura et studio Eligii M. Buytaert, Turnholti, Typographi Brepols, 1969.

something to be a father, which, however, does not make paternity into a distinct thing on a par with the thing that is a father.[13]

Furthermore, even if Abelard had said what Kenny says he did, the mere equivalence of 'Something is a father' with 'A father exists' would still not be sufficient to support the claim that 'A ___ exists' in the latter sentence expresses the same concept as 'Something is a ___' does in the former. For as I have pointed out, the mere equivalence of propositions is insufficient for establishing the identity of the concepts involved in the thoughts they express.

In general, there is an important lesson here for ("analytically minded") historians of medieval philosophy: even if the slogan 'existence is not a predicate', taken in the sense that the Fregean second-order concept of the existential quantifier is not a Fregean first-order concept is trivially true, nevertheless, in that sense it is absolutely irrelevant to anything in medieval philosophy (indeed, to much of the history of philosophy in general), for in that sense it simply establishes a trivial truth concerning a Fregean concept, and says nothing at all about, say, a Thomistic, a Scotistic, or for that matter a Heideggerian concept. On the other hand, if this slogan is taken in the sense in which it is regularly used to castigate medieval (and other) philosophers – that is, in the sense in which it would claim that the equivalents of 'is' or 'exists' as used by these philosophers do not and cannot express a first-level concept –, then it is relevant, but trivially false. After all, as our medieval colleagues put it, *verba significant ad placitum* – words signify by convention. Therefore, if by *their* convention, the medievals *did* consistently express a (non-Fregean) first-level concept by means of the relevant Latin words, then it is entirely futile to try to argue that they did not or could not express what they in fact did.

But however that may be, Kenny's point about Abelard is in the end totally irrelevant to the explanation of Aquinas' notion of existence. As Kenny explicitly remarks: "… Aquinas does not explain existence in Frege's manner by the use of a quantifier". (p. 201.) But then, if the Fregean quantifier is *not* Aquinas' concept of existence, then why bring it up at all? The only plausible explanation seems to be Kenny's deep-seated belief that what really and truly captures "*the* notion of existence" is Frege's quantifier. No wonder, then, that this is the notion Kenny uses as the yardstick to measure the "logical depths" of Aquinas' claims about existence, and, although Kenny does acknowledge the fact that Aquinas uses the equivalents of 'exists' in senses radically different from the Fregean quantifier, whenever these claims fail to measure up to this standard, their author is duly reprimanded.

Now concerning this strategy, consider the following analogy. The word 'bat' in English is multiply equivocal. One way of expressing this fact is saying that in one possible usage the word is used to express the concept whereby we conceive of mouse-like flying mammals; in another it expresses the concept whereby we conceive of the wooden implements used in baseball or cricket to hit the ball; and in yet another it expresses the concept whereby we conceive of the action of blinking. Suppose, then, that there is a not too competent user of English, let us call him C, who can only understand 'bat' in the first sense. Yet, C is arrogant enough to claim that this is

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[13] For an excellent discussion of why Abelard cannot justifiably be regarded as a "proto-Fregean", see John Marenbon, "Abélard, la predication et le verbe 'être'" in J. Biard (ed.) *Langages, sciences, philosophie au XIIe siècle*, Paris: Vrin, 1999, pp. 199-215.

the only possible way the word 'bat' can make any sense, and it is only understood in this way that it expresses "the proper concept of bathood". Accordingly, whenever C happens on an English expression using this word, he will only interpret it in this sense. So, when he sees the sentence 'She didn't bat an eye', our incompetent, yet sufficiently arrogant speaker would confidently declare that this sentence does not make any sense, since it should mean 'She didn't mouse-like flying mammal an eye', which is sheer gibberish. However, it should be clear that C only sees a problem here because he uses a concept in expounding the sentence that is not the concept intended by the competent speaker who propounded it.

In the same way, using a concept in expounding Aquinas that he never intended to be conveyed by his words can only lead to problems of this type. But then Kenny's castigating Aquinas' claims concerning God as *ipsum esse subsistens* for not making sense in a Fregean analysis[14] is just as misplaced as our incompetent speaker's effort to castigate a competent speaker's claim on account of his limited understanding of the competent speaker's language. Of course, if *esse*, in the claim that God is his *esse*, is supposed to convey the same concept as the existential quantifier, then we would have to end up with the gibberish 'God is his ∃'. But the nonsensical character of this string of symbols is no more an indication of confusion on Aquinas' part than the gibberish C ends up with is an indication of confusion on the competent speaker's part. Rather, this should be taken as a sure sign that *esse* is *not* to be read as conveying the concept of an existential quantifier in Aquinas' claim.

But this analogy tells only part of the story. In fact, aside from Kenny's remarks condemning Aquinas' doctrine of *ipsum esse subsistens* as nonsensical, the analogy would rather describe the way Carnap used Fregean logic to point out the "nonsensical' character of "traditional metaphysics". So, let me expand a little bit on this analogy to give a somewhat fairer representation of Kenny's treatment of Aquinas.

Consider a slightly more yet not completely competent, and certainly not so arrogant speaker. Let us call this second speaker K (to distinguish him from the previous analogy's C). K is familiar with the first two senses of 'bat' and he even knows that the second sense also has an associated verbal sense, conveying the concept of the act of hitting a ball with a baseball bat. He is just ignorant of the (perhaps nowadays not so common) third sense. K, then, faced with the sentence 'She didn't bat an eye when he confronted her', is honestly trying to make sense of it. Seeing that the first sense he knows would render it gibberish and the nominal sense of the second as well, he opts for the corresponding verbal sense: 'She didn't hit an eye with a baseball bat when he confronted her'. Now this sentence is not gibberish (i.e., it is at least grammatical), but the claim it makes is still rather "improbable". So, K, throwing up his hands, feels forced to conclude that the person who wrote this sentence must have been utterly confused about what he was writing about.

Kenny is definitely more like K. In his interpretation of Aquinas on the real-distinction/*esse-subsistens*-issue, besides the "Carnap-like" criticism that Aquinas' thesis would amount to an "ill-formed formula" (pp. 47, 193), he does try out what he calls the "individual being"-sense of *esse*, a first-level concept of being (p. 44). But since he can only understand this in its application

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[14] See Kenny's claim that Aquinas' doctrine should amount to an ill-formed formula, on pp. 47 and 193.

to God as conveying the notion of 'everlasting existence', which is at best implied in our notion ('nominal essence') of divinity, he does not see how Aquinas' thesis could make a stronger claim concerning God than it does concerning creatures. After all, he claims, just as (1) for God to be God is for Him to be, so too, (2) for Fido to be a dog is for him to be (p. 45).

In fact, I think this last statement is perfectly correct, but Kenny can only understand it as expressing the necessary equivalences of [1] 'God is God' and 'God exists' on the one hand, and [2] 'Fido is a dog' and 'Fido exists', on the other, and this is why he does not see how (1) can make a stronger claim than (2).

In connection with this objection we should note in the first place that if we assume, as Kenny regularly does, that the necessary equivalence of thoughts is sufficient for the sameness of their conceptual structure, and that '___exists' is used here univocally, which Kenny does not question at all, then the equivalences of the sentences in [1] and [2] should also guarantee the sameness of the concepts of '___ is God', '___exists', and '___ is a dog', which is not only absurd, but blasphemous. But if '___ exists' is supposed to convey the same (first-level) concept of existence, i.e., it is used univocally, in both [1] and [2], and necessary equivalence is sufficient for the sameness of concepts, then the conclusion is inevitable. For on the assumption of the sufficiency of equivalence for the sameness of conceptual structure, the phrases '___ is God' and '___ exists' in 'God is God' and 'God exists' should convey the same concept. But if '___ exists' is used univocally in both [1] and [2], i.e., it conveys the same concept in [2] as it does in [1], then the same concept must be conveyed by the phrase '___ is a dog' as well, given the equivalence of 'Fido is a dog' and 'Fido exists'.

Therefore, it should be clear that for a proper understanding of Aquinas' claim we need the more "fine-grained" analysis of his concepts I alluded to earlier. Following Peter Geach's lead in his "Form and Existence",[15] let us characterize the concept expressed by a common term F by a function that for an individual u yields u's individualized F-ness, whether it is actual or not, and whether it is the same as u or not. We may designate a value of such a function as the significate of F in respect of u: SGT(F)(u). Accordingly, SGT('dog')(Fido) is what the term 'dog' signifies in Fido, namely, Fido's canine nature, whereas SGT('exists')(Fido) is what the (first-level) predicate 'exists' signifies in Fido, namely, his act of existence, his canine life.

With this notation at hand, we may express Aquinas' claim of the real distinction between Fido's essence and existence as follows: SGT('dog')(Fido) ≠ SGT('exists')(Fido). That is to say, Fido's canine nature is not his canine life, whatever each is in itself. To be sure, we may not know in a clear a distinct fashion what Fido's canine nature is, for we may not know the essential definition of a dog.[16] Still we do have *some* concept of this nature, insofar as we have the concept of *dog* as

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[15] Geach, P.T.: "Form and Existence", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 55(1954-5); reprinted in his *God and the Soul*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969, pp. 42-64.

[16] Well, perhaps, with the advance of genetics we will know it, just as with the advance of chemistry we have learned the essential definitions of chemical elements in terms of their atomic numbers. In this connection it may be worth noting that modern chemistry quite interestingly confirmed an Aristotelian idea often cited by Aquinas, according to which the essences of things are like numbers, in which the addition or subtraction of a unit varies the species of that number (i.e., adding one to the number of the species dyads, we get the species of triads, etc.). In the

a specific sort of animal. In the same way, we may not know in a clear and distinct manner what canine life is; still we do have *some* concept of it. But this much is certainly sufficient for sensibly making the claim that they are or they are not identical. In any case, it should be clear that even if it is true that Fido's life is actual if and only if his canine nature is actual, that is, Fido exists/is alive if and only if he is a dog, this does not entail that Fido's existence or canine life is the same as his canine nature.

In general, the necessary co-occurrence of two things need not entail their identity. For example, necessarily, whatever is triangular is trilateral, and *vice versa*. So, the triangularity of any object is necessarily co-occurrent with its trilaterality. Still, this does not mean that the triangularity of any object is identical with its trilaterality: its having three sides is not the same property of an object as its having three angles (or, for that matter, its having three vertices or three medians, etc.). That is to say, even if necessarily, u is triangular if and only if u is trilateral, i.e., necessarily, u's triangularity occurs whenever u's trilaterality occurs and *vice versa*, still, SGT('triangular')(u) ≠ SGT('trilateral')(u), u's triangularity is not the same thing as u's trilaterality.

But then it is definitely possible to make a stronger claim about the identity of existence and essence in a thing than the claim asserting the necessary co-occurrence of the two. That is to say, even if Fido exists if and only if he is a dog, which means that his canine life is necessarily co-occurrent with his canine nature, this does not amount to claiming the identity of essence and existence in Fido, whence it would be a stronger claim to assert the identity of the two. Therefore, claiming the identity of essence and existence in God is also a stronger claim than the mere equivalence of 'God is God' and 'God exists'.

But this is a nicety apparently inaccessible to Kenny. Since he never tries to understand Aquinas' notion of existence within Aquinas' *own* logical framework, in the framework of the so-called "inherence theory of predication", Kenny simply cannot see the possibility of this interpretation.[17] Had Kenny been willing to *learn* Aquinas' concepts, instead of merely trying to "reconstruct" (up to the level of logical equivalence) Aquinas's thoughts using his own Fregean concepts, he could have realized that within Aquinas' conceptual framework it is quite possible to provide a much stronger interpretation of Aquinas' thesis, which is immune to his criticism.[18]

But despite Kenny's occasional willingness to bring a first-level concept of being to bear on his interpretation and evaluation of Aquinas' doctrine, most of the time he is so blinded by his own unquestioned Fregean assumptions that he does not use this interpretational option even when it is begging for being recognized. This is the clearest in the case of Kenny's treatment of Aquinas'

Periodic Table of Elements, the addition or subtraction of a proton, the unit determining the atomic number of an element, does indeed vary the species.

[17] For a more detailed discussion of the issue of what sort of logical framework is needed for the proper interpretation of Aquinas' thesis, see Klima, G. (2002) "Contemporary 'Essentialism' vs. Aristotelian Essentialism", in: J. Haldane, (ed.), *Mind, Metaphysics, and Value in the Thomistic and Analytic Traditions*, Notre Dame, pp. 175-194.

[18] For further explanations, along with distinctions of the several, yet analogical senses of 'being' in Aquinas, see Klima, G.: "The Semantic Principles Underlying Saint Thomas Aquinas's Metaphysics of Being", *Medieval Philosophy and Theology*, 5(1996), pp. 87-141.

argument for the thesis of the real distinction of essence and existence in creatures (and the corresponding identity thereof in God) on pages 34-46 of this book.

In order to make clear what I find to be totally mistaken in Kenny's treatment, let me first provide the following, somewhat tendentious reformulation of Aquinas' famous argument as follows:

(1) Whatever does not belong to the understanding of any thing is extrinsic to its real, individualized essence, but (2) its individual act of existence does not belong to the understanding of any (created) thing; therefore, (3) its individual act of existence is extrinsic to any (created) thing's real, individualized essence.

As is well-known, Aquinas supports what is stated in premise (2) here with examples. It is possible, he points out, to understand what a man is or what a phoenix is without knowing whether either of these actually exists. As with the somewhat tendentious reformulation I meant to indicate, the point of the argument is to establish that the individual act of being of a creature is distinct from its individualized essence signified by its quidditative definition or (less clearly and distinctly) by any of its substantial predicates, say, the predicate 'F' ('man' or 'phoenix'). It is, therefore, a "deeply disturbing problem", not of Aquinas' argument, but of Kenny's own interpretation of the argument that he takes it to concern what he calls "specific existence" (the Fregean quantifier, as opposed to the individual act of being of a thing that is F) (pp. 35, 42) and "the meaning of the word 'F'" (rather than the real essence of something that is F).

To be sure, in his interpretation Kenny takes it for granted that a phoenix is a *mythical* bird, which therefore cannot have a real essence. However, for Aquinas, the fictitious character of phoenix was by no means a known fact. After all, Isidore of Seville, whom Aquinas frequently cites, discusses the phoenix along with birds known to exist (such as eagles and ostriches). Also, the examples with which Aquinas groups the phoenix-example together are obviously real, natural phenomena (man, eclipse, cf. p. 62). In fact, the eclipse-example is the prime example in Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* of a natural phenomenon whose essence we know by means of its quidditative definition ("the privation of the moon's light by the interposition of the earth between the sun and the moon"). We may only not know whether it actually exists (say, because of a cloudy sky). Therefore, when Aquinas is talking about understanding the essence of the thing without knowing the existence of the thing, he means understanding the real essence of a real thing (whether distinctly, by means of its quidditative definition, or confusedly, by means of some of its essential predicates), but not knowing whether the real thing in question *actually*, at the moment of our consideration, exists. But *this* existence is precisely what Kenny calls "individual being", the (first-level) concept of which would be the *only* relevant concept in discussing Aquinas' argument. However, this is the concept that Kenny does not even consider in his interpretation and evaluation of this argument, even if, curiously, later on he *does* allude to the possibility of this interpretation on p. 62.

Restricted space does not allow me to go into further details of Kenny's objections or other problems with Kenny's book. In any case, further discussion would only further illustrate how other errors in Kenny's criticism of Aquinas' doctrine stem from the *radix omnium errorum* identified above. I only hope this much can serve as a sufficient illustration of my judgment concerning the general methodological flaws and their particular materializations in this book. I

also hope to have given sufficient reason to believe that Kenny's summary judgment about Aquinas being confused about being (p. i) rests on very shaky grounds.

To be sure, this being a critical review of Kenny's objections to Aquinas, and *not* an overall defense of Aquinas' doctrine, I believe it is sufficient to show here that by using a Fregean concept that Aquinas never had in mind Kenny misinterprets Aquinas, and that, as a consequence, in his criticism he simply talks past Aquinas. But we should carefully note that just because Kenny's objections fail, it does not follow that Aquinas' doctrine is immune to any sort of criticism or that *any* criticism of his doctrine "respecting the rules of his language-game" is necessarily doomed to failure.[19]

Nevertheless, I also happen to believe that, despite Kenny's claim to the contrary (p. 189), it is possible to show (by means of an exact model theoretical reconstruction) that Aquinas does have a comprehensive, profound, and coherent doctrine of being, uniting all of the various senses of the verb *est* he distinguishes under the umbrella of his theory of the *analogy of being*, about which, by the way, Kenny has precious little to say.[20]

For all its flaws, however, the book does have the undeniable merits I mentioned at the beginning. Indeed, these merits make it possible to put even the flaws of the book to important *pedagogical* use. Owing to Kenny's clarity of style, the book's flaws provide the best illustrations of how and why the finest analytic philosophers of the twentieth century could be so blind to the niceties of the pre-modern metaphysical tradition. But by now it should be clear that the dismissal of that tradition on the grounds of a conceptual apparatus that has turned out to be just as history-bound as what it criticizes is based on a view of philosophy that our students would justifiably call "*so* twentieth century". Philosophy students of the twenty-first century need a much broader, more accommodating view. Indeed, as the first philosophers of a new millennium that can view even modernity as belonging to a previous era, what we *all* need is a view of the previous millennia of intellectual history that encompasses both modern and pre-modern ideas, understanding each in its own particular historical context, as it keeps searching for the Truth illuminating each, yet transcending all.

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[19] I was prompted to add this cautionary remark by Brian Davies, whose numerous comments on earlier versions were invaluable in improving the presentation of this material.

[20] Cf. Klima, G. "Aquinas' Theory of the Copula and the Analogy of Being", *Logical Analysis and History of Philosophy*, 5(2002), pp. 159-176.