

Hylomorphism between Thomism and Scotism

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I

Hylomorphism is naturally perceived as a kind of common ground of the entire Aristotelian-scholastic tradition. Of course there are different interpretations of the doctrine and its core notions, but – or at least so it may seem – the basic tenets, like that every material substance is composed of prime matter and at least one substantial form, that matter relates to form as a potency to an act, that substances can be further actuated by additional determinations called accidental forms, and so on, are shared universally across all the various scholastic schools and particular elaborations of the doctrine.

In this paper, I would like to challenge this view. I would like to suggest that under the guise of common nomenclature, there are in fact two radically different philosophical conceptions fighting each other – conceptions not just of material reality but of reality as such: two radically different metaphysical worlds. Putting aside many complications and necessary qualifications, we can say that one of these conceptions is that of the Thomists, while the “rest of the world”, so to speak, shares the other.

I am aware, of course, that such a general claim cannot be properly justified within the confines of one paper. Inevitably, then, my approach will drastically abbreviate. For one thing, I will assume on the part of the reader familiarity with the general outlines of the Thomistic theory. I include here the notorious doctrines of prime matter as pure potency,¹ unicity of substantial

1 Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *De principiis naturae* [subs. abbr. as DPN], c. 2: “[Materia prima] per se nunquam potest esse, quia cum in ratione sua non habeat aliquam formam, non habet esse in actu, cum esse in actu non sit nisi a forma, sed est solum in potentia. Et ideo quicquid est actu, non potest dici materia prima.” Joannes Versor [† c. 1485], *Quaestiones super De ente et essentia sancti Thomae de Aquino ordinis fratrum praedicatorum*, q. 13, sciendum 1°. Ederunt M. Severa – L. Novák. *Studia Neoaristotelica*, 5, 2008, 2, s. 247, l. 25–26: “Forma est proprius actus materiae, nam materia secundum se accepta est pura potentia nullam habens actualitatem. Si igitur materia habeat actum, oportet quod habeat per formam, ad quam est in potentia. Omnis autem materia de se sit in potentia – patet, quia unumquodque imperfectum est in potentia ad sua perfectionem. Sed materia de se turpis est et imperfecta, et perficitur per formam. Ideo

form,² and resolution down to prime matter at substantial change (“usque ad materiam primam”).³ Assuming familiarity here will allow me to focus

materia est in potentia ad formam.” Ibid., q. 13, c. 2: “Si materia sit, ipsa habebit suum proprium esse et suum proprium actum. Sed actus eius est forma [...]” Ibid., q. 13, dub. 1^o: “Si esset [materia] sine forma, esset ens et etiam non ens, quia non haberet suum proprium actum, per quem solum sibi convenit esse.” João Poinset [Joannes a S. Thoma], *Cursus philosophicus Thomisticus* [hereinafter *CP*], pars 2, q. 3, a. 2. Lugduni, sumpt. Arnaud et al. 1678, p. 362a: “Materia secundum se est in potentia ad actum formalem, et ad actum entitativum, ita quod non habet immediatum ordinem ad existentiam, sed mediante forma, cuius est prius susceptiva, quam existentiae.” Gredt, J., *Elementa philosophiae Aristotelico-Thomisticae*. Editio 13, recognita et aucta ab E. Zenzen O.S.B. Herder, Barcinone–Friburgi Brigisoviae–Romae–Neo Eboraci 1961 [subs. abbr. as *Elementa*], vol. 1, *Philosophia naturalis*, th. 5, p. 240: “Materia prima est pura potentia, forma vero substantialis actus substantialis primus.” All italics in quotes are original, unless indicated otherwise. For simplicity, I omit square brackets in case of mere capitalization of the first letter of a quote; and I also silently expand abbreviations as suitable. Proposed emendations of the quoted text are marked by angle/curly brackets (for additions/deletions respectively).

2 Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *In De anima* II, lect. 1, n. 14: “Haec est differentia formae substantialis ad formam accidentalem, quod forma accidentalis non facit ens actu simpliciter, sed ens actu tale vel tantum, utputa magnum vel album vel aliquid aliud huiusmodi. Forma autem substantialis facit esse actu simpliciter. Unde forma accidentalis advenit subiecto iam praesistenti actu. Forma autem substantialis non advenit subiecto iam praesistenti in actu, sed existenti in potentia tantum, scilicet materiae primae. Ex quo patet, quod impossibile est unius rei esse plures formas substantiales; quia prima faceret ens actu simpliciter, et omnes aliae advenirent subiecto iam existenti in actu, unde accidentaliter advenirent subiecto iam existenti in actu, non enim facerent ens actu simpliciter sed secundum quid.” *CP*, pars 3, q. 1, a. 3, p. 741a: “Tamquam certa conclusio, et communi authorum approbatione recepta statuendum est, *In nullo composito substantiali, quod est unum per se, posse dari plures formas substantiales, neque propter diversa praedicata, seu gradus, neque propter diversitatem propter diversitatem partium heterogenearum.*” Gredt, J., *Elementa*, vol. 1, *Philosophia naturalis*, n. 260, p. 243: “Ergo non possunt duae formae substantiales simul informare eandem materiam [...]”. Forma enim superveniens formae iam non esset actus substantialis primus [...]”; *ibid.*, vol. 2, *Metaphysica*, th. 18, p. 141: “Non potest ex duabus substantiis constitui una natura, nisi utraque substantia sit incompleta: altera pura potentia, altera ut actus eius substantialis primus.”

3 Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones quodlibetales* I, q. 4, a. 1, co.: “Frustra [...] esset in homine alia anima sensitiva praeter intellectivam, ex quo anima intellectiva virtute continet sensitivam, et adhuc amplius; sicut frustra adderetur quaternarius posito quinario. Et eadem ratio est de omnibus formis substantialibus usque ad materiam primam; ita quod non est in homine diversas formas substantiales invenire, sed solum secundum rationem; sicut consideramus eum ut viventem per animam nutritivam, et ut sentientem per animam sensitivam, et sic de aliis. Manifestum est autem quod semper, adveniente forma perfecta, tollitur forma imperfecta, sicut etiam adveniente figura pentagoni, tollitur quadrati. Unde dico, quod adveniente anima humana, tollitur forma substantialis quae prius inerat; alioquin generatio esset sine corruptione alterius, quod est impossibile. Formae vero accidentales quae prius inerant disponentes ad animam, corrumpuntur quidem non per se, sed per accidens ad corruptionem subiecti: unde manent eadem specie, sed non eadem numero; sicut etiam contingit circa dispositiones formarum elementarium, quae primitus materiae advenire apparent.” *CP*, pars 2, q. 1, a. 6, p. 592a: “De resolutione omnis formae substantialis in praesenti non tractamus, sed supponimus totaliter spoliari materiam forma substantiali, quando fit generatio, eo quod in composito non sunt plures formae substantiales. [...] *De resolutione ergo omnis formae accidentalis difficultas est.*”; *ibid.*, p. 593a: “[S]ententia S. Thom. est, *In generatione substantiali fieri resolutionem accidentium, ita ut nullum, quod erat in corrupto, relinquatur in genito, sed de novo producatur.*” Gredt, J., *Elementa*, vol. 1, *Philosophia naturalis*, th. 19, p. 316: “In generatione substantiali, cum corrup-

on the opposite philosophical party. Moreover, from the still quite large pool of doctrinal variants I will chose just a single representative (or, in fact, a pair of representatives), namely the Prince of Scotists Bartolomeo Mastri, together with his overshadowed colleague and co-author of the greater part of his *Philosophiae ad mentem Scoti cursus integer*, Bonaventura Belluto.⁴ This choice is justified by several considerations. First, Mastri is arguably the most luminous figure of the 17th-century Scotism, and, by implication, of Scotism as such, and so makes for a respectable representative of the entire anti-Thomist cohort. Moreover, his and Belluto's philosophical *Cursus* is probably the most detailed and comprehensive systematic treatment of the whole of scholastic philosophy. Mastri and Belluto's work also has the virtue that it provides a rich panoramic view of the entire landscape of then-current scholastic thought, since they not only cite their sources and opponents by name, but also relate their views and arguments with admirable reliability and precision.⁵

Still, Mastri and Belluto's treatment of hylomorphism spans some 170 folio pages of dense argumentation. From among this overwhelming amount of material I will focus on a single topic, which I consider crucial for my argument: namely the nature of prime matter, and, to a lesser extent, of substantial form.

My paper has three parts. The first one is just over. In the second part, I will put forth some basic theses on matter and related topics extracted form Mastri and Belluto's exposition. Finally, I will turn to the broader context of the problem and present my understanding of the ultimate conceptual background of the Scotist–Thomist dispute, and so try to justify my thesis.

II

Mastri and Belluto's treatment of hylomorphism (based, of course, on Aristotle's *Physics*) is twofold: they treat matter and form first (together with privation) as principles of material things *in becoming* (*in fieri*), i.e., of substantial change, and then as principles of material being *in being there* (*in facto esse*). The most important theses of matter and form, however, are contained

tionem substantiae producitur nova, fit resolutio usque ad materiam primam, nulla remanente forma neque substantiali neque accidentali."

- 4 I use the following edition: Bartholomaei Mastrii [...] et Bonaventurae Belluti [...] *Philosophiae ad mentem Scoti cursus integer*. Tomus secundus: [...] Disputationes ad mentem Scoti in Aristotelis Stagiritae libros Physicorum. Venetiis, apud Nicolaum Pezzana 1727 [subs. abbr. as *Physica*].
- 5 For a brilliant in-depth analysis of the hylomorphic theory in Duns Scotus himself see Ward, T. M., *Duns Scotus on Parts, Wholes and Hylomorphism*. Leiden, Brill 2014.

already in the first treatment, forming *Disputation 2* of their tome on natural philosophy; and I will focus mostly on that.⁶

The first concern of Mastri and Belluto is to demonstrate the very *existence* of matter and form. Although they regard this thesis as so obvious that it needs virtually no demonstration,⁷ they nevertheless provide three standard arguments. First, were it not for hylomorphic composition of bodies, things would be created and annihilated, or perhaps transubstantiated, instead of being generated and corrupted; but these are naturally impossible ways of coming to be or perishing.⁸ Second, were it not for substantial forms, material substances would not be specifically different from each other, but they evidently are.⁹ Third, it is evident that not all changes are merely accidental. For example, when a piece of food is turned into the flesh of a living being by nutrition, the respective change can hardly be regarded as merely accidental.¹⁰ Therefore, hylomorphic composition is required within substances, too.

But what is the nature of this matter corresponding to a substantial form? This is the next question Mastri and Belluto raise, and from this point on, their exposition inevitably assumes the form of an anti-Thomistic polemic. For the fundamental point of dispute is, whether matter is a potency so pure and naked, that it excludes not just any *formal* act (i.e. any form, substantial

6 The structure of Mastri and Belluto's treatment of matter and form can be gleaned from the titles of the first five disputations of their tome on Physics:

1: *De principiis rerum naturalium in fieri.*

2: *De principio materiali, et formali mutationis substantialis.*

3: *De principio materiali, et formali mutationis accidentalis.*

4: *De privatione.*

5: *De principiis intrinsecis in facto esse.*

Disputations 1–4 treat the “principles *in fieri*” or principles of change: (1) in general, (2) substantial form and the corresponding matter, (3) accidental form and the corresponding matter, (4) privation. Disputation 5 treats the “principles *in facto esse*”: i.e. matter and form *qua* material and formal cause of the composite.

7 “Dicimus, ita certum esse, dari in rerum natura materiam, et formam substantialem, ut quasi probatione non indigeat.” Mastrius – Bellutus, *Physica*, d. 2, q. 1, a. 1, n. 2, p. 38a.

8 “Si non daretur [materia], res omnes fierent ex nihilo, et in nihilum redirent; atque ita productio omnis esset creatio, aut transsubstantiatio, et omnis corruptio esset annihilatio, sed ex nihilo nihil fit naturaliter, et nulla res in poenitus nihil desinit, ergo danda est materia, ex qua, tanquam ex subiecto primo omnia fiant, et in quod tanquam in ultimum resolvantur [...]” *Ibid.*

9 “Necesse est admittere principium quo una substantia materialis ita in suo esse constituitur, ut per illud substantialiter differat ab alia re quacunq[ue], illo principio constitutivo carente; sed talis esse nequit, nisi forma substantialis, etgo etc.” *Ibid.*, p. 38b.

10 “Non [...] solùm da(n)tur mutationes accidentales, sed etiam substantiales, nam ex aqua fit aer, ex ligno ignis, et ex alimento non vivente fit vivens; at huiusmodi, mutationes fieri nequeunt per corruptionem, et generationem primi subiecti, quia tunc forent creationes, et annihilationes, ergo permanet sub utroque termino unum primum, et commune subiectum; pariter per huiusmodi transmutationes non acquiruntur nova accidentia sola, aut deperduntur; dum alimentum fit vivens non acquirit solùm accidens, dum corpus vivens interit, non solùm accidens amittit, ergo termini harum mutationum sunt formæ substantiales.” *Ibid.*

or accidental), but also any *entitative* act – which is the claim associated with Thomists.¹¹ Or whether it, on the contrary, has an *actus entitativus* proper to itself – which is the Scotist position. But what is an entitative act, or what it means for matter to be endowed with entitative act? This is also a matter of dispute. Mastri and Belluto list no less than *four* different Thomistic positions in that regard:

(1) “Older Thomists” – and, it would seem, the only faction that seems to implement Thomistic principles consistently – simply claim that prime matter is absolutely devoid of any entity or entitative act, whatever that may be, to the effect that *all the entity* of matter derives from the form.¹² In Mastri and Belluto’s eyes, this is clearly an extreme view.¹³

(2) Other Thomists, according to Mastri and Belluto “*magis D. Thomae mentem penetrantes*” (i.e. having better grasp of Aquinas’s mind), (i) identify *actus entitativus* with existence, and (ii) concede to matter its own entity and essence but not its own existence or *actus entitativus* (in their sense). This is, according to Mastri and Belluto, a more common view.¹⁴

11 “Explicaverunt Thomistæ essentiam materiæ per hoc, quòd in genere, et coordinatione entium sit nuda, et pura potentia, omnem prorsus excludens actum, etiam entitativum [...]” Ibid., a, 2, n. 6, p. 39a.

12 “Veteres Thomistæ ita mordicus a natura materiæ excluderunt omne(m) actum entitativum, ut in tota entium coordinatione nullum gradum entis illi adscripserint, sed omnem eius entitatem, et actualitatem in formam retulerint; ita ut entitas actualis materiae non sit alia præter entitatem formæ, sed sit eadem entitas formæ communicata formaliter ipsi materiæ [...]” Ibid., p. 39a-b.

13 It is not clear to me who these “older Thomists” are supposed to have been. Not John Capreolus, who concedes a “positive, albeit potential entity” to prime matter, while responding to Scotus’s argument that only that which has some positive entity in itself can be said to “receive” (“recipere” non convenit nisi habenti in se prius aliquam entitatem positivam” – see note 35). Capreolus responds: “Dicitur quod solum concludit, quod materia prima habet aliquam entitatem positivam, actualem vel potentialem; sed non concludit quod illa sit actualis.” Joannes Capreolus, *Defensiones theologiae Divi Thomae Aquinatis*, lib. II, dist. 13, q. 1, a. 3, § 1, n. II, ad arg. 5^{am}, ad prob. 4^{am}. Ed. C. Paban et T. Pègues, tom. IV, Turonibus, sumpt. A. Cattier 1903, p. 31b. In a similar way, Versor’s formulations quoted in note 1 only imply that all *actuality* of matter is given to it by the form, nothing is said about the *entity* of matter: and these two are not the same for Thomists, as can be seen in Capreolus (and cf. also note 14).

14 This seems to be expressly the view J. Poinso: “Formalem actum vocamus formam constituentem cum materia aliquod tertium; actum verò entitativum, existentem per quam aliquid formaliter constituitur extra causas. [...] Nunc autem qui cum Aristotele sentiunt materiam esse ens in potentia, et aliunde non possunt percipere quod illud quod non est ens actu, sit aliquid reale, sed solum nihil, intelligunt materiam non dici ens in potentia quasi careat existentia [...], sed solum [...] forma informantem, quae vocatur actus formalis, non quia caret existentia, quae vocatur actus entitativus. Et haec sententia sumit suum principium ex eo, quod existimat existentiam non distingui à quacumque entitate reali, hoc ipso quod realis est [...] quia remotà existentia, omnis realitas removetur [...]. Nunc autem supponimus fuisse semper communem sententiam usque ad hæc nostra tempora, distinctionem aliquam a parte rei dari inter essentiam realem et existentiam [...]” CP, pars. 2, q. 3, a. 2, p. 362a. Cf. also Gredt, J., *Elementa*, vol. 1, Philosophia naturalis, n. 261a, p. 243: “Inter merum nihil et actum datur tertium: r e a l i s

(3) Some recent Thomists, or would-be Thomists (Mastri and Belluto list Domingo Soto, but also the Jesuits Conimbricenses and Ruvius), went even further and ascribed to matter not just its proper entity and essence, but also existence distinct from the existence of form. But on the other hand, they denied to matter an *actus entitativus*, which, according to them, is not the same item as existence.¹⁵

(4) Still others, (and Mastri and Belluto wonder that even some from among the Dominican family) like e.g. Diego Mas, distinguished between existence and *actus entitativus* as well, but they (in Mastri and Belluto's eyes quite strangely) denied existence to matter, while conceding to it an *actus entitativus*.¹⁶

Mastri and Belluto conclude from all this, first, that despite their rhetoric, no Thomist actually takes the absolute purity of the potentiality of prime matter so seriously as to reduce it to a mere objective potency. So, in the Scotists' eyes, the Thomists' "pure potency" is not in fact as pure as it might be expected.¹⁷ And second, they note that unless the Thomistic position is understood in the (to them) radical sense of the "older Thomists", the dispute between the Thomists and the non-Thomists turns out to be merely verbal. For all the remaining three interpretations concede that matter *does* have some intrinsic reality, actuality or entity, however that may be called, and nothing more is claimed in the Scotistic position. However, the two Scotists add, the radical Thomistic interpretation is untenable, since to deny to matter any intrinsic entity or reality *whatsoever* and say that it receives it all from the form just is to make the form the only single principle of material beings, and thus to contradict the already established conclusion that material beings are hylomorphically composed.¹⁸

potentia. Materia utpote pura potentia nullo modo significat actum seu perfectionem, sed omni ex parte potentialitatem, imperfectiorem, est *tamen ens reale*, sed prorsus imperfectum, ultima linea realitatis, pura potentia realis [...]" [Italics mine, spacing original.]

15 "Recentiores aliqui Thomistæ ulterius per(r)exerunt, quidam enim concesserunt materiæ nedum suam partialem entitatem, sed etiam existentiam realiter distinctam ab existentia formæ, et adhuc actum entitativum eidem denegarunt concedentes existentiam hoc nomine appellari non posse [...]" Mastrius – Bellutus, *Physica*, d. 2, q. 1, a. 2, n. 6, p. 39b.

16 "Alii è contra etiam ex familia Dominicana (quod mirabilis est) negant materiæ propriam existentiam, et concedunt actum entitativum, quia volunt actum ejusmodi importare non rei existentiam, sed intrinsecam quandam et transcendentalem perfectionem cujusunque entis [...]" Ibid.

17 "Ex quo duo colligere licet, primum est nullum Thomistarum materiam primam ita puram potentiam fecisse, ut eam posuerit in sola potentia obiectiva [...]" Ibid., n. 7, p. 39b.

18 "Alterum [colligendum] est, hanc quaestionem esse de nomine, nisi in sensu veterum Thomistarum sustineatur, in quo nullo modo defendi potest, quia tunc materia non esset comparata cum forma, compositum esset simplex, et alia sequerentur absurda [...], nam in altero sensu, quod tribuitur materiæ distincta entitas in rerum natura ab entitate formæ, licet non distincta

This move is characteristic for the Scotistic attitude to the Thomistic doctrine of matter as pure potentiality: they cannot imagine how the Thomistic doctrine can be maintained without either being *evidently* false, or coinciding with their own. I hope that the reason why this is so will be made clear in the final part of my paper.

The fruit of the long and detailed discussion of the Thomistic alternative(s) which follows (whose nature and results, however, are pre-determined by the basic strategy I have just sketched) is the real definition of matter: matter is *an imperfect and incomplete substance, the first subject of all forms and changes, and an essential part of the substantial composite in the manner of a per se potency*.¹⁹ Note the reistic language employed: matter is called a *substance*, albeit incomplete and imperfect, and *subject* without any qualification.²⁰

The treatment of substantial form by Mastri and Belluto is considerably shorter.²¹ The main problematic point of the doctrine is, how substantial form is to be distinguished against accidental form. Substantial form is defined by everyone as the *primary act* of matter.²² What that means is clear in the Thomistic system, where there can only be *one* substantial form in a given substance and all accidental forms inhere strictly in the already constituted composite.²³ The Scotists, however, maintain that there usually is a plurality of forms in a substance,²⁴ and they even concede that some accidents inhere

existentia, jam convenit D. Thom[as] cum Scoto secundum rem ipsam, Doctor enim [...] aliud probare non intendit, quam materiam non esse in potentia obiectiva tantum [...].” Ibid.

19 “Est igitur [materia prima] substantia quaedam imperfecta, et incompleta, subiectum primum omnium formarum et transmutationum, et pars essentialis compositi substantialis per modum per se potentiae; [...]” Ibid., n. 23, p. 43b.

20 Compare this with Aquinas, DPN, c. 1: “Proprie loquendo, quod est in potentia ad esse accidentale dicitur subiectum, quod vero est in potentia ad esse substantiale, dicitur proprie materia. Quod autem illud quod est in potentia ad esse accidentale dicitur subiectum, signum est quia dicuntur esse accidentia in subiecto, non autem quod forma substantialis sit in subiecto. Et secundum hoc differt materia a subiecto: quia subiectum est quod non habet esse ex eo quod advenit, sed per se habet esse completum, sicut homo non habet esse ab albedine. Sed materia habet esse ex eo quod ei advenit, quia de se habet esse incompletum. Unde, simpliciter loquendo, forma dat esse materiae, sed subiectum accidenti, licet aliquando unum sumatur pro altero scilicet materia pro subiecto, et e converso.”

21 Spanning less than a single page: Mastrius – Bellutus, *Physica*, disp. 2, q. 1, a. 3, n. 24–26, p. 44a-b.

22 “Forma est actus primarius materiae, unum per se cum ea constituere natus; [...]” Ibid., n. 24, p. 44a.

23 See note 2.

24 “Objicies. Primò, quia dantur aliquæ formæ substantiales, quæ essentialiter ordinantur ad alias, ac proinde esse perfectum, et {in}completum non tribuunt, sed incompletum potius, et quasi genericum, sic se habet forma mixti in viventibus in ordine ad animam, vegetativa in ordine ad sensitivam, et sensitiva in ordine ad intellectivam in opinione ponente tres animas, ergo malè explicata est ratio formæ substantialis, quòd det esse completum, et specificum.” Mastrius – Bellutus, *Physica*, disp. 2, q. 1, a. 3, n. 25, p. 44a.

directly in the matter (for example, the relation of its union to form²⁵). So it seems that in this doctrine some substantial forms will not be primary, and, conversely, some accidental forms will be primary.²⁶

Mastri and Belluto cite Scotus's own reply to these kinds of worries: "primary" and "secondary", as distinguishing substantial from accidental forms, must not be understood according to the "order of introduction" of the forms into matter (which is how the Thomists interpret the definition). Rather, the priority and posteriority involved is that of *nature*. A form naturally prior or primary is such that it imparts *esse simpliciter* to its subject, while a form naturally posterior only imparts *esse secundum quid* – *irrespective of the actual order according to which these forms inhere in the matter*.²⁷ In other words: the "substantiality" of a form must be considered as part of the intrinsic nature of the given form, which, according to Mastri and Belluto, imparts primary, that is substantial, formal being to whatever it joins, and whenever (in whichever order) it joins it. A substantial form is not "substantial" because it "comes first" to naked prime matter, but because it has, of itself, substantial nature, *viz.* the capacity to formally cause a substance. Unlike the Thomist doctrine, then, there is no reductive analysis of substantiality in Scotism.

For the sake of brevity, I will refrain now from digging further into Mastri and Belluto's rich and dense presentation of their interpretation of the hylomorphic theory, and proceed on to the wider context and background of the Thomist-Scotist dispute, in order to derive some general conclusions.

25 Perhaps a less contentious Scotistic example than that of quantity (see note 26).

26 "Secundò [objicies]. Si differentia posita inter formam substantialem, et accidentalem à Scoto posita valet, nimirum, quod illa sit actus primarius, hæc secundarius materiæ primæ, sequitur aliquam formam substantialem esse accidentalem et aliquam accidentalem esse substantialem; si enim quantitas, v.g. immediatè recipitur in materia, et postmodum forma substantialis, quia est actus primarius materiæ, et anima, quia non primo advenit materiæ, sed post formam mixtionis, esset forma accidentalis, quia est actus secundarius." *Ibid.*, n. 26, p. 44b.

27 "Respondetur negando, esse de ratione formæ substantialis in communi, ut ab accidentali distinguitur, quòd constituat semper rem in esse perfecto et ultimo, sed [...] quòd det constituto esse simpliciter, ut esse simpliciter contradistinguitur ab esse secundum quid, quod à forma accidentali tribuitur." *Ibid.*, n. 25, p. 44a. "Non discernimus formam substantialem ab accidentali per hoc, quod substantialis est actus primarius, et dat esse primum materiæ, et composito, quod constituit; accidentalis vero est actus secundarius, et dat esse secundum, non debet accipi prius et posterius, ut præcisè dicit ordinem introductionis formarum in materia, sed ut significat primum naturaliter et secundum naturaliter; illud enim est esse simpliciter, hoc verò secundum quid, quia esse simpliciter præcedit naturaliter esse secundum quid; quamvis igitur quantitas primo adveniens materiæ dat primum esse formale in primo sensu, non tamen in secundo, et quia cuicumque, et quandomcumque adveniat, semper tribuit esse secundum quid, et è contra, quamvis forma substantialis adveniat materiæ secundò et tertio, semper daret esse primum in hoc secundo sensu, esse nimirum simpliciter."

III

Above I have suggested that in the scholastic tradition there are two radically different hylomorphic theories: one Thomistic and one non-Thomistic. Now why do I say that these are not two variants of essentially the same doctrine, but rather two radically distinct philosophical views concerning the nature of material reality, and, implicitly, of reality in general?

The reason is that if I interpret the two hylomorphisms correctly, they are theories serving different purposes, or attempting to explain different things.

Take Thomistic hylomorphism. Its basic tenet (though not always carried through consistently) is that matter and form are not *beings*, but *principles of a being*. According to the orthodox Thomists, the level of being is only reached when the *actus essendi* comes in; a *being* is that which is endowed with *actus essendi*, nothing else. But that means that the entire analysis which precedes the introduction of *actus essendi* (that is, both the essence-existence composition and the matter-form composition) is, so to speak, a sub-entitative analysis. It is not, or would not be if consistently carried through, an analysis of complex entities into simple entities. It is an analysis of entities into items which are not, properly speaking, entities. *This* is the reason why the Thomists do not find anything absurd in the notion that prime matter is not endowed with any “entitative act” – for the entitative act, properly speaking, just is the *actus essendi*; something that only *entities*, i.e. *beings*, can possess. And yet they reject the implication that the lack of any actuality whatsoever in prime matter just means that it is pure nothing. One cannot understand this doctrine unless one is aware that the Thomistic hylomorphic analysis is meant to explain beings by means of items which are *not* beings, not *entities* – which, however, is not to say that they are they *non-entities* or negations of entities. They do not exist or not-exist – they are just not the kind of items capable of either. Their way of obtaining or being there, so to speak, is their *principiating* an entity, and their way of not-being-there is their *non-principiating* an entity.²⁸ In other words, to ask whether prime matter is something or nothing is, in the Thomistic view, to commit

28 Cf. this concise statement in Gredt, J., *Elementa*, vol. 1, *Philosophia naturalis*, n. 261b, p. 243: “Duplici modo potest aliquid esse reale seu existere in rerum natura: α) ut «quod», i. e. ut totum quod est, β) ut «quo», sive potentiale sive actuale, i. e. ut pars sive potentialis sive actualis, quae est totum. Materia et forma, essentia et existentia sunt partes, quibus est ens completum corporeum, seu quibus exercet essendi actum: materia est pars pure potentialis, forma pars actualis – actus primus; existentia est pars actualis – actus secundus; essentia est pars potentialis relate ad existentiam. Ideo in forma dicimus: materia existit, *dist[inguo]*: Ut quod, *nego*, ut quo, *subdist[inguo]*: Ut quo actuale, *nego*; ut quo pure potentiale, *concedo*.” See further note 43.

a category-mistake. It is neither – for by entertaining the hylomorphic analysis one is making a step beyond the categories of being and non-being; one is enquiring into the *principles* of a being, which are situated on a level of explanation where the dichotomy “something or nothing” does not – yet – obtain or apply. There is no other way how to conceive of such principles, if they are to succeed in explaining the nature of a being in a non-circular way. Clearly, you do not successfully explain the beingness of a being by means of an item that itself is a being.

It seems to me that one can easily identify the source of the intuition underlying the Thomistic understanding of the meaning and philosophical role of hylomorphism. It has little to do with Aristotle but very much with Plato. The basic principle of Plato’s ontological thought is precisely a kind of *search for heterogeneous principles*, i.e. principles that are of different kind or order than the items they serve to explain. For Plato, *being* is not the ultimate and elementary ontological datum, it is something that is derived from principles that are “beyond being”,²⁹ principles which transcend the dichotomy of “something or nothing”. It is well known that Aquinas adopted many structural features of Platonic ontology.³⁰ But my point here is that in addition to that, and even more importantly, he adopted from Plato the very *notion* of ontological explanation and analysis.

Of course, he was not able to appropriate this Platonic heritage without at the same time contracting its notorious problems. For example: The Platonic method in ontology inevitably leads to various kinds of hierarchic structures of ontological explanation, as the explaining item is never of the same order or kind as the item explained. However, this very fact works ultimately against the building principle of the hierarchy, which is *heterogeneity* or *transcendence*: since the very fact that there is an ordered hierarchy implies that all the members *do* participate in one and the same order after all. The relative transcendence and heterogeneity of the individual levels of the hierarchy has been “domesticated” or “reduced to the same denominator”, so to speak, by the very fact that the individual items could be conceived as partaking in a single hierarchy at all.

This is a paradox which haunts Platonic thought from its beginnings and manifests itself in many ways. One such manifestation is the pragmatic inconsistency of the negative-theological implications of Platonism. On the one hand, the Good (or the One, or whatever one prefers to call

29 Or “ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας” – cf. Plato, *Republic* VI, 509b.

30 Cf. e.g. the already classic Fabro, C., *La nozione metafisica di partecipazione secondo S. Tommaso d’Aquino*. 1st ed. Milano, Vita e Pensiero 1950.

the “τοῦ παντός ἀρχή”³¹) should be absolutely transcendent, and so absolutely ineffable. On the other hand, the Platonists manage to employ thousands of words in attempts to delineate its ineffable nature – precisely by conceiving it as the top-element in the hierarchy.³²

Another manifestation of this phenomenon is directly relevant to our present concern: it can be dubbed “The Paradox of the Lowest Rank”. It seems almost inevitable that in any Platonic system of thought a question must ultimately arise, *how to conceive of the lowest rank of the hierarchy*. On the one hand, the lowest rank is, by definition, *part* of the hierarchy, and so it must, to a degree, partake on the constitutive principle of the hierarchy, which is ultimately derived from its top-rank item. On the other hand, it must be the *lowest* rank of the hierarchy, by its very nature, i.e., it must be impossible to think of anything even *lower*. The paradox is, how these two requirements are compatible. Is there a *least* possible degree of participation? Isn’t it always possible to think of a lesser degree, as long as the degree in question is still “positive”, still “above zero”, i.e. still part of the hierarchy?³³

This is, in very general terms, the problem that seems to manifest itself clearly both in Plato’s original ontological conception and in the Thomist hylomorphism. In the Platonic tradition, it is the problematic nature of the item – variously called *χώρα*, *ἀόριστος δυάς*, “Great and Small”, matter, etc.³⁴ – that seems to function both as the lowest rank of the Platonic hierarchy of emanations, and as an independent co-principle which makes the descendent emanation possible and meaningful in the first place. And although, of course, there are many differences between the Platonic notion of *χώρα* and the Thomistic *prime matter*, they seem to share the same *systematic* problem, the problem of the lowest rank. How is it possible to conceive a *pure* potentiality, which, however, is not mere nothing? How can such an item both partake in the order of positive contribution to the actual makeup of the actual being, and yet be absolutely devoid of participation in all actuality or positivity? Or, in other words: how can there be anything left if you remove all the actuality from a being? This, precisely, is the Scotistic concern with the Thomistic notion of matter.³⁵ But, on the other hand – if we ascribed

31 Plato, *Republic* 511b2.

32 In Thomism this problem resurfaces in the elusive nature of the analogical predication of God.

33 Think of an analogy: there is no *least positive real number*, as between zero and any positive real number no matter how small there is always an uncountable infinity of more numbers. No real number is “just above zero” – this notion does not make sense.

34 Cf. Plato, *Timaeus*, 48e ff., esp. 52a8 and 52d3; Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I, 6, 987b18 ff.; *ibid.*, XIII, 7–9; *ibid.*, IV, 1–3.

35 Compare Gredt’s label for the prime matter, “*ultima linea realitatis*” (see note 14 for context), and Scotus’s refusal to regard such a notion as meaningful: “Aliquid dicitur esse in potentia dupliciter. Uno modo, ut terminus potentiae sive ad quod est potentia, ut albedo generanda.

any degree of actuality to the prime matter, wouldn't it, in the Thomistic system, inevitably turn into a *secondary* matter, a composite of potency and act, i.e. not the true *lowest rank* of the Thomist hierarchy of hylomorphic ontological explanation?³⁶ Augustine the puzzled Platonist observes that matter is “close to nothing, [...] below which there is nothing else”³⁷, but we may ask: precisely *how close*? Any finitely small “distance” plainly is not close enough, since it allows for possible positions even closer; and a distance infinitely small would be just a different label for *lack* of any distance. The notion of being “just above nothingness” is thus suspect as incoherent.³⁸

I won't go further now into analysing the nature of Thomistic hylomorphism and its problems and paradoxes, let alone into trying to solve them. I only described the Thomistic approach in such a detail to be able to show how very different it is from the Scotistic take on hylomorphism. But before I turn to that, I would like first to address a certain worry readers might have about my exposition of the role of hylomorphism in Thomism. I said that in Thomism, hylomorphic explanation strives to provide an ontological explanation of being as such, as if hylomorphism had universal ontological validity for the Thomists. However, only material bodies are composed of matter and form in Thomism, so how can I speak of a universally ontological relevance of hylomorphism, as if its role were to explain being as such, and not just material being?

Of course, in the strict sense hylomorphic analysis is indeed confined to the material bodies only. Still, one can easily see that in the Thomistic conception the matter-form analysis is just a special case of a much more general idea that extends to the entire realm of being. Aquinas extrapolates, so to speak, the hylomorphic principles beyond the realm of matter and form proper. In Thomism, the matter-form composition turns out to be just the least perfect instantiation of a more general pattern of a potency-act composition, and lack thereof. The entire Thomistic realm of being is explained in

Alio modo, ut subiectum potentiae sive in quo est potentia, ut superficies dealbanda. Qui dicunt materiam esse primo modo ens in potentia, dicunt eam esse simpliciter non-ens [...]. Secundo ergo modo [materia] est ens in potentia, et magis [in potentia] quam subiectum accidentis, quia minus habens in se actualitatis, et maioris capax. Et ista potentia fundatur in aliquo actu, secundum Commentatorem [...]. Quia recipere non convenit nisi habenti in se prius aliquam entitatem positivam. *Primum fundamentum omnis realitatis positivae, quid est?* [italics mine] – i.e. “[...] The ‘ultimate foundation of all positive reality’ – what is that supposed to be?” (Duns Scotus, *In Met.* VII, q. 5, n. 17-19, ed. Bonav. IV: 135–136).

36 Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *De principiis naturae* 2: “[Q]uicquid est actu, non potest dici materia prima.”

37 Augustine, *Confessiones* XII, c. 7, n. 7 (PL 32: 828b–829a): “prope nihil [...] quo inferius nihil esset”. This saying of Augustine's is often cited by Aquinas as authoritative.

38 Or is there a kind of minimal quantum of actuality? Why should we assume that? And if there is, doesn't it just mean that the degree of *pure* potentiality is unattainable, that you cannot possibly get *prope nihil*?

terms of either presence or absence of the same hylomorphic principles, and it is these principles what provides the most general metaphysical frame for the Thomistic universe. For example, it is not as if hylomorphism simply did not apply to the Angels, who are pure forms without matter. It *does* apply, as their ontological status within the great Thomistic hierarchy of being is determined precisely by the way (noble and exalted) they partake in the hylomorphic constitution of reality as such. They are not *beyond* hylomorphic analysis, but quite the opposite: they represent an ontologically indispensable degree in a hierarchy of possible realizations of the hylomorphic scheme. And the same is true, *mutatis mutandis*, even of God. For the Thomists, divine simplicity is, in the first place, *hylomorphic* simplicity broadly conceived; and its opposite in creatures is *hylomorphic* composition, in its two analogical modes: *viz.* essence–existence composition, and matter–form composition.³⁹ In this way, it is justified to say that hylomorphism is a general *metaphysical* conception in Thomism.

In contrast, the Scotistic hylomorphism is not a theory designed to ontologically explain the beingness of a being – far from it. According to the Scotists, being *qua* being cannot be further ontologically explained. Being is the ultimate ontological concept of which any further explanation is impossible because it is *presupposed* in all possible explanation. *Any principle, in order that it can function as a principle, must, in the first place, be.*⁴⁰

39 Cf. Gredt, J., *Elementa*, vol. 1, Intr., n. 3: “Philosophia aristotelico-thomistica essentialiter consistit in evolutione rigorose logica et consequenti doctrinae aristotelicae de potentia et actu. [...] Fundamentum eius est distinctio realis inter actum et potentiam limitantem actum: inter essentiam limitantem esse et materiam limitantem formam. Esse irreceptum est simpliciter infinitum, actus purus; et forma pure spiritualis, in nulla materia receptibilis, est in sua linea infinita. Quo stabilitur distinctio inter Deum et mundum, inter mundum spiritualem et corporeum.” By “act” and “potency” Gredt evidently means act and potency *qua* constitutive, “physical” ontological principles, an extrapolation of the matter–form dyad. This primarily or exclusively “hylomorphic” conception of potency and act is characteristic of Thomism, but is alien to Scotism.

In Scotism, on the other hand, the simplicity–complexity distinction plays a much lesser rôle in distinguishing God and the creatures. For one thing, unlike Thomism, God is not conceived primarily in terms of *unparticipated, undifferentiated simplicity* of being (“*ipsum esse subsistens*”) but rather of *fullness and genuineness* of being (cf. Duns Scotus, *De primo principio*, c. 1, n. 1, interpreting the Mosaic revelation of the God’s name, יהוה: “Tu es *verum esse*, tu es *totum esse*” [italics mine]), so that God is more a *paradigm case* of entity than a transcendent source of “entitateness”. And so far as Scotus plays the simplicity–complexity card, he relies on his idiosyncratic “formal distinction” to “save the difference” between God and creatures: “Haec differentia [scil. distinctio formalis] et compositio sibi correspondens, quando perfectiones contentae sunt limitatae, generalis est omni creaturae. Et secundum hanc faciliter salvatur quomodo omnis creatura componitur ex potentia et actu. Non enim ibi accipitur potentia pro illa quae est ad esse, quia illa non manet in creatura.” – Duns Scotus, *In Met.* VII, q. 19, n. 54, ed. Bonav. IV: 373.

40 A connected (Avicennian-)Scotistic observation is that *being qua being* can have no principles: for in that case each and every being would have to have principles, which cannot be, since God has no principles even though He is a being, *univocally*. See Avicenna Latinus, *Met.* I, c. 2

Matter and form, thus, are not treated as *principles* of being but rather elementary *kinds* of being. The Scotistic hylomorphic analysis does not make any step *beyond* the realm of being in order to explain it, but just dissolves more complex beings into their parts, and reduces effects to their causes. The importance of the latter clause must be stressed: Scotistic hylomorphism is not atomism. It makes no attempt to reduce ontological analysis to mereological analysis – quite the opposite! Matter and form are still conceived not just as *parts* of things, but as their Aristotelian *causes*. The hylomorphic whole is conceived not as a mere *combination* of the matter and form, but as a *joint effect* of them in the manner of material and formal causality. The effect is *really distinct* from its causes, even *qua* united.⁴¹

It should be clear that this is an entirely different paradigm of thought, and that the difference between Thomistic and Scotistic hylomorphism cannot be reduced to the fact that while the Scotists ascribe an entitative act to matter, the (mainstream) Thomists do not. One should rather say that each party is engaged in a different philosophical project, which, however, the other party regards as impossible. The Thomists pursue the quasi-platonic analysis of being in terms of principles which themselves are neither beings nor non-beings. This is something a Scotist would regard as absurd. On the other hand, the Scotists are in search of the ultimate elementary beings that compose the empirical things by materially and formally causing them. This, in turn, is something that the Thomists find repugnant; since for them, *material substances* are the elementary beings, which cannot be further analysed on the level of being. For the Thomists, no being which has its own unity and essence can be composed of other beings; no two beings can compose a third one; any unity resulting from such a composition would be a mere unity *per accidens*. In the Scotistic picture, a material substance is a complicated complex composed of many various kinds of parts, both physical (matter and form, or, more often, several matters and forms) and integral (like the organs of an animal), and all these parts are considered beings in their own right, and even partial substances (which does not mean that they are substances only partially, but merely that they are substances which are

(ed. Riet I: 14): “Deinde principium non est principium omnium entium. Si enim omnium entium esset principium, tunc esset principium sui ipsius; ens autem in se absolute non habet principium [...]”; Cf. Duns Scotus, *In Met.* I, q. 1, n. 9-10 (ed. Bonav. III: 18): “Subiectum cuiuslibet scientiae habet propria principia [...], nec Deus nec ens est huiusmodi [...] quia si ens, in quantum ens, haberet principia, igitur quodlibet ens haberet principia [...]”; further discussion *ibid.*, n. 78-84 (ed. Bonav. III: 41-43); all that in view of *In Met.* VI, q. 4, n. 10-12 (ed. Bonav. IV: 87-88), where Scotus finally endorses the Avicennian position.

41 This is a specifically Scotistic (i.e. not generally non-Thomistic) thesis – cf. the in-depth analysis in Ward, *John Duns Scotus*, op. cit., ch. 4, p. 60-75; for Mastroianni and Belluto’s defense see their *Physica*, disp. 5, q. 13, a. 1, n. 154, p. 149a.

parts of another substance).⁴² For the Scotists, the parts are naturally prior to the whole, which means that the whole exists because of the parts that compose and cause it. For the Thomists, a material substance cannot have parts which are both beings and naturally prior to it. Matter and form are naturally prior to the material substance, because they cause it, but they are not beings but principles – and it is the whole that confers the ultimate real status on these parts, once united. For the *actus essendi* belongs to the composite whole as to *that which* (“*ut quod*”) has it.⁴³

We can also notice that for the Scotists, hylomorphism does not serve as the universal ontological frame we saw it to be in Thomism. Scotistic hylomorphism is not a theory in general ontology that aims at explaining the nature of being as such in all its degrees, but its applicability is rather a matter of empirical knowledge. Mastri and Belluto, for instance, tentatively believe that celestial bodies, though in a sense material, are not hylomorphically composed but simple – because they appear to be incapable of substantial change.⁴⁴ And on the other hand, they find acceptable the view that spiritual substances are composed of form and spiritual matter,⁴⁵ although they themselves do not endorse it. And the Scotistic understanding of the exclusive divine simplicity is not derived from hylomorphic considerations at all (for God’s *hylomorphic* simplicity is shared by many other beings), but the distinction between God and creatures in terms of simplicity is based on the

42 Cf. Ward, *John Duns Scotus*, op. cit., ch. 10, p. 165–182.

43 It only belongs to the matter and form as to that *through which* (“*ut quo*”) the composite whole has it – see Gredt quoted in note 28, and also CP, pars 2, q. 3, a. 2, p. 362b: “In quocumque composito datur unicum esse existentiae, quo existit tam forma, quàm materia, eo quod datur unicum fieri totius compositi, et resultat unica entitas: existentia autem sequitur ipsum fieri rei, cùm sit terminus eius, et ipsam unitatem essentiae, seu entitatis, cui convenit. [...] Existentia est propria compositi *ut quod*, et solum convenit formae, ut principio quo deter(mi)nandi [?] existentiam, et materiae ut principio *quo* suscipiendi illam.” And further: Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 90, a. 2, co: “Nulli formae non subsistenti proprie competit fieri, sed dicuntur fieri per hoc quod composita subsistentia fiunt.” Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones quodlibetales* 9, q. 5, a. 1: “Fieri non [est] nisi compositi, cuius etiam proprie est esse. Formae enim esse dicuntur non ut subsistentes, sed ut quo composita sunt.”

44 “Dicimus in principiis Arist[otelis] cœlum non esse compositum ex materia, et forma, imò hoc potius asserendum esse secundum lumen naturæ; at secundum Theologos constare ex materia, et forma [...] et prob[atur] primò, quod secundum Arist[otelem] cœlum tali compositione sit expers, quia secundum ipsum [...] cœlum est æternum, et incorruptibile, at materia est principium, et radix corruptionis, eo quia est in potentia contradictionis ad formam, et privationem formae [...]” Mastrius – Bellutus, *Philosophiae ad mentem Scoti cursus integer*. Tomus tertius. Venetiis, apud Nicolaum Pezzana 1727, De cœlo, disp. 2, q. 2, a. 1, n. 41, p. 491a.

45 “Quamvis enim Angeli, et anima rationalis de facto sint substantiae simplices, compositione materiae, et formae carentes secundum communiorem sententiam, quam Doctor sequi semper est visus [...] tamen [...] non implicare videtur, dari materiam spiritualem receptivam formae substantialis spiritualis, et aliquam substantiam spiritualem ex his constitui [...]” Mastrius – Bellutus, *Physica*, disp.

presence or absence of metaphysical structuring of the essence by means of formal distinctions.⁴⁶

The Thomists, both baroque and modern, like to blame many of the non-Thomistic tenets of their opponents on their rejection of the doctrine of real distinction between essence and existence.⁴⁷ Is that a convincing insight? There certainly is a close connexion between the adoption or rejection of the real distinction thesis on the one hand and the adoption of the Thomistic or Scotistic version of hylomorphism on the other. The Thomists can hardly adjudge entitative act to prime matter, if they identify it with the *actus essendi*, the “*ultimus actus entis*” which comes over and above the entire composite essence and by which the essence is first placed into actual reality. The Scotists, on the other hand, do not conceive of the actuality of an item as of an act really distinct from it, but they conceive it as identical to the entity of the given item. Therefore, to be real just *is*, for them, to have an entitative act; there is no room for principles which are real but not of themselves actual, that is, not of themselves beings.

However, despite this clear logical connexion, I don't think that the doctrine of real distinction or identity of essence and existence is the true root of the radical difference between the Thomistic and non-Thomistic conceptions. It seems to me that the interpretation of hylomorphism and the understanding of the essence and existence in these two conceptions both stem from the described divergent general intuitions concerning the possible direction of ontological enquiry. If, as a non-Thomist, you believe that *ens* is the primitive item in ontology, and therefore there is no sense in trying to describe a level of principles of being which are not themselves beings, then your general metaphysical approach will be characterized by what the Thomists would pillory as a “reification of the principles”. And since, unlike matter and form, existence *qua* really distinct from essence cannot be meaningfully reified,⁴⁸ you are bound to reject its real distinction from

46 See note 39.

47 Cf. J. Poinsot quoted in note 14 who, by the way, boldly claims that the real-distinction thesis has always been the *sententia communis*, shared not just by Thomists but also others, except a few ill-famed dissenters like Durandus, Suárez and Vázquez (Scotus and the Scotists are not mentioned). In neo-Thomism a view gradually established itself that the real-distinction thesis is the cornerstone of Thomism – cf. Del Prado, N., *De veritate fundamentalii philosophiae Christianae*. Freiburg (Schweiz) 1911, p. 44–46; Manser, G. M., *Das Wesen des Thomismus*. 3. Aufg., Freiburg (Schweiz) 1949, p. 559; and more authors cited in Berger, D., *Thomismus: Grosse Leit-motive der thomistischen Synthese und ihre Aktualität für die Gegenwart*. Köln, Editiones Thomisticae 2011, p. 177, note 451.

48 The guileless attempt of Giles of Rome (cf. Lambertini, R., Giles of Rome. In: *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2014 Edition), ed. E. N. Zalta [cit. 9/4/2014]. Accessible from [www: http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/giles/](http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/giles/), ch. 3) is spurned by Thomists and Scotists alike.

essence. If, on the other hand, you work on the assumption that being as such is ontologically derivative, and therefore the main task of ontology is the enquiry into its principles, then you are likely to assign a special principle responsible for its very beingness – the Thomistic *actus essendi* as the final seal of the ontological makeup of any being.

To conclude. It seems that the fundamental question that decides between the two alternative forms of hylomorphism is neither *Is matter endowed with entitative act?*, nor *Is existence really distinct from the essence?*, but *Is being (ens) ontologically primitive, or does it have principles?*⁴⁹

SUMMARY

Although hylomorphism is often regarded as a kind of common ground for the entire scholastic tradition, the aim of this paper is to show that its Thomistic and non-Thomistic versions are radically different. The author takes a developed Scotistic version of hylomorphism (as presented in the work of B. Mastri and B. Belluto) as a representative specimen of the non-Thomistic interpretation and argues that in Scotism the very aim and scope of hylomorphic analysis is quite different from that of the better-known Thomistic interpretation of the doctrine. He claims that the root of the difference is a difference over what metaphysical analysis can and cannot achieve. Whereas in Thomism hylomorphism is a theory that serves to explain the very “beingness” of a being in terms of principles which are neither beings nor non-beings (because they come “before” a being is constituted), the Scotistic position regards such a “sub-entitative” analysis as impossible, and interprets hylomorphic analysis as simply reducing complex beings to simple ones, i.e. as exposing not *principles*, but elementary *kinds* of being. The acceptance or rejection of the real distinction between essence and existence seems to be not the source but just an implication of this more fundamental difference between Thomism and non-Thomism.

Keywords: hylomorphism, matter, form, prime matter, entitative act, formal act, metaphysics, pure potentiality, Thomism, Scotism, principles of being, Platonism, Aristotelianism, B. Mastri, B. Belluto

49 This study is a result of the research funded by the Czech Science Foundation as the project GA ČR 14-37038G “Between Renaissance and Baroque: Philosophy and Knowledge in the Czech Lands within the Wider European Context”. An earlier version of it was presented at the conference *Explorations in Baroque Philosophy*, organized by the Joint Research Group for the Study of Post-Medieval Scholasticism (Faculty of Theology, University of South Bohemia & Institute of Philosophy, The Czech Academy of Sciences) at the Faculty of Theology, University of South Bohemia, 26th–27th November 2015. I thank David Robjant for substantially improving the English of the paper.