

“THIS LITIL WORDE ‘IS’”: THE EXISTENTIAL METAPHYSICS OF THE *CLOUD* AUTHOR

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The *Cloud* author has long been recognized as one of the finest prose writers in the English language. Yet because of his subject matter -- spiritual guidance -- and the seeming difficulty of his theology and metaphysics, he is not widely known or read. This paper will attempt to make the *Cloud* author more comprehensible and accessible by describing his metaphysics, a task which has heretofore been neglected.

The best known work of the *Cloud* author, from which his "name" is drawn, is *The Cloud of Unknowing*.¹ In it the anonymous fourteenth-century English mystic instructs an equally anonymous "goostly freende in God" (*CU* 13/8; 7/21) in the "sleightes" or techniques of the contemplative life; shows clearly what signs indicate that one is called to such a life; rationalizes the contemplative calling; reviles with considerable gusto those of the active life who dare to question the contemplative's mode of living; and attacks pseudo-contemplatives. Everywhere the *Cloud* author's literary skills are evident: masterful examples of metaphor, wit, sarcasm, irony, flights of enthusiasm, and alliteration abound. Yet while the *Cloud* author's renown may rest on this work, the theoretical basis for his writing and, indeed, a display of his philosophical and theological "credentials" are to be found in "explicitly the most advanced of his spiritual treatises,"² *The Book of Privy Counselling*.

The Book of Privy Counselling was written, at least in part, to respond to questioning and criticism of *The Cloud of Unknowing*. While the latter

work is long on advice for meditative technique, *Privy Counselling* eloquently advocates a metaphysical position which largely forms the theoretical basis for this technique. This metaphysical position depends greatly on the distinction between essence and existence, a distinction which has generally been ignored by those who have commented on, criticized, or interpreted the works of the *Cloud* author.

The contemplative, argues the *Cloud* author, should concentrate his thinking and his feeling on his existence ("that himself is") rather than on his essence ("what himself is") if he wishes to advance on the path to mystical union with God. This technique, while underlying *The Cloud of Unknowing*, is not expounded upon there. Although this distinction may seem abstruse, it is, as I hope to demonstrate, fundamental to an understanding of the *Cloud* author.

Despite the *Cloud* author's assertions that his teachings are simple, it is not surprising that many are intimidated by those teachings. To comprehend *The Book of Privy Counselling* on first reading would require a good sense of classical and mediaeval metaphysical terminology, some awareness of the mediaeval debate on the distinction between essence and existence, and a realization of the centrality of this distinction to certain mainstream forms of mediaeval mysticism. The modern reader might take some comfort from the fact that some of the *Cloud* author's contemporaneous audience also found his work difficult. However, the modern reader may not like the *Cloud* author's estimation of those who cannot understand him. He attacks and ridicules his critics unmercifully, with typical hyperbole, sarcasm, and condescending, ironic incredulity, while at the same time outlining and defending his position: "softely [quietly], mornyngly [sadly] and smylyngly I merveyle me sometyme whan I here sum men sey (I mene not simple lewid [uneducated] men and wommen, bot clerkes and men of grete kunnyng [knowledge]) that my writyng to thee and to other is so harde and so heigh, and so curious and so queinte." These critics claim his writing to be so abstruse or fanciful ("queinte") that "unnethes [scarcely] it may be conceivid of the sotelist clerk or witted [most intelligent] man or womman." His detractors, says the *Cloud* author, are in fact so "bleendid" by their knowledge of theology and their natural intelligence ("here coryous kunnyng of clergie and of kynde"), that they cannot understand "the trewe conceite of this light werk." Ironically, according to the *Cloud* author, his work "schal be founden bot a symple and a light lesson of [for] a lewid man." Not satisfied with placing his critics below some of the "lewdist" and "boistousest [crudest]" men or women

who may accomplish the "litil maistrie" necessary to understand aspects of his works, the *Cloud* author goes even further by locating these opponents below "the lewdist kow or unresonable beest." Even bovines, it seems, unlike his adversaries, may at least "fele the [their] owne propre beyng" (137/4-30; 75/17-41; 76/1).

That which is "bot a symple and a light lesson" is the aforementioned distinction between essence and existence: one must "thenk and fele that him-self is, not what him-self is bot that hym-self is" (137/26-27; 76/38-39). Primacy of consideration is given to existence. While this lesson is indeed simple the consequences are certainly not light -- if, as the *Cloud* author advocates, one bases one's way of life on it.

In order to demonstrate that one may understand the *Cloud* author's "lesson" by understanding his terms it is necessary to define his terms. These definitions may be of value for all who wish to read the *Cloud* author, but who are not already well-versed in scholastic philosophy's treatment of the distinction between essence and existence. The value of the definitions of terms offered here is considerably enhanced by the fact, as we shall see, that a misunderstanding of the *Cloud* author's terms is imbedded in the apparatus of all the critical editions of his texts, a misunderstanding which may make the texts incomprehensible to many.

Definitions of metaphysical terms, as such, are not found within the works of the *Cloud* author. His are rhetorical works of metaphysical advocacy, spiritual guidance, and contemplative technique, not metaphysical primers or commentaries. For definitions of terminology one must go "outside" the text. By and large I will go to St Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle for definitions, chiefly because the *Cloud* author makes, again and again, a distinction between essence and existence.

In the scholastic debate on this distinction there were three basic positions: between essence and existence there may be a formal, or a mental, or a real distinction. This debate itself is not the concern here.³ What is of concern is that the *Cloud* author's distinction between essence and existence is unequivocally "real." It is the same position as that of Aquinas. It follows that if this distinction is "real" for both of them, their metaphysics should, in general, be similar. While others have noted the influence of Aquinas on the *Cloud* author in a number of areas, no one, to my knowledge, has demonstrated the congruity of their metaphysics.⁴ Also, while the sources of the theology of the *Cloud* author have been well established, the source or sources of his metaphysics have not.⁵ The only

evidence of the *Cloud* author's direct knowledge of Aquinas is his reference to "Seinte Thomas the Doctour" (PP 51/5-6; 102/36), unusual in itself for a writer who mentions authorities only on very rare occasions. However, the "real" distinction of both authors, together with the coherency which Aquinas's metaphysics (based on Aristotelian metaphysics) lends to *The Book of Privy Counselling*, makes Thomistic influence, direct or indirect, obvious.

The distinction of the "what you are" from the "that you are" is a classical metaphysical distinction: "what man is and that man is," wrote Aristotle, "are two different things."⁶ For different purposes, and in many different ways, the making of such a distinction is common to mediaeval thought, and it is particularly important to mysticism. Martin Heidegger asserts that "The mystical theology of the Middle Ages, for example, that of Meister Eckhart, is not even remotely accessible without comprehension of the doctrine of *essentia* and *existentia*."⁷ This being so (and the present study should lend credence to this assertion), it is remarkable that practically no attention has been paid to this doctrine in studies of the *Cloud* author. The great clarity which the Thomistic doctrine of essence and existence lends to *The Book of Privy Counselling* makes it an obvious manifestation of "existential metaphysics"⁸ and the "metaphysical revolution"⁹ of the Middle Ages -- a revolution from a classical Greek essentialism to a Christian existentialism.

Let us first consider generally some words and terms: "metaphysics," "being," "essence," "existence," and "existential metaphysics." Later we shall consider "being," "essence," and "existence" in more detail, together with "accident," "quality," "substance," and "God."

Metaphysics

The most general definition of "metaphysics" is that of Aristotle: the study of "being as being" -- being as such (*Metaphysics* 4.1 1003a). A being is anything, material or immaterial, which in any way was, is, or will be. Metaphysics is the "universal" science: all other sciences are special or particular; botany, for example, deals exclusively with beings which are plants. Metaphysics deals with that which rocks, plants, animals, and angels have in common -- being. In order to distinguish between an individual being, and the abstract notion of being, Aquinas used two words: "ens," which refers to individual beings considered *concretely* as *essences*, and "esse," which refers to being considered *abstractly*. According to Joseph Owens, in an article fundamental to the present study, Aquinas's *esse*

is best rendered in English as "existence."¹⁰ Aquinas very often defines individual created beings considered concretely in terms of *esse*, or existence: "nulla enim creatura est suum esse, sed est habens esse" ["no creature is its own existence, but is that which has existence"] (*Quodl.* 2.2.1).¹¹ This definition also shows what Aquinas wished to emphasize -- that all beings *have existence*. In Aquinas's Christian metaphysics the verb "habere / to have" predicates participation while the verb "esse / to be" predicates identity as in the statement: "Deus dicitur bonus essentialiter, quia est ipsum bonitas; creaturae autem dicuntur bone per participationem, quia habent bonitatem" ["God is called good essentially, because God is goodness; creatures however are called good through participation because they have goodness"] (*Quodl.* 2.2.1).¹² Likewise, Aquinas does not say simply that creatures "are," but that they "have" existence; existence is contingent.

In the Judaeo-Christian cosmogony there is only one being which does not have existence, but which is existence: God. As a perceiving subject, an individual human being may not know *what* God is -- that is beyond human capacities -- but because an individual human being exists, and because existence comes from God, the perceiving subject, through thinking about and feeling his or her existence, both "knows" and "feels" God. Aquinas teaches this and this is what is meant when it is said that in his metaphysics Thomas Aquinas gives primacy to existence. This does not mean that existence comes *first*, that there is some kind of chronological priority of existence over essence. Rather, it is a matter of epistemology, ultimately all that we may really know is existence. This too is what the *Cloud* author calls his "simple teching." We can see "beyng" clearly used in its abstract sense of "existence," and primacy given to this term when the *Cloud* author parallels the statement that one ought "for to thenk and for to fele his owne propre beyng" (138/2-3; 77/3), with the statement that one should be able to "thenk and fele that him-self is, not what him-self is, but that hym-self is" (137/26-27; 76/38-39). In this passage we are told that even "the moste unresonable beest" may "fele that him-self is" or is able "for to fele his owne propre beyng" -- its existence -- while man who is "endowid with reson" may also "thenk" of his existence.

Existence is the factor common to each created being and God; essences define: a definition of "tree" or "bird" is a description of the essential characteristics of all trees and birds; an essential definition describes *what* "treeness" or "birdness" consists of -- the *what* question is the

essential question. The question of whether a particular bird or tree exists is the question of existence; it tells us that something exists -- this is the existential question. If I not only gave prime consideration to the question of the existence of a being, particularly my own being, but also insisted that ultimately this is the only important question, one could say that I was an existentialist -- that I gave primacy to existence; this is what Aquinas and the *Cloud* author do. If I gave prime consideration to the whatness of beings, of describing what they are, as did Aristotle, one could say that I was an essentialist -- that I gave primacy to essences.

Just about any philosopher would support the claim that the difference between the essential question and the existential question is simple. Aristotle treated it as such (*Posterior Analytics* 2.8 92b). Heidegger says of the "that" and the "what" of a being: "In the philosophical tradition it is taken as self-evident. Everyone has this insight."¹³ Aquinas says that of anything "quia quaestio quid est sequitur ad quaestionem an est" ["we cannot even ask what it is until we know that it exists"] (*ST* 1a.2. 2 ad.2 / 2:10-11).¹⁴ There is, then, nothing spectacular, or even unusual in the *Cloud* author's drawing of attention to the fact that for every being one may ask a "what" question and a "that" question. What is unusual, and perhaps more difficult to grasp, particularly from a "modern" scientific point of view, or from an Aristotelian point of view, is why the *Cloud* author would tell his disciple to forget the "what" question and to consider only the "that" question. The answer underlines the difference between creationist and non-creationist metaphysics, the difference between classical Greek and Christian metaphysics.

Because of the doctrine of creation, and the dependent relationship of created beings to the creating Being, Christian metaphysics must considerably modify classical metaphysics. For the classical Greeks creation out of nothing is irrational and impossible, and the very definition of a being rests on its independence.¹⁵ For the Christian there must be an absolute difference in kind between the Being and its dependent created beings. In Christianity, the Being (God), who is "Being" or existence itself, created other beings. This is a "fact": "omne esse, quocumque modo sit, est a Deo" ["every existing thing, in whatever way it may be, is from God"] (*SCG* 3.7.1918).¹⁶ Man, like all beings in the Christian universe of Aquinas, has from the Being, God, its *esse*, or existence. Each being is that which has existence; God gives beings existence and sustains them in existence. In this metaphysics existence and dependence are key words in

considering beings. For the Greeks *essence* and *independence* are the key words. In discussing Plato's *Parmenides* R.E. Allen succinctly summarizes this position: "Both Plato and Aristotle suppose that to be real is to be intelligible, and that to be intelligible is to be, or to be possessed of, essence or form. They also suppose that to be real is to be independent and ontologically prior, that is, able to exist apart from other things."¹⁷ For the classical Greek essence or "whatness" is of primary importance; for the Christian existence or "thatness." The ultimate concern for Aquinas is the source of existence, "he" who does not have existence but who *is* existence, who told Moses that his name was "I AM" (Exod. 3:14), the uncreated being, God, existence *per se*. The *Cloud* author mirrors the Aquinian concern and metaphysical assumptions when he writes: "al it is hid and enstorid in this lital worde IS" (143/26; 80/38-9).

It may surprise those who closely associate Aquinas with Aristotle, a view popular earlier in this century, that this Thomistic, Christian metaphysics finds its roots in Neoplatonism. Just as the *Cloud* author chides the disciple for thinking too much on the "what," so Aquinas gently criticizes the "ancient philosophers," particularly Aristotle:¹⁸ "A principio enim quasi grossiores existentes, non existimabant esse entia nisi corpora sensibilia" ["Somewhat raw to begin with, they reckoned that the only realities were sensible bodies"] (*ST* 1a.44.2 / 8:10-11). Fortunately, "aliqui / others," that is, the Neoplatonists,¹⁹ "ulterius . . . exererunt se ad considerandum ens in quantum est ens, et consideraverunt causam rerum, non solum secundum quod sunt haec vel talia, sed secundum quod sunt entia" ["later . . . climbed higher to the prospect of being as being, and observed the cause of things inasmuch as they are beings, not merely as things of such a kind or quality"] (*ST* 1a.44.2 / 8:12-13). Because of the revelation of creation, Christian metaphysicians must consider beings in the light of "the cause of things," something the Neoplatonists, adapting Aristotelian causality to their own ends, that is, extending it to the immaterial realm, had already done.²⁰ Adapted by Christian Neoplatonists, such as the Pseudo-Dionysius, this approach to being is an integral part of Thomistic metaphysics.

Instead of Socrates being a mutable, imperfect copy of some immutable, independently existing, concept-object called "humanness," as Platonists might have it, Aquinas crystallized the Neoplatonic relation of the many emanating from the One -- creatures are related to God as the effect is related to the cause. As we have already seen (and shall expand upon later),

the key word in Aquinas's definition of this relationship is *esse*. For the purposes of understanding Christian existential metaphysics all we need bear in mind is that a created being is something which has existence from another: "omne quod quocumque modo est a Deo est" ["everything that in any way is, is from God"] (*ST* 1a.44.1 / 8:6),²¹ and "for that thou arte thou hast of him" (144/10; 81/8). A human being, then, like all creatures, is "id quod finite participat esse" ["that which finitely participates in existence"] (*In Lib. de Causis* 6.1.6.175),²² or God "is thi being, and in him thou arte that at [that] thou arte" (136/10; 75/31-2), and "for that thou arte thou hast of him and he it is" (144/10-11; 81/8; emphasis added). The participation of the Platonic tradition is Christianized and existentialized. Existence emanates from God as light from the sun; the heliotrope, the metaphor of the sun and its light, which so readily conveys both the conceptual distinction between participation and identity, as well as the concept of identity through participation, is a favourite of the Christian Neoplatonic tradition and of Aquinas:

Se habet omnis creatura ad Deum sicut aër ad solem illuminantem. Sicut enim sol est lucens per suam naturam, aër autem fit luminosus participando lumen a sole, non tamen participando naturam solis, ita solus Deus est ens per essentiam suam, quia ejus essentia est suum esse; omnis autem creatura est ens participative, non quod sua essentia sit ejus esse. [Every creature stands in relation to God as the air to the light of the sun. For as the sun is light-giving by its very nature, while the air comes to be lighted through sharing in the sun's nature, so also God alone is being by his essence, which is his *esse*, while every creature is being participatively, i.e., its essence is not its *esse*.] (*ST* 1a.104.1 / 14:42-43)

Non-divine created being, for both Aquinas and the *Cloud* author, is clearly *ens participatum*, participating being:²³ "Relinquitur ergo quod omnia alia a Deo non sint suum esse, sed participant esse ["We are left with the conclusion that all things other than God are not their own existence but share existence"] (*ST* 1a.44.1 / 8:6-7).

Being

We have already seen that "being" has different senses; Aquinas following Aristotle (*Metaphysics* 1026) was acutely aware of this. So too

is the *Cloud* author, and so must we be if we are to understand his metaphysics. We have already noted above an instance in which "beyng" is unequivocally used in the abstract sense of *existence* as revealed by the parallel phrases: man must "thenk and fele that him-self is" (137/26-7; 76/38-9) and ought "for to thenk and for to fele his owne propre beyng" (138/2-3; 77/3). This use of the word "being" is likely to be a stumbling block for many modern readers who, when they are told to think of "their being," will give, like Aristotle, prime consideration to the *concrete* sense of being -- their whatness or essence -- rather than to their existence.

Unfortunately, this confusion extends to the apparatus of critical editions of the works of the *Cloud* author. In both their glossaries and notes these editions, all edited by Phyllis Hodgson, sometimes suggest that the word "being" be understood as "essence"; sometimes as "existence"; sometimes as "essence" or "existence"; and sometimes as having another meaning or other meanings. This is done without any attempt to explain the distinction between essence and existence or its importance. Often Professor Hodgson's choice of explanation of the word "being" is simply wrong, and sometimes there is a contradiction between the 1944 and 1982 editions -- "being," in one edition, is noted to be "essence," and in the other, it is "existence"; there is another case where the note changes from "existence" to "entities."

An example of the serious consequences of this editor's failure to come to terms with the different senses of "being" is as follows. In the statement: "For he is thi being" (136/9-10; 75/31), "being" draws this note in the 1944 edition: "By *being* is meant the centre of the soul, the essence of the soul, its apex, or ground of the spirit, or the synteresis. All these appellations mean the same thing -- in modern terminology, the 'transcendental self'" (205). However, if one continues reading the passage noted, the sentence cited *itself* reveals that "being" in this case means "existence" and not the "transcendental self." That "being" here means "existence" is obvious if one has mastered the "light lesson" of the difference between *that* and *what* "thou art." The signal of this difference is the repetition of the word "that" in the passage under notation: "For he is thi being, and in him thou arte that at [that] thou arte" (136/9-10; 75/31-2): "that at" or "that that" may only refer to "thatness" or existence (this citation will be dealt with more fully below).

While the 1944 note is wrong, the 1982 note skirts the question. Here the note is to fourteen lines beginning with the passage just cited, and in

which the word "being" or "beinges" appears eleven times, often in seemingly paradoxical fashion, for example, "he is thi being and thou not his" (136/15-16; 75/37). If, as I argue, "being" here means "existence," the meaning of this passage is: "You have your existence from God not vice versa." Hodgson, however, offers a universal definition of "being": "*Being* connotes both 'existence' and 'essence'; in God both are one" (note 75/31-76/6, 176). While this statement is of course correct it certainly does not clarify the passage being noted, whose meanings (and seeming paradoxes) depend on the play with the *concrete* and *abstract* senses of "being" and the different relations of these senses to each other in creatures and in God, hence of the relationships and difference between creatures and God. Without a clear understanding of the distinction between the senses of the word "being," the object of the word play will be missed, and the eleven uses of "being" in this short passage will only cause confusion. With an understanding of the difference between "thatness" and "whatness," this passage from *The Book of Privy Counselling* is accessible; without it, it is indeed "curious and queinte."

Substance

There is a parallel and related problem with the *Cloud* author's use of the word "substance." As with the word "being," modern readers, like mediaeval readers, have an inclination to equate the term "substance" with "essence." If they do so *The Book of Privy Counselling* becomes more and more "curious." Unfortunately, such an equation between substance and essence is drawn in the critical editions of the *Cloud* author's works.

A core section of *Privy Counselling* comprises an exegesis of the words of Solomon in Proverbs 3:9: "Worschip thi Lorde with thi substaunce, and with the first of thi frutes fede thou the pore" (140/13-14; 78/26-27). The exegesis is based on a metaphysical sense of "substance," which in the notes to her editions Phyllis Hodgson suggests should be read as "essence."²⁴ If this interpretation were correct, then the *Cloud* author would be assigning his disciple the contradictory task of "worschipping God with thy essence" while at the same time insisting that he forget that very essence ("think not what thou art").

The first meaning of "substance" given in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (7.1028B) is indeed "essence." However, only another meaning of substance, that is, the meaning of "hypostasis" or "first substance," such as appears in Aristotle's *Categories* (5.2a.10), makes the *Cloud* author's exegesis of

Proverbs 3:9 coherent and consistent.²⁵ It may seem prophetic for readers of the critical editions of *The Book of Privy Counselling* that Thomas Aquinas long ago warned that the different senses of "substance" could be a source of error ("posit esse erroris occasio"), because "nomen 'substantiae,' quod secundum proprietatem significationis respondet 'hypostasi,' aequivocatur apud nos, cum quandoque significet 'essentiam' quandoque 'hypostasim'" ["the word 'substance,' which properly speaking corresponds in meaning to 'hypostasis,' is equivocal in our usage, since it refers sometimes to 'essence' and sometimes to 'hypostasis'"] (*ST* 1a.29.2 ad 2 / 6:48-49). In the *Cloud* author's exegesis of Proverbs 3:9 "substance" refers to "hypostasis," not to "essence" as Hodgson's texts would have us understand.

What is the difference between "essence" and "hypostasis"? Consider the statement: "John is a human being." "John" is the subject and "human being" is the predicate. John, because he is an individual existent, an independent "being" (in the qualified Christian sense), is an "hypostasis" or a "suppositum," which in Aristotle and Aquinas is also called "primary substance." John is a self-supporting "substance" which supports his "accidents," such as where he may live, what colour his skin may be, or how tall he may be. If John were a disciple of the *Cloud* author he would be urged to think only of his "substance" in relation to the word "is"; to think only of the statement "John is": the existential or "that" statement. He would be told not to consider such thoughts as "John is a man, white, five feet ten, and lives in Montreal": this is the beginning of the essential statement which defines what John is. However, in Aristotelian and Thomistic metaphysics the word "man" in the statement "man is a rational animal" may also be considered a "substance" -- a secondary substance. Here "man" is used to begin defining the principles of the species "man" -- an essence. "Man" no longer refers only to one individual of the species, but the general characteristics or essence of "humanity."

The *Cloud* author in *The Book of Privy Counselling*, unless one accepts that the text may be nonsensical, does not use "substance" in the sense of "essence," but rather in the sense of "hypostasis": "subjectum vel suppositum quod subsistit in genere substantiae" ["the subject or the underlying thing subsisting in the category of substance"] (*ST* 1a.29.2 / 6:48-49). For the *Cloud* author a substance is a "thing," an individual being, which stands alone. "Nam ens dicitur quasi ens habens, hoc autem solum est substantia, quae subsistit" ["For being means something having existence, but it is substance alone which subsists"] (*In* 12 *Meta.* 2419).²⁶ The colour of

John's skin, may also be called a "being" because it too has existence, but it does not stand alone, it exists in John; it is not a substance or hypostasis, it is an accident, a term to be dealt with later in more detail. We should also keep in mind that in Christian metaphysics all hypostases, except God, do not really support themselves, they are created and maintained in existence by God. But when the *Cloud* author writes in *The Book of Privy Counselling*, "worschip unto God with thi substaunce and for to offre up thi nakid beyng, the whiche is the first of thi frutes" (142/2-3; 79/29-30, emphasis added), we should understand "substaunce" as "substantia prima" ["first substance"] (*In 5 Meta.* 903; also, 7.1273), as "nakid beyng," as an hypostasis considered without accidents, "substantia est hoc primum inter omnia entia" ["substance is the primary kind of being'] (*In 4 Meta.* 546), the "first of thi frutes": "thus maist thou se that the first and the poynte of thi beholding is moste substancialy set in the nakid sight and the blynde felyng of thin owne being. And thus it is only thi being that is the first of thi frutes" (141/23-26; 79/22-24).

The final proof that the sense of "first" or "primary substance" or "hypostasis," and not "essence," is intended in the *Cloud* author's exegesis of "substaunce" in Proverbs 3:9-10, "'Worschip thi Lorde with thi substaunce, and with the first of thi frutes fede thou the pore'" (140/13-14; 78/26-27), is that it makes the following passages coherent: "Alle the yiftes of kynde [nature] and of grace . . . I clepe hem thi frutes" (140/28-29; 78/40-41), but "The firste yift in iche creature is only the being of the same creature" (141/3-4; 79/3-4), and the disciple should "do hole worschip unto God with thi substaunce and for to offre up thi nakid beyng, the whiche is the first of thi frutes" (142/1-3; 79/29-31). The "first of thi frutes" is your "nakid beyng"; your "nakid beyng" is your "primary kind of being"; your "primary kind of being" is "your substaunce," and all of these can be understood as that which, according to the *Cloud* author, should be of prime importance before all else -- your individual human existence.

Accidents

In the "nine and fourti chapitre" (*CU* 92-93;51) of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, the *Cloud* author makes an analogy based on the distinction between the Aristotelian categories of being: "substaunce" and "accydenes." However, in *The Book of Privy Counselling*, which post-dates *The Cloud of Unknowing*, the author, while frequently using the word "substaunce," does

not use the word "accyidentes." Rather, again and again, he mentions one of the accidents: "qualite." The only other accident mentioned is quantity, and then not by name, and in connection with quality considered as part of the definition of a thing: "loke not how mochel ne how litil that it be, ne charge not what it is ne what it bemenith" (135/16-17; 75/14-16). This could imply that the *Cloud* author is considering "qualite," as well as quantity, in the sense in which the two are used in formal logic to distinguish categorical propositions.²⁷ But there are also sound ontological reasons for not mentioning the accidents other than quality and quantity. In scholastic philosophy quality and quantity are absolute and intrinsic accidents, while the other seven are relative and extrinsic; these latter are grounded in the former. "Quality and quantity alone modify the substance in itself."²⁸ Thus considered, these two accidents have a higher status and importance. This is also found in Aristotle (*Metaphysics* 12, 1069a-19). The *Cloud* author wants the disciple to forget *what* he is; he would consider it unnecessary or superfluous to tell him to forget *where* or *when* he is, or to forget any of the other relative or extrinsic accidents.

Aristotle writes: "I call 'quality' that in virtue of which some things are said to be such and such."²⁹ In his *Metaphysics* (5.14, 1020a,33-1020b, 25), the Stagirite elaborates on the various senses of "quality." Aquinas comments on these senses (*In 5 Meta.* 987-996). To summarize Aquinas: qualities answer the question "what sort" or "what kind"; qualities refer to the definition of a being. As mentioned above, all the accidents considered as "beings" have a status inferior to substances. This inferior status of all accidents is also discussed by Aquinas in the *Summa*:

Formae autem et accidentia et alia hujusmodi non dicuntur entia quasi ipsa sint, sed quia eis aliquid est; ut albedo ea ratione dicitur ens, quia ea subjectum est album. Unde, secundum Philosophum, accidens magis proprie dicitur 'entis' quam 'ens'. [As for forms and modifications and the like, you do not speak of them as beings as though they themselves were things, but because they affect things; for instance, the reason why you call whiteness real is that by it a subject is white. Hence, to cite Aristotle, we say that a modification is more fittingly called 'of a being' than 'a being'.] (ST 1a.45.4 / 8:40-41)

It is "more fitting" or correct to call a quality "of a being" (*entis*), than "a being" (*ens*), for a quality is a dependent being. If we say "that man is

wise," "wisdom" is a quality of "that man." The "wisdom" has existence (*habet esse*), or in some way the "wisdom" is, and hence it has, or is, a "being." But in Aristotelian and scholastic metaphysics, and in the metaphysics of the *Cloud* author (as can be inferred by comparing the *Cloud* author's much repeated use of "qualite" in *The Book of Privy Counselling*), a quality has a lesser kind of being. Because it is not its own being, because it exists in another being, a quality is "inferior" to a substance: "Omne accidens secundum suum esse est inferius substantia quia substantia est ens per se, accidens autem in alio" ["As a category of reality a quality is inferior to substance because substance is a real thing in its own right, accident is real only in another"] (*ST* 2a.2ae.23.3 ad 3 / 34:16-17; also 1a.29.1; 1a.28.2).

Understanding the inferior status of "quality" in the metaphysics available to him makes clearer statements of the *Cloud* author such as "bere up thi seek self as thou arte unto gracious God as he is, with-outyn any corious or special beholdyng to eny of alle the qualitees that longyn to the beyng of thi-self or of God" (139/7-10; 77/35-37). The disciple must contemplate only his substance; never should he waste his time on accidents.

Essence

It was argued above that the sense of "substance" used by the *Cloud* author in *The Book of Privy Counselling* should not be confused with "essence" even though this is one of its senses: "Uno modo dicitur substantia quidditas rei quam significat definitio secundum quod dicimus quod definitio significat substantiam rei; quam quidem substantiam Graeci 'usiam' vocant, quod nos 'essentiam' dicere possumus" ["In one sense we call 'substance' the whatness of a thing; this is what a definition refers to, as when we say that we define the substance of a thing. Actually the Greek word for this is 'ousia,' for which we may use the word 'essence'"] (*ST* 1a.29.2 / 6:48-49). In the same article, Aquinas explains "essence" in more detail: "Essentia proprie est id quod significatur per definitionem. Definitio autem complectitur principia speciei, non autem principia individualia" ["Properly speaking the essence is what is expressed by the definition. A definition comprises principles of the species but not individual principles"] (*ST* 1a.29.2 ad 3 / 6:48-49).³⁰ For Aristotle, Aquinas, and the *Cloud* author essences do not exist in themselves. I may be able to tell you what "man" is and what "phoenix" is by naming specific qualities, those qualities which belong to the species "man" or "phoenix"; I would define "man" or

"phoenix," saying "a man is such and such" and "a phoenix is such and such," but unless there is an individual man or phoenix in which these qualities exist, then "man" or "phoenix" does not really exist.

The following quotation reveals quite clearly the difference between "essence" and "existence":

Omnia quae sunt in genere uno communicant in quidditate vel essentia generis quod praedicatur de eis in eo quod quid. Differunt autem secundum esse, non enim idem est esse hominis et equi, nec hujus hominis et illius hominis. Et sic oportet quod quaecumque sunt in genere differant in eis esse et quod quid est, id est essentia. [All members of a genus share one essence or nature, that of the genus stating what they are. As existents, however, they differ, for a horse's existence is not a man's, and this man's existence is not that man's. So that when something belongs to a genus, its essence, or what it is, must differ from its existence.] (ST Ia.3.5 / 2:36-37)³¹

There is a real distinction between the general definition of man, i.e., an essence, and the existence of the individual man in the metaphysics of Aquinas. This, I would argue, is the case as well for the *Cloud* author, for while he does not use the word "essence" or "species," which is a specific essence, he does use a Middle English equivalent of "species" or "genus," that is, "kind." At one point he defines the essence of the disciple (while telling him that in the spiritual exercise under discussion this is to be forgotten): "what thou arte: A man in kind" (138/11; 77/11) -- the "kind" of creature the disciple belongs to is "man." It is quite clear, Aquinas states, that "the principles of the species" refer to an essence and not to an individual being (ST Ia.29.2 ad 3 / 6:48-49); there is no alternative to accepting that the *Cloud* author is making exactly this distinction. Contemplation of essences which do not exist in themselves, he is saying, is a waste of time and an impediment to experiencing mystical union.

The relationship between the individual and the universal in this metaphysics finds its roots in Neoplatonism. In the Prologue to his *Commentary on the Divine Names of the Pseudo-Dionysius* Aquinas makes a sharp distinction between the theory of the reality of the ideas and the causal nature of the First Principle. The Platonic theory of ideas is rejected out of hand as not agreeing with faith or truth ("ratio fidei non

consonat nec veritati"). But as far as the First Principle of things ("primo rerum Principio") is concerned, "quod est ipsa essentia bonitatis et unitatis et esse, quod dicimus Deum et quod omnia alia dicuntur bona vel una vel entia per derivationem ab illo primo" ["which is itself the essence of goodness and unity and existence, which we call God and by which all other things are called good or one or being by derivation from that first principle"], in this "verissima est eorum opinio et fidei christianae consona" ["their (the Neoplatonists') opinion is most true and in accordance with Christian faith"].³² Aquinas rejected the Platonic concept of the independent reality of forms (the essence "horse" or "justice" would really exist and the individual horse or act of justice would be but a mutable and inferior copy of "horse" or "justice"), while accepting the Neoplatonic compromise of forms, or prototypes, or ideas, somehow existing or "pre-existing," as the Pseudo-Dionysius would put it, in the mind of God. This in turn is linked to the Neoplatonic application of Aristotelian causality to the problem of the relationship of the One to the many. The many derive their existence from the one essence whose essence is not distinct from its existence, "the essence of goodness and unity and existence, which we call God."

The real distinction between essence and existence for all beings but God is explicit in *The Book of Privy Counselling* when the *Cloud* author writes that God, unlike man, "ben bot one bothe in substaunce and also in kynde" (169/30-170/1; 97/26). Recalling that "thatness" or individual existence has a fundamental equivalence with "substaunce," and that "kynde" refers to "essence," the foregoing statement of the *Cloud* author is identical in meaning to the following by Thomas Aquinas, the very core of his metaphysics: "Solus Deus est ens per essentiam suam, quia ejus essentia est suum esse" ["God alone is being by his essence, which is his esse"]. God's "whatness" is his "thatness," while, continues Aquinas, for created being our "whatness" is not our "thatness": "Omnis autem creatura est ens participative, non quod sua essentia sit ejus esse." ["Every creature is being participatively, i.e., its essence is not its esse"]. (ST Ia.104.1 / 14: 42-43). It is for this same reason, Aquinas writes elsewhere, that "Ens autem non ponitur in definitione creaturae, quia nec est genus nec differentia. Unde participatur sicut aliquid non existens de essentia rei; et ideo alia quaestio est an est et quid est" ["Being is not placed in the definition of a creature, because it is neither a genus nor a difference. Being is participated in as something not existing from the essence of a thing, and therefore the

question whether a thing is, is other than the question what a thing is"] (*Quodl.* 2.3.1).

In the works of the *Cloud* author we find a mysticism based on "existence." A person who wishes to be "knit" to God must think and feel that he is, for he participates in thatness, or existence, which emanates from God, or, as a Christian must say, which God emanates. This borrowing from Neoplatonism is that which is "new" in the metaphysics of Aquinas, a metaphysics which the *Cloud* author shares, and which distinguishes their metaphysics from that of Aristotle. Aquinas is well aware of how he and the Stagirite differ:

Antiqui philosophi . . . non consideraverunt nisi emanationem effectuum particularium a causis particularibus, quas necesse est praesupponere aliquid in sua actione; et secundum hoc erat eorum communis opinio, *ex nihilo nihil fit*. Sed tamen hoc locum non habet in prima emanatione ab universali rerum principio. [The ancient philosophers concentrated their attention on the emanation of particular effects from particular causes. These, of course, presuppose something to act on, and in this context the general reckoning was that nothing comes from nothing. The axiom, however, does not apply to the original emanation from the universal source of things.] (*ST* 1a.45.2 / 8:30-31)³³

This existence which emanates from God deserves more direct scrutiny.

Existence

For created beings existence is primary. God "gave thee to be" (141/15; 79/14), "The first yift in iche creature is only the being of the same creature" (141/3-4; 79/3-4), and the fact that the creature is a substance "the whiche was sumtyme nought" (144/12; 81/9-10) may be explained by the following: "Illi enim proprie convenit esse quod habet esse, et quod est subsistens in suo esse" ["Only that is an existent, in the proper sense of the term, which has existence and supports its own existence"] (*ST* 1a.45.4 / 8:40-41). This is a "substance." That which is "nought in substance" is not really a being "in the proper sense of the term." Without existence -- nothing.

Domingo Báñez commenting on Aquinas in the sixteenth century writes: "esse is that by which a thing is constituted as outside nothingness."³⁴

As already noted, the cornerstone of Christian metaphysics is "Deus ex nihilo res in esse producit" ["God brings things into existence from nothing"] (*ST* 1a.45.2 / 8:30-31); hence "ipsum esse est quo substantia denominatur ens" ["existence (*esse*) is that by which substance is named being (*ens*)"] (*SCG* 2.54.1292).³⁵ In the sense of participation, God is in man and man is in God. Considering "being" in the sense of *esse*, "existence," the following from *The Book of Privy Counselling* states this doctrine: "For he is thi being, and in him thou arte that at thou arte, not only bi cause and bi beyng, bot also he is in thee bothe thi cause and thi beyng" (136/9-11; 75/31-3). In this statement "bi cause" refers to the willed creative act of God, and "bi being" refers to the effect of that causal act, that is, the existent individual -- in this case, the disciple. The "thi cause" and "thi being" refer to the ongoing sustaining relationship between the cause (God) and the effect (the existent individual). *Esse* comes from, and is the ongoing effect of, God alone.³⁶ God causes and sustains existence; created beings participate in existence. Because God is constantly causing ("thi cause") and sustaining ("thi beyng") each individual being, "Deus totus est in omnibus et singulis" ["God exists wholly in each and everything"] (*ST* 1a.8.2 ad 3 / 2:116-17). But this does not mean that man and God are identical; if it did we no longer have a theistic metaphysics. In the words of Aquinas's favoured Neoplatonic analogy:³⁷ "Se habet omnis creatura ad Deum sicut aër ad solem illuminantem" ["Every creature stands in relation to God as the air to the light of the sun"] (*ST* 1a.104.1 / 14:42-43). But as the light of the sun is not identical with the sun, so the effect is not identical with the cause.³⁸ We can now understand that there is "this difference betwix thee and him, that he is thi being and thou not his. For thof it be so that alle thinges ben in hym bi cause and bi beyng and he be in alle thinges here cause and here being, yit in him-self only he is his owne cause and his owne being" (136/15-18; 75/36-38, 76/1-2). This is the doctrine of sustaining creation and participation as taught by Aquinas and derived, ultimately, from the Platonic tradition.

It is here that we see the *Cloud* author, Aquinas, the Pseudo-Dionysius, and Augustine standing on the same ground -- Neoplatonic ground. It is here also that we see a principal difference between Christian and pagan Neoplatonism. For the Christian, being or existence emanates from the will of God; God wilfully creates, and He sustains those things which He has created in existence. For the pagan Neoplatonist, "emanation" is a result of blind necessity.³⁹

Esse, existence, is primary: "Ipsum enim esse est communissimus effectus primus et intimior omnibus aliis effectibus; et ideo soli Deo competit secundum virtutem talis effectus" ["For *esse* is the most common of all effects, it is primary, more penetrative than all others; hence it belongs to God alone as consonant with his own power"].⁴⁰ *Esse* is "thi nakid beyng" (141/12; 79/12), and "the first poynte of thi spirit" (143/9-10; 80/23), and the "first of thi frutes" (141/7-8; 79/7). For the *Cloud* author and for Aquinas: "Esse autem est illud quod est magis intimum cuilibet et quod profundius omnibus inest" ["Existence is more intimately and profoundly interior to things than anything else"] (1a.8.1 / 2:112-13). But God is existence, without God there is only non-existence: nothing; and "Unde oportet quod Deus sit in omnibus rebus et intime" ["So God must exist and exist intimately in everything"] (*ST* 1a.8.1 / 2:112-13), and God "est in omnibus rebus ut dans eis esse et virtutem et operationem" ["is in all things giving them existence, power and activity"] (*ST* 1a.8.2 / 2:114-15). It is as effect that "Deus totus est in omnibus et singulis" ["God exists wholly in each and every thing"] (*ST* 1a.8.2 ad 3 / 2:116-17), and it is because he is an effect of God that the *Cloud* author advocates that the disciple utter the prayer, "That at I am, Lorde, I offre unto thee, for thou it arte" (137/1-2; 76/14).

This prayer reveals how completely the *Cloud* author understands the Thomistic doctrine of essence and existence. Existence is not essence, "thatness" is not "whatness," so the *Cloud* author must use the word "that" twice in this statement. He does not say "what I am" but "that at I am": "that that I am" is that which is God in him ("for thou it arte"). There are many modes of being (*multiplex modus essendi rerum*): one for corporeal creatures, another for incorporeal creatures (angels), and another for God. An index which distinguishes between beings (creatures) and Being is existence. So for angels, while they have a mode of being different from that of corporeal creatures, "tamen non sunt suum esse, sed sunt esse habentes" ["existence is still something they have, it is not what they are"] and "Soli autem Dei proprius modus essendi est ut sit suum esse subsistens" ["Finally there is the way of being that belongs to God alone, for his existence is what he is"] (*ST* 1a.12.4 / 3:14-15). Only for God are "whatness" and "thatness" identical: "Divina essentia est ipsum esse" ["The divine essence is existence itself"] (*ST* 1a.12.2 ad 3 / 3:10-11).

One "problem" with the metaphysics of the *Cloud* author which remains is the "qualities" of God. The *Cloud* author, as we have already seen in another context, instructs the disciple to forgo "any corious or special beholding to eny of alle the qualitees that longyn to the beyng of thi-self or of God" (139/8-10; 77/35-37). But Aquinas says that "in Deo accidens esse non potest" ["accidents cannot exist in God"] and then gives various reasons why God has no accidents, for example: "Quia Deus est suum esse, et ut Boëtius dicit, licet id quod est, aliquid aliud possit habere adjunctum, tamen ipsum esse nihil aliud adjunctum habere potest" ["Because God is his own existence, and as Boethius says, you may add to an existent, but you cannot add to existence itself"] (*ST* 1a.3.6 / 2:38-39). According to Aquinian metaphysics, then, God has no accidents. Yet, also according to Aquinas, the perfections or the qualities that exist in man also exist in God, but in a different way: "Omnes rerum perfectiones quae sunt in rebus creatis divisim et multipliciter, in Deo praeexistunt unite et simpliciter" ["The perfections which in creatures are many and various pre-exist in God as one"] (*ST* 1a.13.5 / 3:64-65).

When the *Cloud* author speaks of the "qualitees" of God he is speaking of God in the imperfect manner of which creatures are capable, for according to Aquinas "impossibile est aliquid praedicari de Deo et creaturis univoce" ["it is impossible to predicate anything univocally of God and creatures"] (*ST* 1a.13.5 / 3:62-63). We only use words to name God, such as those of the *Cloud* author, "'Good' or 'Faire Lorde', or 'Swete', 'Merciful,' or 'Right-wise'" (143/23; 80/35-36), because of our limited means, always realizing that "Intellectus autem noster, cum cognoscat Deum ex creaturis, format ad intelligendum Deum conceptiones proportionatas perfectionibus procedentibus a Deo in creaturas. Quae quidem perfectiones in Deo praeexistunt unite et simpliciter, in creaturis vero recipiuntur divise et multipliciter" ["Since we know God from creatures we understand him through concepts appropriate to the perfections creatures receive from him. What pre-exists in God in a simple and unified way is divided amongst creatures as many and varied perfections"] (*ST* 1a.13.4 / 3:60-61). In enumerating such qualities, Aquinas continues, we can only understand imperfectly "unum omnino simplex" ["something altogether simple"] (*ST* 1a.13.4 / 3:60-61). So, also, as he is well aware, the *Cloud* author when using such words as "Good" or "Wisdom" or "Love" to name or define God, is speaking analogically and imperfectly. For this

reason he tells the disciple "to think upon the nakid beyng" (CU 25/10-11; 14/11) of God, because if:

Now thou askest me and seiest: "How schal I think on him-self, and what is hee?" And to this I cannot answeere thee bot thus: "I wote never" For of alle other creatures and theire werkes -- ye, and of the werkes of God self -- may a man thorou grace have fulheed of knowing, and wel to kon thinke on hem; bot of God him-self can no man thinke. (CU 25/13-19; 26/1-2; 14/14-20)

In *Dionise Hid Divinite*, the *Cloud* author's translation of Pseudo-Dionysius' *Mystical Theology*, we read that God "is aboven alle substaunce and al maner knowyng" (DHD 3/12; 120/19-20); God is "soveryn-substancyaly aboven," transcending all "beyng thinges" (DHD 3/22-23; 121/4-5). Aquinas might have been thinking of this same source when he writes: "Divina substantia omnem formam quam intellectus noster attingit, sua immensitate excedit: et sic ipsam apprehendere non possumus cognoscendo quid est" ["By its immensity, the divine substance surpasses every form that our intellect reaches. Thus we are unable to apprehend it by knowing what it is"] (SCG 1.14.117).⁴¹

We cannot know then what God is, but we can know, imperfectly, of the Cause through the effects, or, more precisely, "ex eis in hoc perduci possumus ut cognoscamus de Deo an est" ["we can at least be led from them to know of God that he exists"] (ST 1a.12.12 / 3:40-41). In this article, as elsewhere, we see the very deliberate contrast of "thatness" (*an est*) and "whatness" (*quid est*). Primacy is given to "thatness" because, according to Aquinas, the "thatness" or existence of God is something which may be clearly known, while the "whatness" or essence of God may not be known. So, also, the *Cloud* author tells us, we are not to mistake the effects or "doynges" for the cause, either in man or God: "Many men clepen here doynges hem-self, and it is not so; for one am I that do, and another aren my dedes that ben done. And the same it is of God; for one is he in him-self, and another ben his werkes" (158/7-10; 90/18-21). We may not know the "what" of God, but we may know the "that" through God's effects, and "Ipsum enim esse est communissimus effectus primus et intimior omnibus aliis effectibus" ["Esse is the most common of all effects, it is primary, more penetrative than all others"].⁴² And where may we best become aware of this effect? "That at I am, Lorde, I offre unto thee, for thou it art" (137/1-2; 76/14). One's existence is not God, but it is the proper effect of God.⁴³

We have come full circle -- the "what / that" distinction of the *Cloud* author and his insistence on the "that" should be clear. In the ontology of the *Cloud* author the Being of God is beyond the mode of knowing of created beings; we can never know *what* He is. But the whole goal of the epistemology of the *Cloud* author is to know God. Fortunately we can know *that* God is. If the *Cloud* author were to refer his disciple to an authority to explain fully why he must try "for to thenk and for to fele his owne propre beyng" (138/2-3; 73/3), he might suggest the following from the *Summa Contra Gentiles* where Aquinas is discussing how men and angels ("separate substances") may ultimately know God in the same way:

Cognoscit tamen substantia separata per suam substantiam de Deo quia est; et quod est omnium causa; et eminentem omnibus; et remotum ab omnibus, non solum quae sunt, sed etiam quae mente creata concipi possunt. Ad quam etiam cognitionem de Deo nos utcumque pertingere possumus: per effectus enim de Deo cognoscimus quia est et quod causa aliorum est, aliis supereminens, et ab omnibus remotus. Et hoc est ultimum et perfectissimum nostrae cognitionis in hac vita, ut Dionysius dicit, in libro *de Mystica Theologia*, cum Deo quasi ignoto coniungimur: quod quidem contingit dum de eo quid non sit cognoscimus, quid vero sit penitus manet ignotum. Unde et ad huius sublimissimae cognitionis ignorantiam demonstrandam, de Moyse dicitur Exod: 20, 21, quod accessit ad caliginem in qua est Deus. [However, a separate substance does know through its own substance that God is, and that He is the cause of all things, that He is eminent above all and set apart from all, not only from things which exist, but also from things which can be conceived by the created mind. Even we are able to reach this knowledge of God, in some sense; for we know through His effects that God is, and that He is the cause of other beings, that He is supereminent over other things and set apart from all. And this is the ultimate and most perfect limit of our knowledge in this life, as Dionysius says in *Mystical Theology*. "We are united with God as the Unknown." Indeed, this is the situation, for, while we know of God *what He is not*, *what He is* remains quite unknown. Hence to manifest his ignorance of this sublime knowledge, it is said of Moses that "he went to the dark cloud wherein God was" (Exod. 20:21)].

It is in order to aid his disciple to enter this "dark cloud" so that he might experience God that the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* urges him "for to thenk and to fele his own propre being." This is but the starting point for mystical contemplation: a concentrated emotional and mental awareness of his own existence is something the *Cloud* author in atypically simple and graphic phrases bids the disciple to "first gnawe on . . . unto the tyme that thou mightest be maad able to the highe felyng of God bi goostly contynowaunce of this prive werk" (156/6-8; 89/4-7). From his own "to be" the disciple is to rise and lose himself in the "high felyng" of that which is the source of existence and which is existence itself: God: "Esse primum . . . est Deus" (*In Lib. de Causis* 12.1.12.282).

"To be": existence: *esse*: for Aquinas and the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*:

For yif thou sey "Good" or "Faire Lorde" . . . "Love" or "Charite," or what other soche thing that thou sey of God: al it is hid and enstorid in this litil worde IS. For that same is to him only to be, that is alle thees for to be. And yif thou put to an hundrid thousand soche swete wordes as ben thees -- good, faire, and alle thees other -- yit yedest thou not fro this worde IS. An yif thou sey hem alle, thou puttest not to it. And if thou sey right none, thou takist not fro it. (143/22-30, 144/1; 80/35-43)

For the *Cloud* author the distinction between essence and existence was real. More than just an idea that existed in the minds of theologians and philosophers, it allowed him to define a view of reality, to follow a certain way of life, and to produce great spiritual literature.⁴⁵

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NOTES

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Abbreviations

The *Cloud* author: all references are to *The Book of Privy Counselling* unless they are preceded by the following abbreviations:

CU: *The Cloud of Unknowing* (in n. 1)

DHD: *Deonise Hid Divinite* (in n. 1)

PP: *Pistle of Preir* (in n. 1)

St Thomas Aquinas:

In Lib. De Causis: In Librum de Causis (in n. 11)

In [numeral] Meta.: In Duodecim Libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis (in n. 26)

SCG: *Summa Contra Gentiles* (in n. 16)

ST: *Summa Theologiae* (in n. 14)

Quodl.: *Quaestiones Quodlibetales* (in n. 11)

¹ References to the *Cloud* author refer to the following texts: first set of numerals = page(s) and line number(s) in *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counselling*, ed. P. Hodgson (1944; rpt. London 1981), or, *Deonise Hid Divinite: and Other Treatises on Contemplative Prayer Related to 'The Cloud of Unknowing'*, ed. P. Hodgson (London 1955); second set of numerals = *The Cloud of Unknowing and Related Treatises*, ed. Phyllis Hodgson (Salzburg 1982). In this article M.E. *thorn* is transliterated as *th*, *yogh* as *y* or *gh*, *u* as *v*, and *v* as *u* where appropriate, and *ampersand* (&) as *and*.

² Rosemary Ann Léés, *The Negative Language of the Dionysian School of Mystical Theology: An Approach to the Cloud of Unknowing*, 2 vols. (Salzburg 1983) II, 317.

³ For a summary of Aquinas's *distinctio realis* between essence and existence and the other major positions of the period (*distinctio modalis* or *formalis*, *distinctio rationis*) see C. Fabro "Un itinéraire de Saint Thomas. L'établissement de la distinction réelle entre essence et existence," *Revue de Philosophie* 4 (1939) 285-310; Etienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers* (Toronto 1949) 74-107; Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, tr. Alfred Hofstadter (Bloomington 1982) 77-98.

⁴ William Johnston, in *The Mysticism of 'The Cloud of Unknowing': A Modern Interpretation* (St Meinrad 1975), devotes several pages to the doctrine of essence and existence and relates it to Aquinas, but he does not demonstrate this doctrine, and what he does say is potentially misleading. Johnston states that the *Cloud* author "continues to stress that mystical

knowledge is not essential but existential. It is the meeting of two existences" (45). Basic to the doctrine of the real distinction is another doctrine of Aquinas (*SCG* 3.65) and Augustine (*De Genesi ad litteram*, 4.12, PL 34.304), that is, the creative and sustaining relationship of God's existence to that of man. Johnston fails to point out the relationship between God's existence and that of the contemplative. David Knowles, in "The Excellence of the Cloud," *Downside Review* 52 (1934) 71-92, asserts that the works of the *Cloud* author "are the work of a Thomist. . . . The thought and expression are Thomist, not Scotist, or Nominalist." However, Knowles does not discuss or allude to the distinction between essence and existence to demonstrate this assertion; rather, he demonstrates the Thomistic nature of "the theory of the relations of love and knowledge, and the description of the life of grace" (74) in the works of the *Cloud* author. James Walsh, in his Introduction to his modern English version of *The Cloud of Unknowing* (New York 1981), points out several areas of Thomistic influence, but does not refer to the doctrine of essence and existence. J.P.H. Clark, in "Sources and Theology in 'The Cloud of Unknowing,'" *Downside Review* 98 (1980) 83-109, also indicates different influences of Aquinas. In a brief discussion on "being" in *The Cloud of Unknowing* Clark quotes from a passage (88) where St Thomas is drawing a distinction between essence and existence. However, Clark does not claim or indicate that such a distinction is made by the *Cloud* author.

⁵ Most thoroughly by Lees (at n. 2), one of whose aims it is "to set the cryptic theology of the *Deonise Hid Divinite* in the wider context of the *Cloud* corpus and the author's intermediary sources of Dionysian theology" (335). As a sources and influences study (Hugh of Balma, Thomas Gallus, the Victorines), and for establishing beyond doubt that the *Cloud* author is solidly within the Dionysian tradition of mysticism, Lees's book is invaluable. However, she ignores the distinction between essence and existence, missing, I think, a very important source: Thomas Aquinas.

⁶ *Posterior Analytics*, tr. Hugh Tredennick (Cambridge, Mass. 1960), (2.8, 92b) 197.

⁷ Heidegger (at n. 3) 90.

⁸ For a history of the term see J.F. Anderson, "Existential Metaphysics," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*.

⁹ Etienne Gilson was among the first to speak of a "revolution" in *God and Philosophy* (New Haven 1941) 67. John D. Caputo, in *Heidegger and Aquinas: An Essay on Overcoming Metaphysics* (New York 1982) compares Heidegger's treatment of the "existential revolution in Thomistic metaphysics" (8) with that of Gilson. See also William E. Carlo, *The Ultimate Reducibility of Essence to Existence in Existential Metaphysics* (The Hague 1966) for a clear and concise review of the "revolutionary ideas" (10) of Aquinas.

¹⁰ See Joseph Owens, "The Accidental and Essential Character of Being," *Mediaeval Studies* 20 (1958): in the philosophical tradition *ens* and *esse* "may be equally translated by 'being' and 'a being' in English, and express in the former way the act of being, and in the latter way the nature that exists. Both grammatical forms may signify either *in abstracto* or *in concreto*. Yet St Thomas uses the infinitive *esse* to signify only *in abstracto*" (15). Thomas uses *ens* in both senses, but "For the most part throughout his works the participle *ens* is in fact used by St Thomas in the sense of 'that which is'" (8), rather than in the sense of the actuality of being. St Thomas was linguistically very conservative and this "departure from current usage" (16) was atypical. A significant verbal link between Aquinas's abstract sense of *esse* as existence occurs when the *Cloud* author makes the same departure from common Middle and Modern English usage in the awkward use of the English infinitive "to be," to indicate *esse* in the statement God "gave thee to be" (141/15; 79/14), and his multiple play with "to be" and "this litil worde IS" (see 143/16-30; 80/30-43).

¹¹ Thomas Aquinas *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*, ed. Raymond Spiazzi (9th ed., Turin 1956); my translations. See also Thomas Aquinas, *In Librum de Causis -- Expositio*, ed. Ceslari Pera (Turin 1955) 6.1.6.175; 18.1.18.344; 12.1.12.282.

¹² Cf. Sandra Edwards' introduction to her translation of Thomas Aquinas, *Quodlibetal Questions 1 and 2* (Toronto 1983) 18-21.

¹³ Heidegger (at n. 3) 88.

¹⁴ All quotations and translations, unless otherwise indicated, are from Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 61 vols., gen. ed. Thomas Gilby, O.P. (New York 1963-81). In addition to the standard reference I have added the volume and page numbers of the Gilby edition.

¹⁵ Compare Gilson (at n. 3) 154 and Heidegger (at n. 3) 100.

¹⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Liber de Veritate Catholicae Fidei contra errores Infidelium qui dicitur Summa Contra Gentiles*, 3 vols., ed. D. Petri Marc (Turin 1967); my translation.

¹⁷ R.E. Allen, *Plato's Parmenides: Translation and Analysis* (Minneapolis 1983) 191. N.B.: these generalizations do not apply to Neoplatonism. For the harmonization of pagan and Christian Neoplatonism see Stephen Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena: An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition* (Leiden 1978) 125-90. On the debate of Plato himself conceiving of a transcendent one or "good" (*Republic* 6.509) see Allen 188 ff.

¹⁸ Cf. *ST* (at n. 14) 8:10-11 notes 'e' and 'f'.

¹⁹ Cf. *ST* (at n. 14) 8:13 note 'p'.

²⁰ Gersh (at n. 17): "The Neoplatonists take over the whole of the Aristotelian doctrine of causation but subject it to two fundamental transformations. First it is extended beyond the sensible world," and secondly we see "its combination with emanation theory" (32).

²¹ My translation; translation in *ST* (at n. 14): "everything that is at all real is from God" (8:7).

²² Thomas Aquinas (in n. 11); my translation.

²³ Caputo (at n. 9): "All metaphysics moves within the distinction between Being and beings, and in each case Being is thought of as some kind of ground or cause of beings. This is clearly true of St Thomas' metaphysics, which is centered on the distinction between subsistent Being, *esse subsistens*, and finite beings, *ens participatum*. Finite beings participate in and depend on Being itself while Being, as the subsistent Being communicates itself to beings" (3).

²⁴ The 1944 edition (at n. 1), note to 140/20: "substance: Here is a play on words. Solomon used the word with the secondary meaning of 'possession'; the author means it here to bear its primary meaning of 'essential nature,' 'being'" (207); the 1982 edition (at n. 1), note to 78/33: "substance: 'essence'; cf. 'possessions', 26. Such word play is characteristic" (177). A clue to the meaning of "substance" intended, and an indication of the *Cloud* author's subtle grasp of metaphysics, is the

play with the words "primary" and "first" (e.g., "the first of thy frutes") throughout this exegesis and its relation to Aristotelian and Thomist "first substance."

²⁵ This "first substance" is equivalent to the fourth sense of substance in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Aquinas himself points out (*In 7 Meta.* 1273) that this sense is identical in definition with the "first substance" in Aristotle's *Categories* 5.2a.10.

²⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *In Duodecim Libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis Expositio*, ed. M.R. Cathala, exarata retractatur cura et studio, Raymundi Spiazzi (Turin 1950); English translation: *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, 2 vols., tr. John P. Rowan (Chicago 1961).

²⁷ See, for example, William of Sherwood *Introduction to Logic*, tr. Norman Kretzmann (Minneapolis 1966) 1.13-14, 28-29.

²⁸ R.E. McCall, "Accident," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, I, 76.

²⁹ Aristotle, *Aristotle's Categories and Propositions (De Interpretatione)* tr. Hippocrates G. Apostle (Grinel 1980) 8b25, 15.

³⁰ For clarity I have translated "principia speciei" as "principles of the species" rather than *ST* (in n. 14) (in this instance): "specific principles."

³¹ To avoid confusion, in this passage I have translated the second occurrence of "essentia" as "essence"; *ST* (in n. 14) translates it as "nature." For a full distinction between hypostasis ("substance") and essence see *ST* 1a.29.3 / 6:48-51.

³² Thomas Aquinas, *In Librum Beati Dionysii de Divinis Nominibus: Expositio*, Cura et studio Ceslari Pera (Turin 1950) 2; my translation. Aquinas makes a similar statement on the "platonici" in *ST* 1a.29.3 ad 4 / 6:50-51).

³³ *ST* (in n. 14) translates "emanationem" as "issuing," and "emanatione" as "flowing out"; I translate both as "emanation" in order to underline the Neoplatonic connection.

³⁴ Domingo Báñez, *The Primacy of Existence in Thomas Aquinas: A Commentary on Thomistic Metaphysics*, tr. Benjamin S. Llamzan (Chicago 1966) 34.

³⁵ My translation.

³⁶ Aquinas: "Sicut igitur fieri rei non potest remanere, cessante actione agentis quod est causa effectus secundum fieri, ita nec esse rei potest remanere, cessante actione agentis quod est causa effectus non solum secundum fieri sed etiam secundum esse" ["Consequently: just as the coming to be of an effect cannot continue once the action of the agent causing its coming to be ceases, so too the esse of an effect cannot continue once the action of the agent causing not only its coming to be but also its esse ceases" (*ST* 1a.104.1 / 14:40-41). See also T.C. O'Brien, "Esse, the Proper Effect of God Alone," in *ST* (in n. 14) vol. 14, app. 1, 169-75.

³⁷ See *ST* 1a.104.1, and *ST* (in n. 14) vol. 14, note "v", 42; also T.C. O'Brien, "The Dionysian Corpus," in *ST* (in n. 14) vol. 14, app. 3, 182-93.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ For Aquinas on this, see *ST* 1a.104.3; 1a.19.4.

⁴⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *De potentia*, 3.7, in *Opera Omnia*, Parmae Edition (1865; rpt. New York 1949) vol. 8; translated by O'Brien (in n. 36) 171.

⁴¹ Translation: *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 4 vols., various translators (1955; rpt. Notre Dame 1975).

⁴² *De potentia* (in n. 40); tr. O'Brien (in n. 36) 170.

⁴³ See *SCG* 3.66; 3.49.4.

⁴⁴ Translation (in n. 41)

⁴⁵ I wish to thank Professors David Williams, Guy H. Allard, and Raymond Klibansky for their kind guidance and suggestions.