

Transubstantiation, essentialism, and substance

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Abstract: According to the Eucharistic doctrine of Transubstantiation, when the priest consecrates the bread and wine, the whole substance of the bread and wine are converted into the body and blood of Christ. The ‘accidents’ of the bread and wine, however, remain present on the altar. This doctrine leads to a clutch of metaphysical problems, some of which are particularly troubling for essentialists. In this paper, I discuss some of these problems, which have recently been pressed by Brian Ellis and Justin Broackes. I argue that defenders of Transubstantiation have satisfactory replies.

It was once quite common for philosophers to think very carefully about the compatibility of their theories with the teaching of the Church: one item of particular interest was Church teaching on the Eucharist.¹ It would be something of an understatement to say that this is no longer the case. Further, it even happens occasionally that Catholic thought, or rather a caricature of it, is held up for ridicule rather than religious assent: philosophers might, for example, make so bold as to refer to certain Church teachings as ‘medieval mumbo-jumbo’,² or ‘obvious nonsense’.³ Nevertheless, one reason there was so much work done on the Eucharist by so many great philosophers, past and present, is that it involves profoundly interesting, and extremely difficult, philosophical problems. In this paper, I address a few of those problems in order to defend the Eucharistic doctrine of Transubstantiation. This doctrine is a strict mystery: it cannot be shown to be true. As such, I set myself a modest task here: I intend to rebut two lines of argument that purport to undermine the doctrine. Brian Ellis defends the first set of objections;⁴ Justin Broakes is the source of the second.⁵

On Transubstantiation

Probably the clearest and briefest statement of the main lines of the doctrine of Transubstantiation is this:

And because that Christ, our Redeemer, declared that which He offered under the species of bread to be truly His own body, therefore has it ever been a firm belief in the Church of God, and this holy Synod doth now declare it anew, that, by the consecration of the bread and of the wine, a conversion is made of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord, and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of His blood; which conversion is, by the holy Catholic Church, suitably and properly called Transubstantiation.⁶

This passage remains the touchstone of Catholic teaching on the matter. It affirms that the whole substance of the bread and wine are converted into the body and blood of Christ – which implies that there is no more bread and wine left after the consecration, and which further implies that the presence of Christ on the altar is not merely spiritual or symbolic, but rather quite real indeed. But since what remains after the consecration still looks and feels like, and otherwise displays the properties associated with, bread and wine, the status of those properties is a further question. Obviously, they don't inhere in the bread and wine any more, since those things are no longer present. But the Church also denies that they inhere in Christ himself, for it seems false to say that Christ is round or white. Thus, the Church tells us that while the accidents of bread and wine remain, they 'continue without a subject in which to inhere'.⁷

I have spoken, and will continue to speak, of 'Transubstantiation' throughout this paper because it is a clearly defined dogma, taught by a large and important ecclesial body (of which I happen to be a part), and because the dogma has been explicitly attacked. However, other believers in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist are vulnerable to some of the objections raised in this paper.⁸ So at least some of what goes on in what follows has application for all believers in the real presence.

Ellis's objections

I now turn to the first set of objections. Brian Ellis is a defender of essentialism. He believes, to use his own capsule version of that view:

... that the laws [of nature] are immanent in the world, not superimposed on it [as in the modern conception of laws]. On [this] theory, the laws of nature depend on the essential properties of the things on which they are said to operate, and are therefore not independent of them.⁹

Essentialism contrasts with what he calls the 'Humean metaphysic', which Ellis understands to be, in part, the view that the causal powers of objects depend on the laws of nature, and that the laws of nature are themselves contingent. The

Humean, then, might hold that it is metaphysically possible for tigers to breathe underwater or for rabbits to fly. If only the laws of nature were different – which they could be – these creatures could have very different kinds of causal powers.

Ellis finds this Humeanism terribly misguided. On his view, there could not possibly be a world that included tigers or rabbits, but where those substances behaved quite differently from how they actually behave. Perhaps a world could contain a flying creature that looked something like a rabbit, but that creature wouldn't be a rabbit. It is *impossible* – not just nomically, but metaphysically impossible – for rabbits to fly. Ellis sees the world as made up of dynamic objects (what some have called 'powerful particulars') – things that have certain essential properties, and that necessarily act in accordance with those properties.

To use a different sort of object as an example, take the proton. Ellis says that it is not possible for a proton to play a causal role different from the one it in fact plays.

... the laws concerning the behavior of protons and their interaction cannot be just accidental – that is, laws which could well have been otherwise. On the contrary, it is essential to the nature of a proton that it be disposed to interact with other things as it does. Its causal powers, capacities, and propensities are not just accidental properties of protons, which depend on what the laws of nature happen to be, but essential properties, without which there would be no protons, and which protons could not lose without ceasing to be (or gain without coming into being).¹⁰

The closing parenthetical is important to keep in mind, for it adds an element that we haven't yet considered. Ellis holds that it's not just the case that protons necessarily have certain characteristic properties, but that it is also the case that anything that has those characteristic properties is a proton. Necessarily, all and only protons have the characteristic properties of protons. And, of course, that claim generalizes to any other kind of thing.

This provides the backdrop for Ellis's objections to Transubstantiation. He argues that the doctrine of Transubstantiation violates the condition that a given thing's activities come and go with its being. That is, he says that bread has certain characteristic properties: what makes something bread is its having these properties. Similarly, what makes something flesh is its having the characteristic properties of flesh. The idea that something could have the characteristic properties of bread, but be something other than bread, is nonsensical, given Ellis's essentialism.

Thus, there are two lines of objection against Transubstantiation here.

Objection 1 Ellis has it that wherever the characteristic properties of bread are found, there you have bread. The doctrine of Transubstantiation tells us that the accidents of bread and wine remain present after the consecration, even though

there is no bread on the altar. So Transubstantiation runs afoul of essentialism on this point.

Objection 2 Ellis has it that wherever you have flesh, there you have the characteristic properties of flesh. The doctrine of Transubstantiation tells us that the stuff on the altar is flesh, even though the characteristic properties of flesh are not there. So Transubstantiation runs afoul of essentialism again.

The most direct and obvious response to both objections is simply to point out that essentialism seems to remain a minority view among philosophers, and if Transubstantiation runs afoul of it, that's hardly a huge blow to Transubstantiation. However, since the Christian philosophical tradition has tended to embrace essentialism in one form or another, that kind of response is not particularly helpful: it would raise more problems than it settled. So I will argue that there are versions of genuine essentialism that are compatible with Transubstantiation.

My reply to Objection 1 invokes a broadly Aristotelian account of substance. In Aristotelian theories of substance, *kinds* play a vital role.¹¹ On this view, a tiger, for example, is an instance of (the substance kind) 'tiger'. Note that this claim is quite different from the claim that there is some object – a bare particular, perhaps – that has the property 'tiger' (and that, presumably, has it indifferently, such that it could just as easily have the property 'toad' or 'electron'). The idea is that substances *are* instances of substance kinds, not that they *have* them.¹²

According to this broadly Aristotelian account, substances come with a characteristic bundle of powers. Nothing can be a tiger and be able to fly, or lay eggs, or breathe underwater. No, tigers are warm-blooded carnivores which, when mature, tend to fall within a certain range of sizes and shapes, etc. But neither the tiger itself, nor the kind 'tiger', is simply a bundle of properties, nor is the tiger a bundle of properties plus a bare particular that has the properties. On the contrary, the substance kinds, like the substances that exemplify them, are basic – irreducible to the properties which come along with them. So, even though there is a characteristic bundle of properties that is associated with being a tiger, simply having those properties isn't what it is to be a tiger. What it is to be a tiger is to be an instance of 'tiger'.

Notice that while one cannot be a tiger without having the relevant properties, that does not entail that anything that had the bundle of properties that are associated with 'tiger' would, simply as an analytical matter, be a tiger. If the kind is irreducible to the properties – which is the claim I'm making here – then there's something else involved in being a tiger than just having the right properties. The extra thing involved is having those properties in the right way: namely, having them *in virtue of* being an instance of 'tiger'. If there is a tigerish bundle of properties out there somewhere that are bundled up together for some other

reason, then that bundle just isn't a tiger. These considerations open up conceptual space that Ellis claims is unavailable to the essentialist. For as I shall now show, this kind of view can be used to defend Transubstantiation from Objection 1.

Assume that the host – the piece of bread that becomes the body of Christ – is a substance.¹³ That is to say, assume the host is an instance of 'bread'. Bread, of course, exhibits a cluster of characteristic properties. Now, imagine that a piece of bread ceases to be an instance of 'bread'. If this happens, then there is no more bread present: the bread has ceased to exist. (What it is to be bread is to be an instance of 'bread'.) But imagine also that the characteristic properties that go along with being bread are miraculously held together, looking and feeling just as they did prior to the end of the bread, by an act of God. If this is possible – more on that question in a later section – then we have arrived at our result. We have an essentialist story that allows us to have the characteristic properties of bread present in the absence of any bread, without resulting in a contradiction of any kind. Despite the presence of the characteristic properties of bread, bread is absent. It is absent because those characteristic properties aren't there in virtue of 'bread' being exemplified. They're there, rather, in virtue of God's performing a miracle. This may be unexpected or bizarre or whatever, but it's not self-contradictory. Thus, Objection 1 is met.

Needless to say, I have not shown that the Aristotelian account of substance that I have invoked here is a good theory of substance. I haven't shown that we have reasons to endorse it. I've only shown that at least that one version of essentialism is not undermined by Objection 1. But I do wish to point out that Christians have reason to want to endorse something *like* what I've just said, irrespective of the Eucharist. For Christians believe that Christ's human nature is just like a human person, but isn't. So Christians believe there is at least one thing that has all the properties associated with a substance of a certain kind – *human* – but that fails to be a complete substance of that kind. (Later in the paper, I'll argue that Aristotelians actually ought to think that sort of thing happens all the time. Perhaps such considerations render the move less distasteful.)

One could certainly object that this account of substance entails that substances are deeply mysterious things: if there can be something apparently just like a tiger, but not a tiger, then that hidden kernel of tigerness is a very obscure thing indeed. I'll discuss a related epistemological objection in the following section. But for the time being, I'll point out that according to traditional essentialists, we just don't have any immediate access to substances: we know them only through their actions – through their accidents. As St Thomas Aquinas wrote, 'the species of a thing is gathered from its proper operation; for the operation manifests the power, which reveals the essence'.¹⁴ In other words, there is always a (fallible) process of inference from the outward acts and appearances to the essence. That's just the view.

The question remains whether essentialism can survive Objection 2. That objection, recall, was as follows. Transubstantiation involves the claim that the body of Christ is present on the altar despite the fact that there are no characteristic properties of flesh present on the altar. And wherever there is flesh, there are the characteristic properties of flesh. So Transubstantiation is false. We cannot simply put to use our response to Objection 1 here. A different response is called for. Someone who has a better grasp on the deep, dark details of St Thomas's metaphysics might press the point that Christ is present in the Eucharist not as in a place, but rather 'after the manner of a substance'.¹⁵ I suspect that move would provide sufficient grounds to reply to Objection 2, but I'm not at all sure I understand exactly what the claim means. So I hesitate to base my reply on it. Instead, I will point out that I have grossly oversimplified the Aristotelian account of substance I invoked earlier, and that by bringing in an important complication – together with making an observation about the status of the body of Christ – we can cut off Objection 2.

I've said that the Aristotelian holds that anything that is a tiger must exhibit a characteristic group of properties. But those properties include potentialities. So a very young tiger cannot actually eat meat, nor does it have the strength or speed to hunt a large animal. In fact, in terms of what it can do, it is quite different from a paradigmatic tiger. The characteristic group of properties associated with 'tiger' is pretty broad, then, if it allows things like that to count as tigers. But the reason such things as tiger infants count as tigers is that they are instances of 'tiger'. And as such, they have the potentiality to develop the other features associated with being an adult, properly functioning tiger. This is a special kind of potentiality. A young tiger is not potentially a thing that eats meat in the same way that one of its cells is potentially a thing that eats meat. A cell from a young tiger is, in one sense, potentially a thing that eats meat because it could (perhaps) be forced into becoming a new tiger organism that will itself one day be able to eat meat. But that's a potentiality in a very different sense than I have in mind. That's a passive potentiality. The tiger infant, on the other hand, has the active potentiality to eat meat. Left to its own devices, it will *naturally* develop the capacity to eat meat. That's what tiger infants do. To fully understand a given substantial kind, we must grasp it in all its active potentialities. I do not mean to defend or otherwise offer apologia for this kind of view here. I merely note that this notion of potentiality is part of the traditional account of essentialism.

Now, given this notion of potentiality, I can make a vital point about the characteristic properties of flesh. Here is a very natural thought: flesh is, among other things, visible. Based on that very natural thought, we might naturally conclude that anything that was not visible would not be flesh. But that natural thought is exactly that: natural. Looking at flesh a little more supernaturally makes things look a little different. As St Thomas says, 'it will be in the power of a glorified soul for its body to be seen or not seen, even as any other action of the

body will be in the soul's power; else the glorified body would not be a perfectly obedient instrument of its principal agent'.¹⁶ (The glorified body is the body of the resurrected human being in heaven.) Here is another such claim: 'the glorified body has by its nature those qualities which have a natural aptitude to affect the touch, and yet since the body is altogether subject to the spirit, it is in its power thereby to affect or not to affect the touch'.¹⁷

The idea here is that those who have glorified bodies will be visible or invisible, tangible or intangible, at will. These power, along with many others, will be available to all the blessed. And all humans are, potentially, among the blessed. So these powers are just part of what's involved in being human: a human body is able to be invisible at will. Not *now*. (At least, not for me. Maybe it's different for you.) But, one hopes, some day. So just as every tiger has the power to eat meat, even though some can't do it right now, so every human has the power to be invisible, even though some can't do it right now since they are not yet among the blessed (or since they are among the damned).¹⁸

This is a point about human bodies. It applies to any human body. Hence, it applies to Christ's human body. And so Christ's human body can be present without being seen (or felt, or what have you). And thus, there is nothing incoherent about claiming that the body of Christ is present on the altar despite the fact that none of the characteristic properties of flesh are (seen to be) there.¹⁹ Or, at the very least, if one wishes to claim there is an incoherence here, one must show that St Thomas's explanation of why it is that the glorified body is capable of invisibility is an incoherent one. His explanation, and possible objections to it, is not a matter I intend to pursue here.²⁰ For the present, I conclude that while Ellis has shown that *his own version* of essentialism is incompatible with Transubstantiation, he has not shown that *essentialism* is incompatible with Transubstantiation. All he has done is given Catholics reason to reject his version of essentialism.

Deeper concerns

But wait! That last bit may seem to be an obvious non-starter as a reply to Ellis, since I'm requiring that our bodies can one day become invisible and intangible, while it seems to be essential to us to be visible and tangible. It looks as though I'm replying to the objection by throwing out essentialism after all.

But that's not the case. It's no violation of essentialism to say that a thing that has properties of one sort at one time can develop *really different* properties at another time. Who would think, upon seeing a human embryo (but without knowing what it was), that it would develop into the kind of thing that could write Beethoven's Ninth Symphony? Without antecedent knowledge of how the embryo's potentialities get realized, such predictions would be

impossible. That doesn't mean the potentialities aren't really there, nor does it run afoul of essentialism to suggest that extraordinarily profound changes can happen.

So it seems to us that we are the sorts of things that *must* be visible when we consider things in the absence of divine revelation. But divine revelation teaches us otherwise. We'd have no reason at all to believe that human bodies will one day have the qualities St Thomas assigns to the glorified body if we didn't have revelation. But we do. So we know that among the potentialities bundled up in 'human' are the potentialities to become invisible and intangible. Again, unexpected and bizarre, but not incoherent. I'm not suggesting that there's any chance Ellis will believe the story I'm telling. He would, I suspect, find it a very silly story indeed. But I'm not interested in convincing Ellis: I'm interested in showing that he hasn't given essentialists any compelling reason to reject Transubstantiation.

But there's still more to this objection. If the metaphysical side of it isn't compelling, it still has an epistemological side. If we're open to flesh and blood having unexpected occult qualities, then don't we lose any grasp on what things are really like? If we believe that bread and wine can become body and blood while still looking just like bread and wine, how could we ever hope to know what anything really is? In short, doesn't accepting St Thomas's claims about the glorified body (or about Transubstantiation) undermine any claim we might ever make to understand the nature of *anything*?

Well, admittedly, all this suggests that we don't (at least in this life) ever know anything completely exhaustively. That's no surprise. But we can still certainly know lots – enough to sustain natural science and philosophical theorizing.

Some, however, would push this kind of objection further. Anthony Kenny writes:

But the metaphysics we were taught appeared to save the coherence of transubstantiation only at the cost of calling in question our knowledge of every ordinary material object. For all I could tell, my typewriter might be Benjamin Disraeli transubstantiated; since all I could see were mere accidents, and I lacked any metaphysical eye to see through to the real substance.²¹

But Kenny's claim is clearly far too strong. The bare metaphysical possibility that we're wrong about some apparently obvious truth doesn't, in itself, give us any reason to doubt that obvious truth – not unless we're playing 'First Meditation' (a popular parlour game) – yet Kenny's objection implies that it does. It may be metaphysically possible that I am a brain in a vat and the ideas I have of the 'computer' on which I write are really caused by mad scientists. But this doesn't lead me to *wonder* whether my computer really exists. Nor would I be concerned over the possibility that my computer might be Benjamin Disraeli, even if I granted, for the sake of discussion, that this is a metaphysical possibility. When

God reveals odd truths to us, that doesn't mean that anything goes, in all other contexts.

Catholics believe in baptismal regeneration. So when someone is baptized, she undergoes a very deep change: not only is original sin washed away, but the new believer is incorporated into the Church. Despite this enormous change, when adults undergo baptism, they typically *experience* nothing other than having a bit of water poured over their heads, while some words are being said. This makes possible an objection of this kind: since Catholics are obliged to believe that people can undergo radical changes without having any awareness of those changes at all, I have no way to know whether perhaps every time I bite into a piece of pizza I undergo a deep conversion that I completely fail to take cognizance of.

It's true – this is a metaphysical possibility. One needn't endorse baptismal regeneration to see that it's a metaphysical possibility. One needn't even believe in an omnipotent God. Nevertheless, this kind of worry is just not live. I have no reason to think that I undergo any major change when I bite into pizza, or when I take a shower, or when I sing 'Happy Birthday'. However, I do have reason to believe that I underwent a major change when I was baptized, even though I myself have no memory of the event. The point applies to the Eucharist as well. Knowing Church teaching, and knowing that a consecration has occurred, I have reason to believe that what I see is not, despite appearances, bread and wine. This gives me *no* reason, however, to doubt the evidence of my senses in the usual run of things.

Here, the liturgy is the clue: because the bread and wine have been consecrated, we have reason to believe they are the body and blood of Christ. Because I have been baptized, I have reason to believe I've undergone a deep transformation, even if all I really experienced was some water being poured on me. God tends to let us know when He's going to do unusual things.

Broackes's objection

This all leaves open the question of whether it is possible for accidents to exist without a subject in which to inhere. To the bundle theorist – particularly to those believers in tropes, who say that it is metaphysically possible for a single trope, such as a particular instance of red, to float free of any bundle – it is clearly a possibility for there to be a collection of properties without any substance in which to inhere. So there are philosophers who see no problem with free-floating properties of the sort involved in the doctrine of Transubstantiation. Unfortunately, I cannot turn to these philosophers for help, since I have already repudiated bundle theories (at least, I have repudiated them *as an account of substance*) in my discussion of Ellis. If bread just is a bundle of tropes, then it's impossible to have that bundle of tropes present and not have bread.

But even if I could turn to the trope theorists for help, they themselves have recently come under fire from someone who defends an Aristotelian account of substance. Justin Broackes argues that the notion of free-floating properties, which originated in scholastic discussions of the Eucharist, came back into popularity in the work of David Hume, and is presently found in the thought of trope theorists, is a grave mistake. He argues that in Hume the doctrine that leads to the endorsement of the bundle theory is the principle that whatever is distinct is separable. Hume infers from this principle, famously, that since any two perceptions are different from each other (and from everything else), they can exist separately, and don't need anything else to support their existence (or, as we might say, they need no substance in which to inhere). Broackes thinks this principle is 'definitely false', for, as he says, the fact that two dents are different doesn't imply that either can exist independently: the existence of a dent implies the existence of *something dented*: a car door, for example.²² Once we see that Hume's principle is false, the way is clear to seeing that the fact that a property is different from the substance that exemplifies it does not imply that it could possibly exist without the substance. On his Aristotelian account of substance, there are fundamentally *things* – concrete objects – which *have* properties, and there can't be properties without the things which have them.

Nor – and this is really the thrust of Broackes's argument – can it make any sense to try to cobble together things out of properties that are in any way prior to those things. In fact, he turns a common argument in support of the bundle theory against it. It's often said that we only perceive properties (or qualities), and never substances. As such, substances, if there are such things, are some 'we know not what' that lie outside our experience. Broackes replies that when we perceive qualities, we perceive them as co-instantiated. When Tibbles the black cat leaves the room, we don't just see blackness. We see the co-instantiation of blackness, furriness, motion, size, shape, and so forth all together. And he says that 'as soon as we have the perception of co-instantiation of properties, we have the perception of a thing'.²³ In fact, he goes further, and argues that all quality perceptions are predicative: the perception of just colour alone, for example (if we could have such an independent perception) *already implies* the existence of a thing that is coloured.²⁴

If Broackes is right, then the notion that the accidents of bread and wine persist without a substance in which to inhere is incoherent. If there's whiteness present on the altar, then there must be some white thing. But, according to the advocate of Transubstantiation, it's not the bread that's white, for there is no more bread; nor is it the body of Christ that's white, for the accidents do not inhere in Christ. So there's whiteness with no substance that is white, which is incoherent. Thus runs Broackes's objection. But consider Mirkwood Forest. It is dark. But its darkness does not inhere in any one substance. Rather, darkness is a property of the forest as a whole, which is (in Aristotelian thought) certainly not a substance,

but, rather, a collection of substances. So Broackes's claim must be adjusted: at most what can be asserted is that any property implies a substance *or substances* that bear that property. But can even this much be asserted? Once Broackes's general claim (perceiving yellow implies the existence of a yellow thing) meets a counter-example, it loses its force.

Of course, I have not shown, by way of my counter-examples above, that it is metaphysically possible for any property to exist without inhering either in a substance, or in a group of substances. Rather, what I've done (I think) is to show that Broackes's argument is not sufficient to prove that it is impossible for a property to exist without inhering in any substance at all. It seems that if darkness can exist without inhering in any one substance (or if the blue of the sky can exist without inhering in any one substance, or if a sound can exist without inhering in any substance), then there's no compelling reason to deny that properties can exist without inhering in any substances at all. If that is a metaphysical possibility, then Broackes's objection, like Ellis's, fails. I haven't positively established that my view is possible: I've simply rebutted an argument that seeks to show that it is impossible.

It is worth pointing out briefly that St Thomas posed an objection like Broackes's to himself, and offered a compelling reply. The objection is as follows:

Further, not even by miracle can the definition of a thing be severed from it, or the definition of another thing be applied to it; for instance, that, while man remains a man, he can be an irrational animal. For it would follow that contradictories can exist at the one time: for the 'definition of a thing is what its name expresses', as is said in *Metaph. iv*. But it belongs to the definition of an accident for it to be in a subject, while the definition of substance is that it must subsist of itself, and not in another. Therefore it cannot come to pass, even by miracle, that the accidents exist without a subject in this sacrament.²⁵

In other words, the objection claims that the notion of an accident that does not inhere in a substance is self-contradictory. Now Transubstantiation is a mystery. That is, it is among those teachings which,

... after the ... acceptance of Faith ... remain covered by the veil of faith and hidden in a certain obscurity Nevertheless, reason enlightened by faith ... can, through analogues derived from created things, throw a light on the mystery and bring it nearer the understanding Also, the objections brought against the dogma can be refuted by reason (Mysteries are), in fact, beyond reason (*supra rationem*) but not contrary to reason (*contra rationem*).²⁶

When a Catholic speaks of a mystery, she means it in the sense outlined above. When someone like St Thomas Aquinas approaches the question of the Eucharist, he approaches it with the desire to show that the objections that can be raised to the doctrine are failures, and with the desire to help illuminate the mystery as far as possible. So since Transubstantiation is a mystery, the Catholic doctor need not try to prove that it is possible, but rather to show that it can't be shown to be

impossible. This is exactly what St Thomas does in his response to the above objection, saying

Since being is not a genus, then being cannot be of itself the essence of either substance or accident. Consequently, the definition of substance is not – ‘a being of itself without a subject’, nor is the definition of accident – ‘a being in a subject’; but it belongs to the quiddity or essence of substance ‘to have existence not in a subject’; while it belongs to the quiddity or essence of accident ‘to have existence in a subject’. But in this sacrament it is not in virtue of their essence that accidents are not in a subject, but through the Divine power sustaining them; and consequently they do not cease to be accidents, because neither is the definition of accident withdrawn from them, nor does the definition of substance apply to them.²⁷

St Thomas doesn’t try to establish that accidents can exist without inhering in a substance. He simply argues that it is not part of the definition of ‘accident’ that it inheres in a substance, and part of the definition of ‘substance’ that it does not inhere in a substance. If those were indeed the definitions, then the claim that the accidents of bread and wine inhere in no substance would be straightforwardly self-contradictory. But this is not the case. So no contradiction has been demonstrated. This puts the burden of proof back on the objector.²⁸

Accordingly, I hold that following the consecration, what remains of the bread and wine is simply a bundle of properties. It’s not bread, for reasons familiar from the discussion of earlier sections. The bundle is nothing more than the properties of bread, sustained in existence by an act of God.²⁹ Note that endorsing the bundle theory in this limited context, I do not fall victim to standard objections to the bundle theory. One such objection, for example, is that the bundle theory leads to excessive essentialism: if a given bundle gains or loses any properties, the resulting bundle is numerically distinct from the original. But if a substance just is a bundle of properties, and if the bundle can’t survive any change, then neither can the substance. So goes a simple version of the objection. But it’s hardly a worry for my view. For even if the objection is entirely right, so that we’ve got different bread after any change of qualities in the bundles, that’s not really a worry, is it? We humans can still survive change in our properties. So can any other substance. That’s the intuition that doesn’t survive on a full-blown bundle theory. But it does survive on my view.

There’s an additional point for Aristotelians to think about. Imagine we accept the view that substances cannot have substances as parts. (This view is clearly endorsed by St Thomas, though Aristotle himself seems wishy-washy on it.) Imagine we also think that we humans are physical substances. (Again, such a view is endorsed by St Thomas.) Then we are committed to the view that none of our parts is a substance. But we have, let’s say, carbon atoms as parts. And we might be inclined to say that they ought to count as substances. There are good reasons to resist that inclination, and deny them substantiality *while they are our parts*.³⁰ But there are equally good grounds for granting them substantiality when

they are not our parts. So the Aristotelian has grounds for thinking there are two kinds of carbon atoms. There are the substances, and then there are the bundles of carbon-atomish properties in us. Those *nominal* carbon atoms only seem to be substances. But since they are not instances of *carbon atom*, they are not.

To tell that whole story would require making this paper much longer. The point of bringing it up here is not to try to convince you to accept it, but simply to say that Aristotelians have independent grounds – entirely unrelated to trying to make Transubstantiation work out – for asserting something like the bundle theory in certain contexts.

But leaving all that aside, I'm not trying to establish the truth of Transubstantiation, but simply to show that it isn't incoherent. If I've established that it can't be shown to be false by way of Broackes's concerns, then that's all I need to accomplish here. Broackes is quite probably correct that this sort of view paved the way for – and that it leaves the door open for – the bundle theory of substance. That may be a shame, but it doesn't prove Transubstantiation false. So the way – or at least one way – to handle Ellis's objection to Transubstantiation is to invoke an Aristotelian doctrine of substance, and the way to handle Broakes's argument is to admit that the Aristotelian theory has to be supplemented with a kind of bundle theory for the specific case of Transubstantiation. Neither move involves self-contradiction or incoherence.³¹

Notes

1. The interest of the medieval scholastics in such theological matters is fairly obvious, but for a good introduction to some of the issues and figures, see Marilyn McCord Adams 'Aristotle and the sacrament of the altar', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* Supplement, 17 (1992), 195–249. As to early modern philosophers, Roger Ariew has argued quite persuasively that they were deeply interested in these issues, as well; cf. his *Descartes and the Last Scholastics* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), ch. 7. See also a pair of articles by Daniel Fouke on the role of Transubstantiation in Leibniz's thought: 'Metaphysics, apologetics and the Eucharist in the early Leibniz', *Studia Leibnitiana*, 24 (1992), 145–159, and 'Dynamics and Transubstantiation in Leibniz's *Systema Theologicum*', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 32 (1994), 45–61. Among the prominent recent philosophers who have had something to say about Transubstantiation are Elizabeth Anscombe 'On Transubstantiation', in *The Collected Philosophical Papers of G.E.M. Anscombe*, III, *Ethics, Religion and Politics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981), 107–112; and Michael Dummett 'The intelligibility of Eucharistic doctrine', in W. Abraham and S. Holzer (eds) *The Rationality of Religious Belief* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 231–261. Most recently, Alexander Pruss has written a very fine piece on the Eucharist: 'The Eucharist: real presence and real absence', in T. Flint and M. Rea (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
2. Brian Ellis *Scientific Essentialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 92.
3. Richard Dawkins 'Viruses of the mind', in B. Dahlbom (ed.) *Dennett and His Critics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 21.
4. I am quite enthusiastic about Ellis's work, and I agree wholeheartedly with a great deal of it. However, it must be admitted, even by a sympathetic reader, that his treatment of this issue is shoddy at best. The extent of his engagement with the doctrine of Transubstantiation is a citation from an online encyclopedia. And he appears to labour under the extraordinary confusion that the Council of Trent's declaration on Transubstantiation was an attempt 'to make sense of the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation'; Ellis *Scientific Essentialism*, 92. Of course, it is not an attempt to make sense of the

- doctrine: it is a dogmatic declaration of *what the revealed doctrine is*, made by the Council because the doctrine was being denied by the Protestant Reformers. It is the work of the Church's theologians and philosophers to 'make sense' of the dogma. Theologians such as St Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, Suarez, and many others devoted literally hundreds of pages to 'making sense' of the doctrine, and although Ellis managed to sneer at this work – calling it 'medieval mumbo-jumbo' – he shows no signs of having read any of it.
5. Justin Broackes 'Substance', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 106 (2006), 133–168.
 6. Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Ecumenical Council of Trent, Session XIII, Chapter IV, J. Waterworth (trans.) (London: Dolman 1848). Available at <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent/ct13.html>
 7. Ludwig Ott *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* (Rockford IL: Tan, 1974), 383. This point is not, to my knowledge, a defined dogma of the Catholic Faith. Ott tells us it is taught '*Sent. certa*', which is to say, it is 'a doctrine, on which the Teaching Authority of the Church has not yet finally pronounced, but whose truth is guaranteed by its intrinsic connection with the doctrine of revelation'; *ibid.*, 9–10.
 8. Believers in impanation (according to which Christ assumes the bread and wine, which themselves remain present on the altar) or consubstantiation (which, again, holds that the bread and wine remain present on the altar) would not be vulnerable to what I'll call Objection 2 from Ellis, or to the Argument from Broackes. However, they would be vulnerable to Objection 1 from Ellis, and perhaps the epistemological concerns I raise in that discussion.
 9. Ellis *Scientific Essentialism*, 1.
 10. *Ibid.*, 2.
 11. See Michael Loux *Metaphysics* (London: Routledge, 1998), ch. 3; Michael Gorman, 'Re-thinking essence and substance' (unpublished ms). Natural kinds play a vital role in Ellis's view, as well, though there are differences in the way they are employed there.
 12. Thus, this view does not run afoul of Ellis's animadversions about substantial kinds being counted as property kinds; Ellis *Scientific Essentialism*, 92–93.
 13. St Thomas Aquinas holds that the bread is a substance. See *Summa Theologiae* [henceforth *ST*] III, 75, 6 ad. 1. I deny that the bread is a substance (and that the wine in the chalice is a substance). I believe that it is an aggregate of substances. So I will have to tell a slightly more complicated story than the one I give in the text. Here is a compressed and fictionalized account, to give some idea of how it goes. The bread is an aggregate of very small substances. Call them wheat particles. (Yes, these are fundamental particles, basic building blocks of the universe. Well, I did say it is a fictionalized account. It makes no difference to the story what the basic substances – those things to which the bread is reducible – are, so I am simplifying.) Wheat particles are instances of *wheat particle*. And bread just is an aggregate of wheat particles. When the priest says the words of consecration, they all cease to be instances of *wheat particle*, but the characteristic properties associated with being a wheat particle remain held in place by an act of God. So the supervenient breadish properties remain in place, too. But there is no bread remaining, since there are no wheat particles remaining, and bread just is an aggregate of wheat particles.
 14. Aquinas *Summa Contra Gentiles*, II, 94. The translation is from *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith*, II, James Anderson (trans.) (New York NY: Doubleday, 1955).
 15. *ST*, III, 76, 5. The translation of the *ST* I will use in this paper is *The Summa Theologica of St Thomas Aquinas*, 2nd edn, Fathers of the English Dominican Province (trans.), 1920, online at New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/index.html>
 16. *ST*, Suppl. 85, 3. Also: 'whoever has a glorified body has it in his power to be seen when he so wishes, and not to be seen when he does not wish it'; *ST*, III, 54, 1 ad 2.
 17. *ST*, Suppl. 83, 6.
 18. One might think there is a disanalogy between the two cases, in that the tiger infant's physical structure explains its ability to develop into a meat-eater, while we humans have no physical structure that explains our ability to develop into things that can become invisible. It's true we have no such physical structure, but we do have a non-physical structure that explains it – namely, the soul. As St Thomas Aquinas says, the reason our glorified bodies will have such odd powers is that the body will be wholly under the power of the soul. So it is a different kind of case, but, then, it should be.
 19. Needless to say, this leaves certain problems unsolved. Is the *whole* Christ present in every host, or just part of Christ? If the whole, how can Christ be multiply located? If a part, which part? And so on. (For

some fascinating discussion of such questions, see Pruss 'The Eucharist'.) These questions, while important, are of a quite different sort than the questions I want to address here. I am not giving a complete theory of the Eucharist, but simply defending the view against certain objections.

20. However, even if such a case could be made, St Thomas Aquinas has another move available. He writes: 'Christ's body is substantially present in this sacrament. But substance, as such, is not visible to the bodily eye, nor does it come under any one of the senses, nor under the imagination, but solely under the intellect, whose object is "what a thing is"; *De Anima*, iii. And therefore, properly speaking, Christ's body, according to the mode of being which it has in this sacrament, is perceptible neither by the sense nor by the imagination, but only by the intellect, which is called the spiritual eye; *ST*, III, 76, 7. Because the mode of Christ's presence is after the manner of substance, one should not expect to see him anyway. You can't *see* substance. Taking this line would unnecessarily complicate things here, since the claim that we can't see substance might seem to conflict with a claim made by Broackes in the following section. I do not think there is a real conflict, but I don't wish to follow that particular rabbit trail in this paper.
21. Anthony Kenny *A Path From Rome* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1985), 72.
22. Broackes 'Substance', 156.
23. *Ibid.*, 162.
24. *Ibid.*, 163.
25. *ST*, III, 77, 1
26. Ott *Fundamentals*, 75.
27. *Ibid.*
28. For a nice discussion of this point, see T. D. Sullivan and Jeremiah Reedy 'The ontology of the Eucharist', *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 65 (1991), 373–386, 374–378.
29. My claims here resemble the view of Sullivan and Reedy 'Ontology', 373–386.
30. For much more on this material, see Patrick Toner 'Emergent substance', *Philosophical Studies*, 141 (2008), 281–297; *idem* 'On Substance', *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* (forthcoming); and *idem* 'Independence accounts of substance and substantial parts', *Philosophical Studies* (forthcoming).
31. I presented this paper at the 2007 meeting of the Society for Catholicism and Analytical Philosophy in Milwaukee and at the 2009 Calvin College summer seminar, 'Philosophical Reflections on Liturgy'. My thanks to participants at both events, especially to Michael Gorman, who was my commentator at the former. I also benefited from suggestions from Peter Byrne and Thomas Flint.