

The Incompatibility of a Thomistic View of Existence and Natural Existence Monism¹

Tim Mosteller

California Baptist University
tmostell@calbaptist.edu

DOI: 10.17421/2498-9746-03-19

Abstract

This paper considers the incompatibility of a broadly Thomistic view of the nature of existence with natural existence monism. The first part of this paper offers two lines of reasoning to establish that existence should be understood as essential exemplification. Two “Thomistic Routes” to this conclusion are considered. The first route is an “exterior” route developed from ordinary sense perception. This route is elaborated by George Klubertanz and Jacques Maritain. The second route is developed by Edith Stein. I call this an “interior” route, which is based on self-awareness and rational reflection. The second part of this paper considers existence monism in light of the understanding of existence as essential exemplification developed in part one. I argue that natural existence monism is incompatible with an understanding of existence as essential exemplification.

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| Introduction | 326 |
| 1 Part 1: Two Thomistic Routes to Existence | 326 |
| 2 Part 2: Natural Existence Monism In Light of Existence as Essential Exemplification | 333 |
| 3 Conclusion | 339 |
| Works Cited | 339 |
| Notes | 340 |

INTRODUCTION

This paper considers the incompatibility of a broadly Thomistic view of the nature of existence with the notion of natural existence monism. The first part of this paper offers two lines of reasoning to establish that existence should be understood as essential exemplification. Two “Thomistic Routes” to this conclusion are considered. The first route is an “exterior” route developed from ordinary sense perception. This route has been elaborated by George Klubertanz and Jacques Maritain. The second route was presented by Edith Stein. I call this an “interior” route, which is based on self-awareness and rational reflection.

If these two routes are sufficient to establish that we can know that existence is essential exemplification, then what remains is to show how this view of existence is incompatible with natural existence monism. The second part of the paper begins with the knowledge derived in the first part of the paper and then explores three possible problems for existence monism, the view that nature is one thing. These problems arise from five ideas taken together: 1) the view of existence as essential exemplification (established in the first part of this paper), 2) the idea that nature consists of only one concrete object (the blobject), and 3) the formalization of existence monism, 4) the indiscernibility of identicals, and 5) the claim that the one thing that nature consists of (the blobject) lacks of real parts.

1 PART 1: TWO THOMISTIC ROUTES TO EXISTENCE

The big questions of philosophy often seem so profound as to merit answers so confusing that no one but a professional expert philosopher could even manage to understand. What is nature? What is existence? What is truth? What is goodness? What is beauty? Thankfully, there have been thinkers through the ages, who begin answering these big questions from simple, common sense starting points. St. Thomas Aquinas was one such philosopher, and G.K. Chesterton was another. Chesterton’s brilliant book on St. Thomas shows us the stark contrast between those thinkers like Aquinas who start from common sense experiences and those who do not. Chesterton wrote that modern philosophies start with a paradox, or something that “no normal man would believe” such as “everything is relative to a reality that is not there” or “that contradictories should exist together.” Whereas those thinkers who really get things right and who deserve both our admiration and whose ideas we should follow have philosophers that are grounded upon our common sense experience. Chesterton tells us that,

The philosophy of St. Thomas stands founded on the universal common conviction that eggs are eggs ... The Thomist stands in the broad daylight of the brotherhood of men, in their common consciousness that eggs are not hens or dreams or mere practical assumptions; but things attested by the Authority of the Senses, which is from God ... To this question "Is there anything?" St. Thomas begins by answering "Yes"; if he began by answering "No", it would not be the beginning, but the end. That is what some of us call common sense. Either there is no philosophy, no philosophers, no thinkers, no thought, no anything; or else there is a real bridge between the mind and reality. But he is actually less exacting than many thinkers, much less so than most rationalist and materialist thinkers, as to what that first step involves; he is content, as we shall see, to say that it involves the recognition of *Ens* or *Being* as something definitely beyond ourselves. *Ens* is *Ens*: Eggs are eggs, and it is not tenable that all eggs were found in a mare's nest (Chesterton 1933, p. 94).

Chesterton's idea delightfully put is an excellent starting point for our understanding of existence. From this understanding, we will then consider how what we know about the nature of reality should inform our understanding of nature itself. Specifically, in the second part of this paper, we will show how the Thomistic view of existence, derived from common sense experiences poses serious problems for natural existence monism.

We start with our ordinary experiences, and we develop our view of reality from there. Doing so requires some careful reflection and elaboration. This is the task of philosophical thinking. Such thinking is always based on experiences which can be had by anyone capable of having experiences, whether they will reflect on those experiences or not. If one is willing to look and to see that "eggs are eggs," that things are real, and that there are certain kinds of things which are not others, then one is on the first step of a longer analysis of the nature of existence. And it will be upon this careful reflection that we build our lives, including our understanding of the natural world. We will begin with two routes to understanding existence. We will then turn to see what the knowledge from these routes contributes to our knowledge of nature.

Thomas Aquinas claimed that "what is first apprehended by the intellect is being. Hence the intellect must attribute this (being) to whatever is apprehended by it. And so when it apprehends the essence of any being, it says that that essence is a being" (Aquinas, *De Veritate*).² It is from our acts of simple apprehension that we ground a theory of existence. We take those acts of simple apprehension, and we hold them before our "mind's eye" and consider what those simple acts tell us about the nature of existence. Since there

are two things which our intellect grasps: our own selves, and things other than ourselves, there will be two routes by means of which we come to see the nature of existence. This first part of this paper will elaborate and clarify these two routes as developed by two twentieth century philosophers: George Klubertanz and Edith Stein.

1.1 *The Exterior Route to Existence: George Klubertanz*

George Klubertanz claims that “according to St. Thomas, the human intellect must begin with sensible things, and hence all principles must somehow be found in sense experience” (Klubertanz, p. v). Not only does this mean that “sensible things can be understood as being” but also that we must find in the being our direct experience all the intrinsic principles of being” (p. vi). This means that when we have ordinary experiences, we know that the things we experience are real, and we can come to know the nature of reality itself. When we have a sense experience, seeing a crow on a fence for example, we know that the crow and the fence exist, but we also know what existence itself is. Klubertanz puts it this way. “The things that we directly and immediately assert to exist are the sensible things of our experience. . . and the judgments that we make about immediately experienced things are called perceptual judgments. The act of existing thus attained is the *esse* [essence] of a material, singular thing” (Klubertanz, p. 47).³ In what follows in this section, I present a brief summary from Klubertanz of how the process works as our minds move from common sense ordinary experiences to an understanding of the nature of existence. There are four steps in the process.⁴

Step 1 We have ordinary sense experiences and we apprehend (or simply see) objects as they are presented to us in our experiences. For example, I look out my window and see a black crow perched on the backyard fence. There they are: crow and fence.

Step 2 I can see or reflect upon the fact that each of these objects exist. I am aware that the crow is real and the fence is real. I see that each of them exists or has existence. There’s the crow. There’s the fence.

Step 3 We can see that there are both differences and similarities among the objects of our experiences. We see that the crow has being, and we can see the fence has being. We see that there is a difference between the crow existing and the fence existing. One exists as a *crow*, and the other exists as a *fence*. We see pretty clearly that *being a crow* and *being a fence* are

two *very* different things. Crows exemplify “crownness” and fences exemplify “fenceness.” But, we also see something in common between them. We see that the both have *being*. They both *exist*. Existence is shared by the crow and by the fence. We see that being or existence is something that both have in common. So now we have two very different things, crows and fences, but the main thing that they have in common is that they both exist.

So, now we make a generalized judgement about these two things.⁵ We judge that existence is something over and above the two particular things which we have apprehended. To help with this step, think of the way we come to make judgements about universal categories. For example, suppose I’ve never experienced a spherical object before. Suppose someone hands me a bag of ten round marbles each one a different size and color. I dump out the bag of marbles, and I immediately see spheres.⁶ I examine each marble, and see and feel the roundness of each one. I go through the whole bag this way, and I see that each marble is *different* (different size, different color), but they are also similar.⁷ There are different marbles, but each shares in being spherical. Because I see that this is so, I can make the judgement that “sphereness” is something that all the marbles have in common. The marbles are each different individuals, but they have something in common, namely “sphereness” or the property of being spherical. I see now that “being a sphere” is something over and above the particular things which are spheres. So too in the account of existence we are working through here, when I see a crow and see a fence, I see that they are different, but what they have in common is existence. So, in the example of the marbles, existence is like the “sphereness” which is had in common by particulars.

Step 4 At this step, we take the evidence (from the simple apprehension) that we have so far and make one final judgement. We judge that what each thing is, the crow and the fence is not the same as each of these thing’s existence. We simply see that “crownness” (being a *crow*, or existing *crowly*) and “fenceness” (being a *fence*, or existing *fencely*) is different than existence itself. Or to put it the other way around, we can see now that existence itself is not the same thing as any essence had by a particular thing. We judge that there is a difference between existence itself and the essences of things that do exist. We judge that there are essences to crows (that which makes *the thing on the fence* a crow and not a cat or a cabbage), and we judge that there are essences to fences (that which makes *the thing the crow is perched on* a fence and not a cat or a cabbage). We now have arrived at the end of our foundation for ontology, a study of existence. We now judge that what

makes crows and fences exist is the unity of the thing's essence with its act of existing. For a crow or a fence to exist is for each of them to actualize their essences.

Thus, we can conclude that existence is essential actualization. Crows exist because they exemplify the essence of crows, and fences exist because they exemplify the essence of fences. Essences are different from existence, and things exist because they exemplify essences. This will be the starting point of our reflection on what follows from the fact that existence is the actualization of an essence.

Let us turn at this point to a brief recapitulation of the four steps which we have just been through. These steps are written in a more formal way with direct quotations and reference from Klubertanz' work.⁸

1. S apprehends (i.e. has direct sensory experiences, i.e. simply sees) objects $O_1 \dots O_n$.
2. S sees "O₁ is," "O₂ is" ... "O_n is."⁹
3. S apprehends that there is a difference between $O_1, O_2, \dots O_n$ and the "is" or "being" of $O_1, O_2, \dots O_n$, since $O_1, O_2, \dots O_n$ are many/particular but "is" or "being" is one/general (i.e. "truly applied" equally to $O_1, O_2, \dots O_n$) (Klubertanz, p. 47).
 - 3.1 Klubertanz calls this a "disengagement" of "a common intelligibility from its original presentation in the completely singular sensible thing" (p. 47).
 - 3.2 Klubertanz claims that this is *not* an abstraction, as nothing is left out when we judge that being is not identical to any particular $O_1, \dots O_n$.
 - 3.3 Judging that "is" or "being" is distinct from particular things "expresses indefinitely a completely determined, singular thing... it has an indefinite reference to the singular as such" (p. 47). He calls this "the negative judgement of generalization."
4. Moving from sensible being to being of metaphysics involves the "discovery that 'is' asserts the *actuality* of, not the *nature* of [1] particular kinds of things which are 2) acting or being acted on, 3) knowing or being known, 4) singular, 5) sensible and material] (p. 50).
 - 4.1 The "discovery of the act of existing – esse – is the moment of discovery of metaphysics" (p. 50).
 - 4.2 From direct perceptual judgment "This is," we make a negative judgment, "and its actuality is not identical" to 1-5. This is a "judgment of separation" (p. 51).¹⁰ This judgment separates "the intelligibility of what it means *to be* from the intelligibility of what a sensible, material quiddity or essence is" (p. 51).

5. Summary

- 5.1 S simply apprehends $O_1, \dots O_n$
- 5.2 S judges that being is general from particulars $O_1, \dots O_n$ (judgment of generalization).
- 5.3 S judges that being is separate from properties of $O_1, \dots O_n$ (judgement of separation).
- 5.4 S knows that “to be” is in general to be in act, or to actualize an essence; being is essential actualization.¹¹

After seeing crows perched on fences (or any other sense perception) we come to know quite a bit about the nature of existence. We know that things exist and they exist because they actualize their essences. If our idea that existence is essential actualization, then it will follow that everything that exists actualizes an essence. As Maritain says, “The act of existing is the act *par excellence*, whether we consider it in this humble blade of grass or in the feeble beating of our heart, it is everywhere the act and the perfection of all form and all perfection” (Maritain, 36). It may also cause us to ask further questions like, why do things actualize their essences at all? What is the cause of things actualizing their essence? Is there something or someone whose essence and existence are the same? Once you start down this path of ontological reflection, there are many more questions to pursue for a fruitful area of inquiry.

1.2 *The Interior Route to Existence: Edith Stein*

Let us now examine another way to our knowledge of existence. When Aquinas indicates that “*what* is first apprehended by the intellect is being” he does not limit the intellect’s apprehension to sense experiences. In fact, one of the first, (if not temporally first, at least often experientially first) things we are aware of is ourselves. One of the first things that our intellect apprehends is itself. We know that we exist.¹² This is the interior route to our understanding of the nature of existence. We might call the exterior route Thomistic, and the interior route Augustinian. The significance of this idea was put forward by St. Augustine in *On the Trinity*. Augustine writes, “Of all the things we know, how much do we know the same certitude as we know that we exist?” (Stein, p. 35). In this section, we will examine a more recent description of this route given by Edith Stein.

According to Edith Stein, “Whenever the human mind in its quest for truth has sought an indubitably certain point of departure, it always encountered the inescapable *fact of its own being or existence*.” (Stein, 2002, p. 35). She goes on to quote Augustine, Descartes and Husserl as each in their

own way pointing to the undoubtable existence of the self, found in “the reality of my perception” (p. 36) of myself. Each of us can have the certitude of our own existence. We know that we exist.

A question now arises. This question is part of the philosophical journey which move us beyond a simple seeing of ourselves as existing to an elaboration of existence itself. Once our intellect sees its own existence, it raises from this fact the question “What is that being of which I am conscious?” This question is about the being of the self. It is about the nature of the existence that I have. Stein says that when we ask this sort of question, two things are revealed to us. First, we are aware of being, but we are also aware of not-being. Second, it is from this certitude that one can come to have knowledge of the idea of pure and eternal being.

Here is how these two things are revealed to us. We come to know the difference between being and not-being by starting with self-knowledge where the self can “contemplate the simple fact of its own being” (p. 37). But, we are also aware that the self, the “I am” can change. Thus, we are aware of being and not-being. Stein then claims that it is from our awareness of the difference between being and not-being that the “idea of pure being is revealed to us as unchanging, and eternal” (p. 37). This brings us to the starting point of our understanding of the nature of existence. Here is an elaboration of Stein’s interior route:

Step 1 I am aware of my own being.

Step 2 I am aware that the being in which I am is subject to change.

Step 3 I can infer that since being and the intellectual movement (i.e. my awareness of my own being) are not separated, the being which is my own is likewise subject to change.¹³

Step 4 We experience a movement from former past states of being, to present states of being.

Step 5 This means that “the being of which I am conscious as mine is inseparable from temporality” (p. 37). So, I know that my own being (the being which I am, which I have) is temporal.

Step 6 From our awareness of ourselves as temporal beings, we are aware of being which is always “now.” When we are aware of ourselves it is always

“now.” The being which we are aware of when we are aware of ourselves is always “now” and this is always between a “no longer” and “not yet.” This is what Stein calls eternal being.

Another way to think of this is the similar way in which we engage in “separation” of being from our experience of particulars. Think of it this way. At the first second, s_1 , we were aware of our *being* at s_1 . At s_2 , we were aware of our being at s_2 . At s_3 we were aware of being at s_3 , etc... . When we reflect on this, we see that there is a distinction between being at s_1 and s_2 and s_3 . s_1 , s_2 and s_3 are each very different points in time, and each has its own being which changes. At s_4 , the being of s_1 and s_2 is over and done with. Those moments of being are past and no longer exist¹⁴ after the intellectual movement which we were aware of during our ten second experiment. Now, here’s where the separation/abstraction comes in. We can reflect back on s_1 , s_2 , s_3 , s_4 , and s_5 and see that there is something in *common* which is had in the being of each of those moments of reflection. What is in common at each moment is being, and being is the same at each different temporal point.¹⁵ When we see this difference, the difference between being at different points in time (which fluctuates, comes and goes), and being over time, Stein says that “the *idea of pure being* is revealed to us” (p. 37). We see now that “pure being is not temporal but *eternal*” (p. 37).

In summary, at the end of the interior route, we find a true beginning, according to Stein. We find that we know that being is both temporal/finite and eternal/infinite. From reflection of on our own existence, we derive an awareness of both temporal and pure eternal being. It is from our temporal awareness of being that we become aware of “that eternal being which is immutable and therefore plentitude of being at every moment” (p. 37). Again, as with the exterior route to being, many more questions arise: Is there more to eternal being than being qua being? What is the relationship between temporal and finite being? What is the relationship between my being and eternal being? Each of these questions begins with simple reflection on one’s ordinary experiences and draws us to the pursuit of metaphysical knowledge of nature, and with hard work, metaphysical wisdom.

2 PART 2: NATURAL EXISTENCE MONISM IN LIGHT OF EXISTENCE AS ESSENTIAL EXEMPLIFICATION

In the previous section, two routes to the knowledge the existence is essential exemplification have been considered. If these two routes are reasonable, that is, if by means of reflection upon the contents of both common-sense

experience (from St. Thomas Aquinas) as well as our awareness of ourselves (from St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross), then, we really do have knowledge that existence is essential exemplification. If this is the case, then we can consider other possible claims about the nature of reality in light of this knowledge. In other words, starting from the knowledge about reality that is gained by the interior and exterior routes, we can evaluate alternative theories of reality.

The following section of this paper seeks to do just that. In this section we will consider one alternative account of reality, namely a form of materialist monism known as “blobjectivism” (See Horgan and Potrc 2000). This is the view that there is only one concrete object. It will be argued that if existence is essential exemplification, then several problems will arise for the reasonableness of the “blobjectivist” view. The view of the nature of reality given by the interior and exterior route above entails the absurdity of the monist view of reality presented by advocates of “blobjectivism.”

Consider the following five ideas.

- 1.1 Existence is essential exemplification (known by the interior and exterior routes above).
- 1.2 Only one concrete object, the blobject, exists (see Horgan and Potrc 2000).
- 1.3 Existence monism is understood as: $\exists x(Cx \wedge \forall y(Cy \rightarrow x = y))$ (see Shaffer 2015).¹⁶

Suppose we take the formalization of Natural Existence Monism, and de-formalize it into an ordinary statement by supposing that the name referred to in the formalization by the letter ‘C’ is the blobject, and the “predicates” or “properties” referred to by the variables ‘x’ and ‘y’ are the realities *essence* and *existence* respectively

- 1.3* $\exists x(Cx \wedge \{\forall y[Cy \rightarrow (x = y)]\})$ ¹⁷
 - 1.3.1 Suppose C = the property of being blobject.
 - 1.3.2 Suppose x = essence. This assumption is simply stating that essences are real, and that it is possible for them to have predicates true of them, including the predicate “the property of being the blobject.” This assumption has some justification given the knowledge that being is essential exemplification from section 1 above.
 - 1.3.3 Suppose y = existence. This assumption is simply stating that existence is real, and that it is possible for it to have predicates true of it, including the predicate “the property of being the blobject.” This assumption has some justification given the knowledge that being is essential exemplification from section 1 above.

- 1.3.4 $\exists x \{Cx \wedge [C.\text{existence} \rightarrow (C.\text{existence} = y)]\}$ is justified by way of “Universal Instantiation” (see Hurley p. 470).¹⁸
- 1.3.5 $C.\text{essence} \wedge [C.\text{existence} \rightarrow (C.\text{existence} = C.\text{essence})]$ is justified by way of “Existential Instantiation” (see Hurley p. 470).
- 1.3.6 Replacing C with “the property of being the blobject”, we have, “Essence has the property of being the blobject \wedge [Existence has the property of being the blobject \rightarrow (Existence has the property of being the blobject = Essence has the property of being the blobject)]”.
- 1.3.7 Replacing the logical operators with ordinary language, we would now have the following claim: If essence has the property of being the blobject, and if existence has the property of being the blobject, then essence and existence are identical for the blobject. Here one might wonder what it means for “essence” or “existence” to have the property of being the blobject. However, assuming that in a monistic ontology the only relation (including the *relation of having the property of being f*) is identity, then to say that “x has the property of being the blobject”, just is to say that “x is *identical* to being the blobject.” This implies that if essence is real, and if existence is real, that is if x and y can be substituted as real items of the universe which have the property of being identical to the blobject, (see Hurley’s discussion of the logical rule of “Universal Instantiation” and “Existential Instantiation,” Hurley pp 464-467), then this implies that essence and existence are identical for the blobject.

Let us now add two additional assumptions.

- 1.4 Assume Leibniz’s notion of the indiscernibility of identicals: $\forall x \forall y [(x = y) \rightarrow (\forall P)(Px \leftrightarrow Py)]$ (see Moreland and Craig 2009, p. 194). This notion does not seem particularly controversial here, but it will imply problems for monism when taken together with 1.1-1.3 and 1.5.
- 1.4.1 Let P = any property.
- 1.5 The blobject has no real parts (see Horgan and Potrc).

Three Problems At least three problems arise among 1.1-1.5. The first problem obtains between 1.1-1.4 taken together and centers on the distinction between essence and existence. The second is due to a non-monistic view of the existential quantifier in 1.3 taken together with 1.4. The third is a problem

between 1.1 and 1.5 taken together. I exam each of these problems in what follows.

2.1 1st Problem

If 1.1. is true, if existence is essential exemplification, implying that for anything that exists, it exists because it exemplifies (instantiates, actualizes) an essence, then for any metaphysically monistic view of nature, the one thing that exists (the blobject), exists because it exemplifies an essence. But if this is true, then there are some problems when considering how to formulate existence monism.

Consider the following formulation of existence monism. Existence monism is understood as: $\exists x (Cx \wedge \forall y (Cy \rightarrow x = y))$.

Suppose C = the property of being blobject.

Suppose x = essence

Suppose y = existence

Thus, substituting x and y for essence and existence respectively, natural monism would read as follows:

Natural Existence Monism (NEM): “If essence has the property of being the blobject, and if existence has the property of being the blobject, then essence and existence are identical for the blobject.”

If this is a correct understanding of natural existence monism, then several problems arise.

First, NEM implies that nature’s, the one thing that exists in the natural world i.e. the blobject’s, existence and its essence are identical. The question immediately arises: given 1.4, are there things that are possibly true of essences (including the blobject’s) that need not be true of existence (including the blobject’s)? Some possible things that can be true of essences that are not true of existence are the following.

First, it is at least logically possible that essences can exist un-instantiated. If this is true, then whatever the nature of the blobject’s essence, it is at least possible that it exist un-instantiated. However, if we ask whether existence can exist uninstantiated, this seems to lead to an obvious absurdity. For existence to exist, something must be instantiated. The idea of non-instantiated (thus non-existent) existence is absurd. So, if this is right, given the indiscernibility of identicals, since essences and existence are discernible with respect to the possibility of the former, but not the later existing un-instantiated, it would follow that the two are not

identical for a natural object. However, if they are not identical, then Natural Existence Monism cannot be true.

Second, it is possible to conceive that *existence* adds something to *essence*, but *not vice-versa*? For we can conceive of essences (e.g. caninity), and we can even conceive of essences being exemplified by a particular dog, Fido. However, these conceptions are distinct from the actualization of the essence caninity in a particular dog. Essences exemplified (i.e. existence) adds something to both the conception of an essence, and the conception of an actualized essence. Thus, existence adds something to essence.

What about the other way around? Does essence add something to existence? If existence is the actualization of an essence, then then no. An essence doesn't add something to existence, rather existence is essence in act. One reason for thinking this is that existence is always the existence of something (some essence); the idea of the existence of nothing (no essence) would be absurd.

A proponent of Natural Existence Monism would view existence and essence as identical. Given the law of indiscernibility of identicals, if there is no discernibility between existence and essence, then the two are identical. However, it appears that existence adds to essence, but essence does not add to existence. Thus, since essence and existence are discernible, they are, contrary to the Natural Existence Monist not identical. Thus, if essence and existence are not identical, then Natural Existence Monism cannot be true.

2.2 2nd Problem

To what extent does the expression of monism in 1.2 above rely on a non-monistic view of the existential quantifier? If the existential quantifier in 1.3 is understood following Frege as “explicitly analyzed quantification in terms of predication” (Uzquiano 2014) then what can predication amount to if 1.1 is the case?

Let us revisit the following formalization of existence monism as:
 $\exists x(Cx \wedge \forall y(Cy \rightarrow x = y))$

Suppose C= the property of being blobject.

Suppose x = essence.

Suppose y = existence.

Thus, substituting x and y for essence and existence respectively, natural monism would read as follows:

Natural Existence Monism (NEM): “If essence has the property of being

the blobject, and if existence has the property of being the blobject, then essence and existence are identical for the blobject.

The problem that appears here is how one reconciles a Fregean understanding of existential quantification in terms of predication given the identity of essence and existence in this formalization of natural existential monism. If the existential quantifier is understood in terms of predication, and if predication always the having of a property p by some subject S , then if monism were true, predication would be a relation, not of the *having* of a property p by subject S , but rather predication would be a relation of *identity*. The essence predicated and the subject of predication would be identical. However, in addition to the arguments raised in 2.1 against the identity of essence and existence for natural existence monism, there are some fairly common-sense reasons to disbelieve that predication is a relation of identity. Three problems arise here.

First, consider the distinction between accidental and essential predicates. The predicate of being brown, when predicated of a dog, is surely non-identical to the predicate of being a canine. A particular dog, e.g. Fido could lack the predicate of being brown and still exist and exist as Fido. But surely Fido could not lack the predicate of being a canine and still exist as a dog, even if he could exist as Fido.

Second, if predication is a relation of identity, then any two predicates would be identical. However, this also seems absurd when one considers the logical relations obtaining between various predicates such as: the predicate of being trilateral and the predicate of being quadrilateral. Being three sided is identical with being four sided?! Surely, this is absurd.

Third, if predication is nothing more than a relation of identity, then non-monic relations themselves become impossible. This would imply that predication, and all other relations just are the monadic relation of identity. However, the formalized expression of natural existence monism $\exists x(Cx \wedge \forall y(Cy \rightarrow x = y))$ relies not just on the existential quantifier, but also on the logical relations of conjunction and material implication. However, if natural existence monism were true, and if the existential quantifier is understood in terms of predication together imply that existential quantification is a monadic relation of identity, then conjunction and implication are also monadic relations of identity. However, this would imply that the truth tables for both conjunction and implication are identical, but they are not. A conjunction can be true in only one way (when both conjuncts are true) and false in three ways, whereas an implication can be true in three ways and only false in one way (when the antecedent is true and the con-

sequent is false). Thus, if NEM were true, then conjunction and implication are both relations of identity. However, a common-sense understanding of these logical operators would imply otherwise. And if the common sense understanding of these operators is correct, then NEM cannot be true.

2.3 3rd Problem

1.1 (existence should be understood as the actualization of an essence) and 1.5 (the blobject, the one thing that exists on view of nature as natural existence monism) entail the following dilemma: Either existence and essence are identical or existence and essence are non-identical. If they are identical, then we are faced with all the problems addressed in 2.1 above. However, if they are non-identical, and if natural existence monism requires that the blobject (the one natural thing that exists) has no real parts, then natural existence monism must be given up.

3 CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that existence should be understood as essential exemplification following Thomas Aquinas. The knowledge of this comes from our ordinary common-sense experiences of the natural world both exterior and interior. If this view is reasonable, then it implies the falsity of natural existence monism. We can add this view to the list of ideas which Chesterton considered at the beginning of this paper, a paradoxical view which runs contrary to common sense.

WORKS CITED

- Anderson, James F., and Clarke, Norris W. 1997. *An Introduction to the Metaphysics of St. Thomas Aquinas*. Washington DC: Gateway Editions.
- Aquinas, Thomas. 1953. *Questiones Disputatae de Veritate*, Translated by Robert W. Schmidt, S.J. Chicago: Henry Regnery. Retrieved from <http://dhspriority.org/thomas/english/QDdeVer21.htm>
- 1997. *On Being and Essence*. Translated by Robert T. Miller. Retrieved from <http://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/aquinas-esse.asp>
- 1953. *On The Power of God*. Translated by the English Dominican Fathers, html edition by Joseph Kenny, O.P. Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press. Retrieved from: <http://dhspriority.org/thomas/QDdePotentia.htm>

- 1947. *The Summa Theologica*. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. New York: Benzinger Bros. Retrieved from: <http://dhspriority.org/thomas/summa>
- Chesterton, G.K. 1933. *Thomas Aquinas*. New York: Sheed and Ward.
- Horgan, Terry and Matjaz Potrc. 2000. “Blobjectivism and Indirect Correspondence.” *Facta Philosophica* 2 (2):249-270.
- Hurley, Patrick. 2008. *A Concise Introduction to Logic*, 12th. Ed. Stamford, CT: Cengage.
- Klubertanz, George. 2005. *Introduction to the Philosophy of Being*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock.
- Maritain, Jacques. 1948. *Existence and the Existent*. New York: Pantheon.
- Maurer, Armand. 1986. *St. Thomas Aquinas The Division and Methods of the Natural Sciences: Questions V and VI of His Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius*, 4th Rev. Ed. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies.
- Moreland, James Porter; William Lane Craig 2003. *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.
- Schaffer, Jonathan. 2015. “Monism”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.). Retrieved from: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2015/entries/monism/>
- Stein, Edith. 2002. *Finite and Eternal Being*, Washington DC: ICS Publications.
- Uzquiano, Gabriel. 2014. “Quantifiers and Quantification”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), Retrieved from: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/quantification>.
- Wippel, John. 2000. *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*. Baltimore: The Catholic University of America Press.

NOTES

1. Portions of this paper were completed through a research grant from Acton Institute. Special thanks is also due to Josef Seifert, the faculty at the International Academy of Philosophy, in Granada, Spain and Eddie Colanter and R. Scott Smith for conversations about the topics addressed in this paper.
2. Aquinas says, “Since being and essence are the things first conceived of by the intellect” (*On Being and Essence*, <http://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/aquinas-esse.asp>).
3. By *esse*, Klubertanz means essence.
4. The key passage from Aquinas’ work on this is from his commentary on Boethius’ *De Trinitate*.
“We conclude that there are three kinds of distinction in the operation of

the intellect. *There is one through the operation of the intellect joining and dividing which is properly called separation and this belongs to divine science or metaphysics.* There is another through the operation by which the quiddities of things are conceived which is the abstraction of form from sensible matter, and this belongs to mathematics. And there is a third through the same operation which is the abstraction of a universal from a particular, and this belongs to physics and to all the sciences in general, because science disregards accidental features and treats of necessary matters. And because certain men (for example, the Pythagoreans and the Platonists) did not understand the difference between the last two kinds of distinction and the first, they fell into error, asserting that the objects of mathematics and universals exist separate from sensible things” (Maurer 1986, p. 41.).

See also Wippell pp 46ff for an additional discussion of this which relies in part on Klubertanz’ work.

5. Klubertanz claims, “Being cannot be reached by abstraction. In other words, the knowledge of being is not a simple concept (apprehension) of an essence” (p. 46). He maintains that we can have *knowledge* of being *qua* being, but not by apprehension. He claims that there are other forms of intellectual knowledge other than apprehension. One such form is judgment, which he calls “that act of the mind by which we assert (or deny) that something *is*” (p. 46). He claims that an act of judgment “directly reaches the esse [being in act] of a thing.” (p. 46). Although the judgement is distinct from an act of apprehension, it does “virtually” contain an apprehension of an essence. He states that the judgement “does not contain an apprehension as a distinct act, but has a function equivalent to that of an apprehension” (p. 46, footnote 19).
6. Even if I didn’t have word to describe the property of being a sphere, I could still see the sphere, even if I didn’t see it *as* a “sphere.”
7. This is a way to understand the negative aspects of the judgement of separation.
8. For a very similar treatment of these four steps see the Jacques Maritain’s very long footnote in *Existence and the Existent*, pp. 26-28, footnote 13 (Maritain 1948).
9. Could anyone really deny this?
10. See Wippel p. 46ff. The text from Aquinas that these ideas are taken from in part come from *Super Boethium De Trinitate*, q. 5, a. 3, where in the “reply” section Aquinas discusses the notion of separation.
11. Thomas’ claims about what the word “being” means: “*Being* properly signifies: something-existing-in-act.” (Anderson and Clarke, p. 20) This quotation comes from the *Summa Theologica* (ST 1, 5, 1 ad 1).
12. This sort of self-knowledge need not be part and parcel of a Cartesian search for epistemic certitude. It is simply an awareness of one’s self which occurs in the ordinary course of human experience.
13. In a footnote to this quotation, Stein indicates that Husserl uses the notion of *act* here to refer to that which she calls “intellectual movement” (Stein p. 37, footnote 9.)
14. This discussion here presupposes of an “A Theory” view of time.
15. This is analogous to the way in which we can see that there is being which is

- common between the crow and the fence. Although each of these has its own being, there is being independent of these two things which makes them both exist.
16. Shaffer's formulation indicates that 'C' in $\exists x(Cx \wedge \forall y(Cy \rightarrow x = y))$ denotes "the property of being a concrete object" (Shaffer 2015) which could "identify the One with the whole cosmos (Horgan Potrc's 'bobject')" (Shaffer 2015).
 17. 1.3* attempts to show more explicitly the logical relations and scope of the quantifiers involved.
 18. If 1.3.4 were a line in a proof, then one would be justified in using the rule of "Universal Instantiation," which according to standard formal logical deductive rules "provides us with an instance of the universal statement" (Hurley p. 464).
-

© 2017 Tim Mosteller & Forum. Supplement to Acta Philosophica



Quest'opera è distribuita con Licenza [Creative Commons Attribuzione - Non commerciale - Non opere derivate 4.0 Internazionale](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

[Testo completo della licenza](#)