ABSTRACT. The objective of this study is to analyze the writing of three neo-scholastic writers of the twentieth century—Marcel Chossat, Pedro Descoqs, and Francis Cunningham—who happen to dispute the prevailing view of Thomists that St. Thomas Aquinas does indeed hold a doctrine of the real distinction of essence and existence in created being. The approach utilized will be basically historical: we start with the year 1910, the year in which Marcel Chossat rekindled the ever-smoldering embers of the essence-existence controversy with his claim that Aquinas never held such a doctrine. In order to justify another treatment of what has been called "the endlessly rehashed question", we try to show that the arguments put forth by the three thinkers in question all are based on considerable and weighty linguistic grounds which others in the debate have tended to dismiss. We conclude by saying that any discussion of the real distinction controversy must take a "linguistic turn" if it is to have any hope of being fruitful.

The question of a real distinction between essence and existence in created being has long exercised the minds of scholastic and neo-scholastic thinkers. Most of this debate has raged around two figures: St. Thomas Aquinas and Giles of Rome. The curious fact about this famous distinction is the number of positions that have grown up around it. In a very real sense, just about any position that could be taken has been taken.

To the question, Is there a real distinction between essence and existence in created being?, we have the following answers: Thomists for the most part have said yes; Franciscans by and large have said no; Jesuits have been divided, saying maybe; and the Church has said in effect "no comment" when asked to resolve the question.

To the question, How important is this real distinction of essence and existence in created being?, we can discover the following answers: Norbert Del Prado considers it to be the fundamental truth of Christian philosophy; Adhemar D'Ales considers it to be the cardinal tenet of Thomistic philosophy, though not of all philosophy; Dominic Soto considers it to be of no great importance; John Duns Scotus considers it to be simply false.
If we grant for the sake of argument that there is a real distinction of essence and existence in finite being, who deserves the credit for introducing this doctrine into philosophy? Here, too, the answers are diverse: Aristotle is the one, avers G. Manser;9 Plato is the one, says A. Little;10 The Neoplatonists deserve the credit according to C. Henry;11 Gilson is convinced that Alfarabi introduced the distinction into philosophy;12 D'Ales chooses Avicenna;13 Henri Renard is certain that St. Augustine deserves the credit;14 Francis Cunningham chooses Giles of Rome;15 A.C. Graham says, in effect, "None of the above".16

If we grant that there is a real distinction between essence and existence, what is the ultimate meaning of this doctrine for philosophy? Again the answers are diverse: It is necessary to safeguard infinite being from confusion with finite being;17 It is the strongest weapon in the Christian intellectual arsenal in the battle against pantheism;18 It is the antidote needed to overcome the poison of the "forgetfulness of being";19 It is the catalyst which has forced man to accept his freedom;20 It is a metaphysical inference to solve the problem of the one and the many:21 It is the ultimate metaphysical implication of the quinque viae of St. Thomas Aquinas;22 It is the Thomistic substitute for the older theory of universal hylomorphism.23

We can ask ourselves one further question: Is the real distinction of essence and existence in the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas? The reader will not be surprised to find a number of opinions given in answer to this query as well. Most authors will say that there is indeed such a distinction in the writings of the Common Doctor, yet even here there are nuances. One author avows that the early St. Thomas held such a distinction but not the later St. Thomas. And another thinker will say that there either is or is not a "real distinction of essence and existence" in the works of St. Thomas, depending on what one means by "real distinction".24

What this welter of conflicting views proves, at the very least, is that "talk about essence and existence admittedly gives rise to all sorts of problems".25 We learn that the relationship between essence and existence is one of the most difficult problems in all of philosophy.26 Indeed, as Gilson has quite aptly pointed out, when it comes to the topic of a real distinction between essence and existence, "universal agreement does not exist".27

In the long history of this problematic, one of the few seeming verities to emerge has been the belief that St. Thomas Aquinas actually held a doctrine of a real distinction of essence and existence in created being. Most present-day Thomists agree on the issue. The Franciscans agree as well. And yet, despite what Gilson and Fabro and a host of others have uncovered of the authentic thought of the Common Doctor, despite the claim that the real distinction doctrine is the key to the secrets of St. Thomas' thought, it is a curious fact that some thinkers have continued to deny that St. Thomas ever held a doctrine of the real distinction of essence and existence.

It will prove instructive to turn to these latter thinkers to see what they have to say about this much ballyhooed question of a real distinction. As we see their positions emerge, we cannot but be struck by the fact that each regularly emphasizes linguistic considerations to
prove that St. Thomas never held the doctrine which his followers continue to attribute to him. What is instructive about this turn to language on the part of those who claim that St. Thomas never held a real distinction doctrine is that it is mirrored by a host of dyed-in-the-wool Thomists who, while continuing to hold that Aquinas did indeed hold the doctrine in question, have themselves made a "linguistic turn" of sorts in trying to explain why the debate on essence and existence has lasted for over seven hundred years.

In a word, then, no matter whether one thinks that St. Thomas held or did not hold a doctrine of the real distinction between essence and existence, one must go to language in order to justify the position one has chosen. The question of the Thomistic real distinction doctrine has taken the "linguistic turn".

When I say that the question of St. Thomas' real distinction doctrine has taken the "linguistic turn", I by no means wish to imply that the great medieval schoolmen were linguistically naive. For example, St. Thomas himself was well aware that there is often an important difference between the etymology of a word and its meaning, pace St. Isidore and his Etymologies. Likewise he was cognizant of the fact that there is a crucial distinction to be made between the grammatical form and the logical form of a proposition, a thesis so dear to the linguistic philosophers of our day. Even the verifiability criterion of meaning, that cornerstone of the logical positivist edifice, is adumbrated in the works of the Angelic Doctor.

Yet the great masters of the Middle Ages had to write in a Latin language which was, as Seneca once lamented, philosophically powerless. Gilson observed: "The philosophical sterility of ancient Rome seems to be a fact". That the Schoolmen showed amazing creative power despite the handicaps of the Latin language is indeed true. As Father Chenu puts it: "Esse et essentia supporteront un edifice metaphysique qui stupferait Ciceron". Yet, in doing so, the medievals were compelled to innovate and at times created what D.P. Henry has termed "monstrous impurities of language". For example, looking at Anselm of Canterbury's sentence, "Grammaticus est grammatica", Henry sniffs that the sentence "is about as full of scandals, from the point of view of ordinary Latin grammar, as any three-word sentence could be".

In the course of our treatment, we shall see more about the linguistic aspect of the real distinction controversy and the language used in the debate. The "linguistic turn" of contemporary philosophy is usually said to have begun in earnest with the publication of G.E. Moore's classic work, Principia Ethica, in 1903. Is it sheer coincidence that we can date the start of the modern debate on the real distinction of essence and existence a scant few years later, in 1910?

Coincidence? Perhaps. Yet as we follow the twists and turns of that debate from 1910 to the present, we notice that Neoscholastic authors become more and more aware of the linguistic side of the question of a real distinction between essence and esse, bearing witness to what the American philosopher, Richard Rorty, has said: "Despite their dubious metaphilosophical programs, writers like Russell, Carnap, Wittgenstein, Ryle, Austin, and a host of others have succeeded in forcing
those who wish to propound the traditional problems to admit that they can no longer be put forward in the traditional formulations."

1. MARCEL CHOSSAT, S. J.

The year 1910 marks a watershed in the history of the real distinction debate; in that year the Jesuit philosopher Marcel Chossat rekindled the ever-smoldering embers of the real distinction controversy by doubting that St. Thomas Aquinas had ever espoused the doctrine traditionally ascribed to him.

Most remember Father Chossat for his contention that St. Thomas did not hold a real distinction between essence and existence. But few have detailed the considerable linguistic observations made by the Jesuit historian of philosophy as he assembled the details necessary to buttress his bold thesis: "On sait que de nos jours les adversaires de la même distinction tiennent tout uniment en latin la même langage aux théologiens qui en sont partisans. . . . Leur langage néoplatonicien doit être jugé comme saint Thomas juge quelque part celui des Arabes ex causis dicendi, c'est-à-dire d'après leur contexte et en tenant compte le l'hypothèse et du point de vue où ils se placent".

Father Chossat was literally buried under an avalanche of articles and books, all attempting to refute the Jesuit's claim that to the best of his knowledge Giles Colonna (Giles of Rome) deserves the credit for introducing the doctrine of "the real distinction of essence and existence" into Scholastic philosophy and theology.

Dominicans immediately leaped into the fray, hoping to defend the honor of their own, the Angelic Doctor. A. Gardeil went on the attack, assuming the role of Averroes to Chossat'sAlgazel by writing an article entitled "Destruction des destructions' du R.P. Chossat". In less strident, more scholarly fashion, Pierre Mandonnet, another Dominican, attempted to deflate Chossat's thesis. The real distinction, conceded the noted historian of ideas, was not invented by St. Thomas; it had its origins in the theory of the Neoplatonists and Aquinas was among the first to welcome the theory.

C. Henry agreed with Gardeil and Mandonnet. A Jesuit, Guido Mattiussi (widely regarded as the "father" of the "Twenty-Four Theses" of the philosophical thought of St. Thomas) denied Chossat's contention that Giles of Rome was the true initiator of the real distinction.

Another author, A. Masnovo, while admitting grudgingly that Chossat's thesis merited attention, nonetheless sided with Chossat's foes. The fledgling journal, Rivista de filosofia neoscolastica formally opened its pages to a debate on the question of a real distinction in St. Thomas, beginning with Masnovo's contribution.

Cautions against the bewitchment of language are not the sole prerogative of the logical positivists. Such cautions were heard much earlier in the real distinction controversy. Here is a text of a Jesuit, Pierre Rousselot, writing in 1910 on the linguistic dimension of the real distinction debate. He is writing of the adversaries of St. Thomas' real distinction doctrine: "C'est que, se laissant tromper par le langage (qui
réfle et directement notre connaissance des objets matériels), ils parlent des formes pures, comme si elles étaient des êtres complets".50

If authors such as Gardeil, Mandonnet, and Masnovo took Chossat to task immediately for his thesis, in the course of the debate down through the years they had much help. The German scholar, Martin Grabmann (forgive the pun), attempted to bury Chossat once and for all.51 After poring through unedited manuscripts for years, Grabmann could write in 1934: "Hanc conclusionem finalem pronuntiare possumus: secundum judicium philosophorum, artistarum et averroistarum saeculi XIII et XIV inuentis S. Thomas Aquinas distinctionem inter essentiam et existentiam realem in rebus creatis docuit".52

Despite all this heavy intellectual artillery amassed against his thesis, Chossat went to his grave (not the one prepared for him by his adversaries) still convinced that his contention had not been refuted. He was resurrected (in a way) by no less a Thomist than Etienne Gilson who, in speaking of Grabmann and Chossat, had this to say: "Both were right, but not from the same point of view. Chossat was well founded in saying that Giles of Rome had invented a real distinction which is not found in Thomas Aquinas; and Grabmann was right in saying that many contemporaries of Thomas had credited him with a doctrine of the real composition of essence and existence, but Thomas and Giles did not understand this composition in the same way".53

Gilson's comment underscores two important considerations that must be borne in mind by anyone who would make sense of the essence-existence problematic as it has come down to us through the centuries: (1) there is no such animal as the real distinction common to both St. Thomas and Giles of Rome; and (2) when we speak of the teaching of Giles, real distinction is the key; when we come to Thomas' doctrine, real composition is a better way of speaking.

In the course of this heated polemic, Chossat's thesis has been the spur sending a host of neoscholastic historians and philosophers back to the men and the issues involved when the controversy over essence and existence began in 1276.54 These investigations have served the valuable purpose of bringing to light the unique role of esse in the genuine thought of Thomas Aquinas.

Whatever the merits of his thesis, Father Chossat deserves the credit for his role as "socratic gadfly", goading Thomists into deeper studies of the mind of their master, studies which have borne fruit in the important contributions of Gilson, Fabro, and others.

Writing in 1943, Francis McMahon seems certain that such studies have resolved the thorny question of a real distinction between essence and existence in the writings of St. Thomas.55 Father Cornelio Fabro, one of the main architects of the modern Thomistic revival, could write in the same vein in 1954: "E fuori dubbio ormai che tale tesi [i.e., the real distinction of essence and esse] appartiene all'essenza del tomismo ed è frutto maturo di quei 'pronuntiata maiora' dai quali il b. Pio X ammoniva essere pericoloso discostarsi" (Motu Proprio Doctoris Angelici del 29 giugno 1914).56

Yet it is a philosophical fact worthy of some note that despite all the contributions made to uncovering the genuine thought of the Angelic
Doctor on the matter, despite the impressive textual evidence amassed by the Thomists to prove the composition in re of essence and esse, despite what Fabro and Gilson have written, yes, despite all this, Chossat's thesis had and still has its supporters. Much like the fabled phoenix which St. Thomas mentions in De Ente et essentia, Father Chossat's contention that Aquinas never held the doctrine of a real distinction is brought down in flames only to rise again from its ashes. Two of his Jesuit companions rush to the aid of Chossat's thesis.

2. Pedro Descoqs, S.J.

Father Pedro Descoqs of the Society of Jesus raised up the standard of his fallen comrade and continued to reiterate Chossat's long-standing claim that St. Thomas never held the doctrine traditionally ascribed to him. In the words of Fr. Descoqs, "la distinction réelle au sense où l'entendent les modernes n'y est absolument pas engagée par le saint Docteur [Aquinas]."57

This Suarezian scholar, called by one writer the "most erudite of recent Scholastic metaphysicians",58 deserves credit—no less than Fr. Chossat—for his role as "gadfly" or perhaps even as "devil's advocate" on the question of the real distinction of essence and existence in St. Thomas: "His vigorous and persevering crusade against the real distinction provided the challenge for much of the best work in recent Thomist metaphysics".59

In sum, what his criticism of the supposed real distinction in St. Thomas boils down to is this: Such a doctrine of the real distinction is not needed to explain how God is really distinct from his creatures; a mere relation of the creature to its exemplar and efficient cause suffices for this task. In the words of Fr. Descoqs: "En prenant la question de ce biais, toute composition réelle par acte et puissance devient vaine et, ou mieux dire, une vraie superfétation".60

In Descoq's reading of the Angelic Doctor, ens is entirely synonymous with essence, though the latter is, to be sure, ordered to existence. What need, then, for a real composition?61 The supposed difference in the doctrines of being in St. Thomas Aquinas and Francis Suarez has been fostered by Thomists, and not based on the true doctrine of the Angelic Doctor—at least as Descoqs reads it.

Linguistic considerations come to the fore in a 1940 article in which Fr. Descoqs makes an interesting observation while zeroing in on his chief adversary on the question of a real distinction doctrine in St. Thomas, Father Cornelio Fabro. The unanimity which Fabro apparently sees among Thomists concerning the true import of Aquinas' essence/existence doctrine is illusory, according to Descoqs.62 The language used by thinkers before St. Thomas—as, e.g., the quod est et esse language of Boethius—must be interpreted in the exact same sense as its authors themselves understood it; unless we guide our analyses by such a criterion, anyone can find in St. Thomas his own personal ideas such as a real distinction of essence and existence understood (or misunderstood, as the case may be) in the sense of Boethius' distinction between esse and id quod est. Fabro is in error if he thinks I am confusing speculation with philology, notes Descoqs.63
In a very real sense, of course, what Descoqs is pleading for is some sort of linguistic control in the question of a real distinction; without this control, what is there to prevent Thomists from practicing *eisegesis* rather than *exegesis* of the genuine thought of Thomas Aquinas? One of the noteworthy features about the methodology of the Angelic Doctor in all his theological work is the fact that he used old language to express new insights, a point made clearly by Fr. Joseph Owens when he treats the topic.64 In the exchange between Fabro and Descoqs on the danger of reading too much of St. Thomas in the texts of writers who preceded him, it is Fabro who concedes that a distinction between essence and existence in created being was a doctrine unknown to Boethius.65 (Score this round at least a victory for Descoqs!) The arguments against there being any real distinction of essence and existence in the writings of St. Thomas by a thinker of Descoqs' stature were not taken lightly by such noted Thomists as Fabro, Aimé Forest,66 and Etienne Gilson.67 Though they disagree with what Descoqs is saying—and Fabro does so rather harshly68—these Thomists realize that Descoqs' arguments cannot be cavalierly dismissed. Perhaps it would not be too much to claim that, due to the work of Pedro Descoqs as a "devil's advocate" on the real distinction question, Thomists had to rework all the ways of dealing with the real distinction of essence and existence which had been popular up to that time.69

But while Thomists were busily revamping the language of essence and existence to meet the criticisms of Chossat and Descoqs, their revisions failed to stop the line of thinkers who continued to claim that St. Thomas Aquinas never held a doctrine of a real distinction. Another Jesuit comes to the defense of Chossat and Descoqs.

3. Francis Cunningham, S.J.

Continuing in the tradition of his Jesuit predecessors, Father Francis Cunningham likewise contests the notion that there is a real distinction of essence and existence in St. Thomas. Writing in 1962, the Jesuit historian of philosophy contends that the question of a real composition is indeed a legitimate one, but not a real distinction.70 Two years later, however, he is to write that St. Thomas "nunca afirmo una 'composicion real' entre los dos [essence and *esse*], ni una 'diferencia real' entre ellas".71 Thus, though the question of a real composition may be a legitimate one, St. Thomas never affirmed such a doctrine... or a real distinction to boot.

Cunningham outdoes his Jesuit forebears in one important respect: while he like those before him refuses to see the doctrine of a real composition of essence and *esse* in Thomas Aquinas, Cunningham goes on to say that Giles of Rome deserves the credit for introducing the famous doctrine of a real distinction not only into Scholastic philosophy but into philosophy period.72 Neither Aristotle nor Alfarabi, neither Avicenna nor Averroes had ever heard of a real distinction between essence and *esse*, avers Cunningham, and neither did St. Thomas Aquinas.

After noting that it was the *Latin* Avicenna and the *Latin* Averroes which influenced the medieval Schoolmen, Fr. Cunningham goes on to claim that Arabic scholars "cannot find any trace of this real distinction in the Arabian philosophers".73 In an allusion to the linguistic aspect of
the question, the Jesuit goes on to add with considerable understate¬
ment: "There is a language problem here antecedent to the one in logic or in metaphysics".74

A further contention which Cunningham makes also deals with the linguistic difficulties surrounding the essence–existence problematic. We have a host of languages floating around with translations taking place from one to the other. We have the Greek of Aristotle being translated into the Arabic of the great Moslem thinkers and into the Latin of the medieval doctors of the Christian West. The translation process is also going on of translating the Moslem thinkers into Latin. A key question emerges: How faithful are translations filtered down from one tongue to another? What happens when concepts go through a sort of "double fil¬ter"? Is anything lost in these translations? Could the real distinction controversy have begun because the very structure of one of the lan¬guages involved necessitated speaking of esse as if it if were really dis¬tinct from essentia? Cunningham answers none of these questions, but he has at least raised them, and for this we should be gratefuI.75

Conclusion

I have cited these three opponents of the view that there is a real distinction between essence and existence in the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas not to prove that there is no such distinction in the works of the Common Doctor but merely to point out that it is still an intellectually respectable opinion to say that there is not.76

Norbert del Prado had written of St. Thomas' teaching on the real distinction of essence and existence: "Haec autem sublimis veritas, nimi¬rum identitas substantiae et esse in Deo et realis utriusque compositio in omnibus aliis, censenda est veritas fundamentalis Philosophiae D. Tho¬mae".77

Francis Cunningham, on the other hand, writes concerning the conviction of many Thomists that Del Prado's thesis is substantially cor¬rect: "There are a number of assumptions involved here, not the least of which is the presupposition that St. Thomas himself held the real dis¬tinction. This has never been proved either exegetically or historically. . .. The real distinction is a sacred cow. It is a bit ironic in these days when the neo-Thomists are challenging the authenticity of Sacred Scrip¬ture itself, that they still refuse to consider any challenge to their own man-made fetish; especially when this particular man, whoever he was, was an imposter to begin with. He was not St. Thomas".78

There we have it in a nutshell: to some the real distinction doc¬trine must be regarded as the fundamental truth of St. Thomas' philoso¬phy; to others it is a "sacred cow", a man-made "fetish", invented by Thomists, perhaps, suggests Fr. Copleston, as a rather desperate way of finding something in [Aquinas'] multitudinous pages which can be cited as an original idea".79

Why this discrepancy? Is it "sublime truth" or "sacred cow"?

On a closely related topic Etienne Gilson once wrote: "In our mind, the existence of such divergences among Neo-Scholastics concerning the thought of St. Thomas is in itself an important philosophical problem. It
is a fact, but an intelligible answer should be given to the problem of its very possibility".\textsuperscript{40}

Could this intelligible answer of which the noted scholar speaks be the language which St. Thomas used to express his insights regarding the relation holding between essence and esse? From what we have seen of those who claim that St. Thomas never held a doctrine of the real distinction and from what we have seen earlier of those who claim he does, language becomes the prime candidate for the very possibility of such divergences.

\textbf{ENDNOTES}


2 Serafino Belmond, O.F.M., "L'Essenza e l'esistenza secondo Duns Scoto", Rivista di filosofia neoscolastica 2 (1910), 281-89. For a more recent treatment of the question with citations from the major Franciscan authors, see my article: "Some Franciscans on St. Thomas' Essence-Existence Doctrine", Franciscan Studies 38 (1978), 283-98.


4 Those acquainted with the essence-existence problematic will surely see the wisdom and prudence of the Church's position. On this interesting papal "non-intervention", see Kardinal Franz Ehrle, \textit{Die Scholastik und ihre Aufgaben in unserer Zeit}, 2nd ed. (Freiburg im Bresgau: Herder, 1933), 85-6.

5 Norbert Del Prado, O.P., \textit{De veritate fundamentali philosophiae Christianae} (Friburgi Helvetiorum: Consoc. S. Pauli, 1911).


7 Dominic Soto, O.P., has written: "Id solum addiderim, quod non est tantum momenti hanc distinctionem aut concedere aut negare; dummodo non negetur differentia inter nos et Deum, quod esse sit de essentia Dei et non sit de essentiae creaturarum", in \textit{In Dialecticam Aristotelis, "De substantia"}, q. 1. The text may also be found in L. Salcedo, S.J and J. Iturrioz, S.J., \textit{Philosophiae scholasticae summa} (Madrid: B.A.C., 1953), vol. I, 673.

8 The \textit{Doctor Subtilis} has this to say about essence and existence: "Simpliciter falsum est, quod esse sit aliud ab essentia", \textit{Opus Oxoniense}, d. 13, q. 1, no. 38: ed. Vives, t. 17, p. 692. We may ask ourselves a question at this point: What does the Subtle Doctor mean by \textit{esse} in the text we have just cited? There are two possible answers: He might be speak-
ing either of esse essentiae or esse existentiae. Which it is is well nigh impossible to discern from the text. And another question we might ask: Does Scotus mean by esse what St. Thomas will mean by esse? The question of language interposes itself forcefully at this point.


11 "Contribution à l'histoire de la distinction de l'essence et de l'existence", Revue Thomiste 19 (1911), 456.


13 D'Ales, DAFC, col. 1674.


15 Francis Cunningham, S.J., "Averroes vs. Avicenna on Being", The New Scholasticism 48 (1974), 216. We shall see more of Fr. Cunningham in the latter part of this work.


17 A Michel, "Essence", Dictionnaire de théologique catholique, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1922), V, 845-46. We should point out that the various answers we might give to this particular question regarding the ultimate meaning of the real distinction do not necessarily exclude each other. The real distinction of essence and existence in created being may well guard against pantheism and also be of value in helping us to overcome the problem of the one and the many.

18 Emile Filion, Elementa philosophiae thomisticae (Montréal: Beauchemin, 1937), I, 364.


23 Cornelio Fabro, C.P.S., "Neotomismo e neosuarezismo: una battaglia de principi", Divus Thomas (Piacenza) 44 (1941), 495.

24 Representative of those who are convinced that there is a real distinction doctrine in the writings of the Angelic Doctor would be V.-A. Berto, "Sur la composition d'acte et de puissance dans les créatures
d'après s. Thomas", Revue de philosophie 39 (1939), 120. In an article I had cited above in note 2, I contended that the Franciscan School in general gives witness to the fact that St. Thomas Aquinas held a doctrine of the real distinction; even though the Franciscans disagree with St. Thomas, they nevertheless attribute that doctrine to him. The author who maintains a real distinction doctrine in the young Aquinas but not in the old is Franz Pelster, S.J., "The Authority of St. Thomas in Catholic Schools and the Sacred Sciences: An Opinion Regarding Two Recent Articles", Franciscan Studies 13 (1953), 160. It is Fr. Frederick Copleston, S.J., who asks us to clarify what we mean by 'real distinction' before he can answer the question. See his History of Philosophy (New York: Newman, 1950), II, 333. For more about the thought of Fr. Copleston on this topic and a host of quotations from his various works, see Germain Kopaczynski, O.F.M. Conv., "The Essence-Existence Question in a Linguistic Key", Miscellanea Franciscana 80 (1980), 67-79, especially 75-79.

27 History of Christian Philosophy, 425.
28 This is the point I have tried to document in my earlier effort, "The Essence-Existence Question in a Linguistic Key". The three Thomists who are singled out for an extended treatment on the "linguistic turn" are Etienne Gilson, Joseph Owens, C.Ss.R., and Fr. Copleston.
30 Summa theologiae, II-II, q. 92, a.1, obj. 2 and ad 2m.
31 Summa theologiae, I, q. 45, a. 1, ad 3m. St. Anselm of Canterbury is also aware of this difference. On Anselm, see D. P. Henry, "Medieval Philosophy", Encyclopedia of Philosophy, V, 225.
32 Ludwig Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, 4.0031.
33 De veritate, q. 12, a. 3, ad 2m: "Quia primum principium nostrae cognitionis est sensus, oportet ad sensum quodam modo resolvere omnia de quibus iudicamus". (The text comes from the Leonine edition, t. 22, v. II, 378: also Vives, t. 11, 604.
34 For some texts of Seneca, see M.D. Chenu, O.P., Introduction à l'étude de s. Thomas d'Aquin (Montréal: Publications de l'Institut d'Etudes Médiévales # 11, 1954), 95.
35 History of Christian Philosophy, 541.
36 Chenu, 95.
37 In the give-and-take occasioned by the long essence-existence controversy, I think it safe to say that Cicero is not the only thinker who has been "stupefied" by the language of essence and existence. See Chenu, 96.
“Medieval Philosophy”, 255.

Henry, 255.


"Dieu", Dictionnaire de théologie catholique, IV, 1180 (Imprimatur of 1910). To the best of my knowledge, Father Chossat (who died in 1926) never changed his mind: There is no real distinction of essence and existence in Aquinas' writings.

"Dieu", col. 1181.

Revue Thomiste 18 (1910), 361-91.

The reader should remember that when Mandonnet and the others writing at this time make mention of "the real distinction", they do so as if they were speaking of one well-defined theory. There might be several theories.


"La distinzione fra essenza ed esistenza", Rivista di filosofia neoscolastica 2 (1910), 532.

Rivista di filosofia neoscolastica 2 (1910), 532.

Rousselot’s text may be found in Edgar Hocedez, S.J., "Introduction historique", Aegidii Romani Theoremata de Esse et Essentia (Louvain: Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense, 1930), 56. On philosophers being deceived by language—a common theme of linguistic philosophy in general—see J.L. Austin, Philosophical Papers 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970), 181-82: "We must forewarn ourselves against the traps that language sets us". See also Wittgenstein, Tractatus, 4.003.


History of Christian Philosophy, 422.

Henry of Ghent published his First Quodlibet in 1276, and from that time on, the question of a real distinction between essence and existence
has been passionately discussed by Christian thinkers. What happened in 1910 was only the latest flare-up in this smoldering issue.


56 "Tommaso d'Aquino", Enciclopedia cattolica XII, col. 289.

57 "La division de l'être en acte et puissance d'après saint Thomas", Divus Thomas (Piacenza) 43 (1940), 480.


59 Sister Helen James John, S.N.D., "Pedro Descoqs: A Devil's Advocate on Essence-Existence", The Modern Schoolman 40 (1962-3), 40. The term, "devil's advocate", must be understood in this context to mean one who actually is convinced of the correctness of his position.

60 "Métaphysique--#5: le thomisme d'après le R.P. d'Ales et à propos de l'union hypostatique", Archives de philosophie 6 (1929; cahier 4), 142-43.


62 Descoqs, "La division", 485.

63 "La division", 487-8. In passing we note that Descoqs credits Franz Pelster, S.J., with the proposal that terms employed by thinkers before St. Thomas should be interpreted in a rigorous sense, that is, in the same sense which they have in these sources. One example, of course, would be the quod est et esse of Boethius.


65 Cornelio Fabro, C.P.S., "Neotomismo e neosuarezismo", Divus Thomas (Piacenza) 44 (1941). 191. Today there is fairly unanimous agreement that Boethius cannot be speaking of a real distinction in the properly Thomistic sense.


67 History of Christian Philosophy, 422.

68 "Circa la divisione dell'essere in atto e potenza secondo san Tommaso", Divus Thomas (Piacenza) 42, 532.

69 John, 43.


71 "Precedentes historicos de la teoria de esse y esencia en santo Tomas", Pensamiento 20 (1964), 157. Also helpful in this regard will be "Textos de santo Tomas sobre el esse y esencia", Pensamiento 20 (1964), 283-306, also by Fr. Cunningham.

"Averroes", 186. Is Fr. Cunningham correct in saying that Amélie-Marie Goichon, La distinction de l'essence et de l'existence d'après Ibn Sina (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1937), "cannot find any trace of this real distinction in the Arabian philosophers"? On p. 131 of her book, Goichon does say: "La question de savoir s'il y a ou non distinction réelle ne semble pas avoir été discutée dans l'entourage d'Ibn Sina... Il ne fait pas non plus de démonstration à proprement parler. C'est pour lui chose admise, evidence toute simple. Cette distinction se retrouve en logique, à propos des éléments du concept, et en métaphysique, où elle fonde le classement des êtres". Granted, Goichon does not make it clear exactly what sort of distinction she is speaking of in the last sentence of the citation. Yet if we turn to p. 138 of her book she cites a passage from Avicenna and adds: "Ce texte commence à déterminer qu'il s'agit bien d'une distinction réelle, fondée sur la nature même de la chose".

"Averroes", 186.

"Averroes", 185-6. Cunningham is not the first to point out the role of translations. Etienne Gilson, Elements of Christian Philosophy (New York: Omega, 1963), p. 139, writes: "In Avicenna's own language, or at least in that of his Latin translators, created existence comes to the essence as a sort of 'accident'". And along the same lines, Joseph Owens, C.Ss.R., An Interpretation of Existence (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1968), 30.

Their opinion concerning the lack of a real distinction of essence and existence in the writings of St. Thomas has drawn fire by a host of fine Thomistic scholars. In this sense, then, we can speak of an "intellectually respectable opinion". That Chossat, Descoqs, and Cunningham are in the minority does not—and should not—matter.

De veritate fundamentali, xxxvii.

"Averroes", 191.

A History of Medieval Philosophy, 181