

Bonaventure and Aquinas on the Divine Being as Infinite

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Rather recently Patterson Brown suggested that one aspect of Bonaventure's conception of infinity anticipates Georg Cantor's definition.¹ When disproving the world to be eternal, the medieval author "pointed out that, if the world were infinitely old, then there would have been an infinite number of annual revolutions of the sun around the ecliptic. But during each such period there occur (roughly) twelve revolutions of the moon, i.e., lunar months or lunations. Thus there would be one infinity which was twelve times another"—and this, he concludes, is impossible. What this disproof amounts to in modern terms is, if one views a revolution of the sun as the period between successive vernal equinoxes, this *reductio ad absurdum*: "If there could be an infinite set of past lunations, then clearly it could be put in a one-to-one correspondence with a proper sub-set of itself—viz., with the set of past lunar months during which vernal equinoxes occurred. But this consequence is preposterous; no set could be so correlated with its own sub-set. Therefore the set of past lunar months cannot be infinite, and the world must have had a beginning." (*Ibid.*)

Other than this brief note, as well as an occasional other paper,² Bonaventure's theory of infinity has not received much attention since the

1. "A Medieval Analysis of Infinity," *Journal of History of Philosophy* [hereafter: *JHP*], 3 (1965), pp. 242-43. Bonaventure's text is *In II Sent.*, d. 1, p. 1, a. 1, qu. 2 (Quaracchi ed. minor, II, 13).

2. See E. Magrini, "Dio perfezione infinita in S. Bonaventura," *Incontri Bonaventuriani*, 5 (1969), pp. 55-79. There is no lack of recent studies on topics other than infinity in Bonaventure, as one can realize by checking the apposite volumes of *Bulletin de théologie ancienne et médiévale*, *Bulletin Signalétique* (Section 519), *Bibliographie de philosophie* and the like. Also see L.-J. Bataillon, "Bulletin d'histoire des doctrines médiévales," *Revue de sciences philosophiques et théologiques* [hereafter: *RSPT*], 56 (1972), pp. 511-20; F. Van Steenberghen, *La philosophie au XIII^e siècle* (Louvain: Publications Universitaires, 1966), pp. 190-271. On this last, see G. H. M. Therán, "Van Steenberghen y su reajuste de la filosofía del s. XIII," *Sapientia* 23 (1968), pp. 59-66; M.-B. Petene, "La philosophie de S. Bonaventure," *Études Franciscaines*, 20 (1970), pp. 335-42.

mid-sixties. Nor did it in previous years, as Jean Prather made clear in 1964. "Papers have been contributed in regard to Bonaventure's doctrine in psychology, epistemology, mystical theology, metaphysics, aesthetics, Trinitarian theology, causality, and some of the divine attributes. Some writings compare Bonaventure with other theologians and another series takes up his life and writings." But "no previous work has been devoted solely to his notion of divine infinity."³

Hence, this topic seems apt for discussion during the septicentenary anniversary of his death in 1274, especially if we also study it in Thomas Aquinas, who died the same year.⁴ This discussion will consist of four parts, in the first two of which we shall briefly reconstruct the intellectual climate within which they wrote by noting what some of their immediate predecessors thought on the subject. Then we shall turn to Bonaventure's and next to Aquinas' first major treatises: their commentaries on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard.⁵

3. "Divine Infinity in Selected Texts from Saint Bonaventure's Commentary on the *Sentences*," (St. Louis University: M.A. Thesis, 1964), p. 20. See the helpful bibliography, pp. 150-65. Cf. also J. Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d'Aquino: His Life, Thought and Works* (New York: Doubleday, 1974), pp. 67-80, 94-95.

4. Among the rather rare papers on infinity in Aquinas, one may note these: J. Owens, "Aquinas on Infinite Regress," *Mind*, 71 (1962), pp. 244-46; O. Argerami, "El infinito actual en Santo Tomás," *Sapientia*, 26 (1971), pp. 217-32. As with Bonaventure, so with Thomas: abundant studies have recently appeared on other topics, as will be seen by checking the bibliographic volumes listed above, note 2, to which should be added: *Bulletin Thomiste*, 12 (1968), pp. 209-435; L.-J. Bataillon, *RSPT*, 57 (1973), pp. 143-55.

5. Controversies exist on when the two wrote their commentaries. For a survey of opinions on Bonaventure, see J. F. Quinn, "Chronology of St. Bonaventure (1217-1257)," *FS*, 32 (1972), pp. 168-86, who argues that Bonaventure was reading the *Sentences* as a *baccalarius sententiarum* during 1251-53 and was officially recognized as a doctor of theology in 1254 (his formal recognition, however, was delayed until Oct. 23, 1257). In this chronology he would presumably have been composing his Commentary on the *Sentences* between 1251 and 1254. Others date its composition between 1250 and 1252—see I. C. Brady, "Bonaventure," *New Catholic Encyclopedia* [hereafter: *NCE*], 2 (1967), p. 658; A. Wolter, "Bonaventure," *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* [hereafter: *EP*], 1 (1967), p. 340. J. Guy Bougerol, *Introduction to the Works of Bonaventure* (Patterson, N.J.: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1964), p. 101, thinks (with L. Lemmens and J.-Fr. Bonnefoy) that "in writing these *Commentaries*, Bonaventure did not follow the numerical order of the Books themselves. . . . [It is] more than probable that Bonaventure began with the fourth *Book of Sentences* and ended with the third."

A problem in determining the date of composition of Thomas' commentary is the possibility that parts of it may have existed also in a revised version. At the end of a long paper, "Textes inédits de S. Thomas. Les premières rédactions du *Scriptum Super Tertium Sententiarum*," *RSPT*, 45 (1961), pp. 201-28; 46 (1962), pp. 445-

Previous Positions

In authors just prior to those two we can detect at least three attitudes on the question of whether the divine being is itself infinite. Someone like Hugh of St. Cher, who taught theology at the University of Paris from 1231 to 1235, seems totally unaware of the doctrine. As Richard McCaslin has established from studying nine sections of his Commentary on Lombard's *Sentences* (written ca. 1231),⁶ the Dominican theologian infrequently and only briefly mentions infinity. Twice he makes it equivalent to incomprehensibility, once to eternity, once to divine supremacy. Nowhere does he apply it to God's essence.⁷ One can only conclude that "Hugh simply did not see infinity [of the divine being] as a problem; and, not seeing the question, he never formulated an answer."⁸

62 and 609-28, P.-M. Gils concluded that "nous ignorons quand cette oeuvre a été publiée." For each passage we must ask whether it is "la première rédaction ou de la révision" (*ibid.*, p. 627; for a history of the controversy, see G. F. Rossi, "S. Tommaso ha fatto due edizioni del 'Commento alle Sentenze'?" *Divus Thomas*, 65 [1962], pp. 412-15). But it seems best to agree with W. A. Wallace and J. A. Weisheipl ("Thomas Aquinas," *NCE*, 14 [1967], pp. 103-104 and 111) that Thomas became a *baccalarius sententiarum* in the Fall of 1252 and a doctor of theology in 1256 (with formal recognition, together with Bonaventure, on Oct. 23, 1257), and that he elaborated his Commentary on the *Sentences* between 1252 and 1256 while lecturing at Paris. Also see G. E. Ponferrada, "Tomás de Aquino en la Universidad de Paris," *Sapientia*, 26 (1971), pp. 233-62.

At any rate, Bonaventure's Commentary preceded Aquinas' by at least two years, whatever their respective dates may be.

6. "Divine Infinity in Some Texts of Hugh of Saint Cher," *The Modern Schoolman* [hereafter: *TMS*], 42 (1964), pp. 47-69. The sections studied are Book I, distinctions 2, 8, 9, 19, 31, 34 and 43; Book III, distinctions 13 and 14. Peter Lombard composed his *Libri Sententiarum* sometime between 1155 and 1158—see *Magistri Petri Lombardi Sententiae in IV Libris Distinctae* (3rd ed.; Grottaferrata: Editiones Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1971), I, i, pp. 117*-29*).

7. McCaslin, *art. cit.*, p. 68. The absence of such an application is what one might expect in the light of the fact that a similar absence occurs in Lombard's own texts. The latter uses "infinity" solely to express God's omnipotence, eternity, omniscience, incomprehensibility, and the identity in nature of the three divine persons. See L. Sweeney, S.J., "Divine Infinity: 1150-1250," *TMS*, 35 (1957), pp. 41-47; *idem*, "Lombard, Augustine and Infinity," *Manuscripta*, 2 (1958), pp. 24-40. Lombard himself was in good company, since Augustine, his main mentor, restricts infinity to God's incomprehensibility, power, and freedom from place, as well as to the absence of distinction between the three persons. See *ibid.*, pp. 26-31.

8. *Ibid.*, *art. cit.*, p. 69. The same conclusion seems valid for Robert Grosseteste in his *Commentarius in VIII Libros Physicorum Aristotelis*, written ca. 1228-32. God "est infinitum quia ipsum est et potencie et sapientie et bonitatis infinite et secundum quod Plato et Augustinus loquuntur de numero: numerus et sapientia idem sunt et sapientia Dei numerus est infinitus et infinite sunt ydee sive rationes rerum in

Infinity for a second group of authors was definitely a problem, encountered when they discussed the beatific vision of God by the saints in heaven. In the course of this discussion they felt obliged to deny that God's being was infinite.⁹ For instance, Guerric of Saint-Quentin, who taught at the University of Paris from 1233 to 1242, was asked in a *quaestio quodlibetalis*, presumably held there and rather recently transcribed by B.-G. Guyot,¹⁰ whether the divine essence will be seen by the blessed in heaven (I, 1: "Quaerebatur primo si videbitur divina essentia"). Yes, he replied, although it will be seen not as essence but as power, which alone is directly related to knowledge (I, 83–85:

sapiencia divina" (R. C. Dales' edition [Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 1963], p. 54; also see *ibid.*, p. 69).

9. One can understand their quandary better if he recalls that in 1241 the Bishop of Paris (William of Auvergne; d. 1249) condemned the proposition that in heaven neither men nor angels see the divine essence itself: "Primus [error], quod divina essentia in se nec ab homine nec ab angelo videbitur. Hunc errorem reprobamus . . . Firmiter autem credimus et asserimus, quod Deus in sua essentia vel substantia videbitur ab angelis et omnibus sanctis et videtur ab animabus glorificatis" (H. Denifle and E. Chatelain, *Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis* [Paris, 1889–97], I, 170). That condemnation says nothing of infinity but it was influential on the doctrine nonetheless. At least one reason which renders the blessed in heaven incapable of seeing the divine being itself was (so some maintained) its infinity, which prevents its being comprehended and seen. But, if according to the condemnation of 1241, "God in his essence or substance" is seen by the angels and the blessed, then one perhaps should infer that God's essence is finite—the position we are now considering.

On that condemnation see the following informative studies, each of which lists other helpful references: M.-D. Chenu, "Le dernier avatar de la théologie orientale en Occident au XIII^e siècle," *Mélanges A. Pelzer* (Louvain: Éditions de l'Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, 1947), pp. 159 sqq.; H.-F. Dondaine, "L'objet et le 'medium' de la vision béatifique chez les théologiens du XIII^e siècle," *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* [hereafter: RTAM], 19 (1952), pp. 60–99; P.-M. de Contenson, "Avicennisme latin et vision de Dieu au début XIII^e siècle," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et Littéraire du moyen âge* [hereafter: AHDL], 26 (1959), pp. 29–97; *idem*, "S. Thomas et l'avicennisme latin," *RSPT*, 43 (1959), pp. 3–31; *idem*, "La théologie de la vision de Dieu au début du XIII^e siècle," *RSPT*, 46 (1962), pp. 409–44; J. M. Alonso, "Estudios teológicos sobre la vision beata. La síntesis pretomista y postomista," *La Ciudad de Dios*, 178 (1965), pp. 5–32. On Hugh of St. Cher's position *re* the beatific vision, see H.-F. Dondaine, "Hughes de S. Cher et la condamnation de 1241," *RSPT*, 33 (1949), pp. 170–74: Hugh was among those who prior to 1241 denied the divine essence *as essence* was seen.

10. B.G. Guyot and H.-Fr. Dondaine, "Guerric de Saint-Quentin et la condamnation de 1241," *RSPT*, 44 (1960), pp. 225–42, where Guyot has edited three *quaestiones*, the first running pp. 230–33, the second pp. 233–38, the third pp. 238–41. The editions are preceded by Dondaine's remarks on the doctrines of the *quaestiones* (pp. 227–29). Our references will be to *quaestio* and line, thus: I, 85 = *Quaestio prima*, line 85.

“Essentia videbitur . . . Sed non videbitur ut essentia quia essentia non erit ratio intelligendi, sed potentia”). Only the Trinity sees the essence as essence and thus they alone have full vision of it. A human intellect will see the divine essence as power and hence will lack that fullness (I, 99, 104–108: “Videbitur essentia, sed non plene . . . Non videbitur ut essentia, sed ut virtus. Si videretur ut essentia, quia essentia simplicissima est, videretur plene; unde a quibus videretur ut essentia, videretur plene sicut a Patre et Filio et Spiritu Sancto. Sed dico quod ab humano intellectu videtur ut virtus”).¹¹ But what of the argumentation against even that partial vision based on Damascene’s saying that God is infinite in whatever pertains to him? The argument runs thus: what is infinite is incomprehensible; but God is infinite in whatever pertains to him; therefore, he is incomprehensible in whatever pertains to him and, thus, he is not comprehended either fully or partially (I, 64–65: “Item. Damascenus: Deus secundum quodlibet sui est infinitus. Infinitum, incomprehensibile; igitur Deus secundum quodlibet sui est incomprehensibilis, ergo nec plene nec semiplene est comprehensibilis”). Damascene’s words on infinity pertain, Guerric responds, to God’s power and not to his essence [which accordingly is not infinite].¹² But if his power is infinite, why can it be known? Because when considered as identified with God, who is supremely good and powerful, it is finite and thus intelligible. But if considered with reference to the particular existents [it causes, which are endless], then it too is infinite and thus cannot be known (I, 122–26: “Ad illud ‘quodlibet Dei est infinitum est,’ solutio: Illa nominant ut virtutem, non ut essentiam. Sed essentia ut virtus potest dupliciter considerari: in ratione universali, sic est finita et sic est intelligibilis; rationes universales sunt quod summe bonus, quod summe potens, etc. Si vero consideretur in ratione particularium, sic sciri non potest”).

In the light of Guerric’s own rather elliptical words, then, God’s essence is not infinite, nor is his power except when described with reference to his innumerable effects.¹³ When in the “responsio” of a

11. Not even the soul of Christ sees the divine essence as essence but only as power—see II, 73–81, especially lines 75–76: “Anima Christi . . . videt sive cognoscit essentiam, sed non ut essentiam, quod facit Trinitas.”

12. Here and later brackets indicate explications, which the text demands or at least allows.

13. Such a description is through “extrinsic denomination”: infinity does not pertain to the power itself but to its effects, which are infinite in number, variety, etc. Such an interpretation is applicable also to texts in Lombard and Augustine (see articles cited above, n. 7), as well as in Aristotle, Plotinus and John Damascene. See L. Sweeney, S.J., “L’infini quantitatif chez Aristote,” *Revue philosophique de Louvain*, 58 (1960), pp. 505–28; *idem*, “Infinity in Plotinus,” *Gregorianum*, 38

later *quaestio quodlibetalis* he retracted his previous position on the beatific vision,¹⁴ he felt no need to distinguish between essence and power but affirmed simply that “the divine essence is seen in itself God is beheld in himself, directly in his very substance” (III, 79, 82–83: “Ipsa essentia in se ipsa videbitur [Deus] videbitur in se ipso, in sua substantia nuda”). He made the distinction, though, in his rejoinder to those objecting that God cannot himself be seen because of his simplicity and infinity (see III, 41 sqq.). Indeed God is, Gueric granted, both simple and infinite. But infinity and simplicity arise from different sources. Simplicity has to do with essence, and thus infinity does not prevent the divine essence as essence from being seen in its entirety. A saint does, then, comprehend the entire essence as essence, but not as power [which is, properly understood, infinite] (III, 165–72: “. . . bene verum est quod Deus simplex est et infinitus, et non ex eadem ratione est infinitas et simplicitas. . . . Unde cum simplicitas sit ex parte essentiae, ex parte illa non erit infinitas; et ideo infinitas non impedit quin essentia in ratione essentiae tota videatur. . . . [Hence, a saint comprehends] totam essentiam in ratione essentiae, non tamen in ratione virtutis”).¹⁵

After this clear indication by Gueric that the divine essence is simple *and finite*,¹⁶ we move to a final and almost opposite position—

(1957), pp. 713–32; *idem*, “John Damascene and Divine Infinity,” *New Scholasticism*, 35 (1961), pp. 76–106. On Alexander of Hales and Albert the Great, see below, n. 16.

14. For data on his retraction, see Guyot and Dondaine, *art. cit.*, pp. 227–29.

15. See also III, 57–60 (italics added): “Infinitas est secundum potentiam et virtutem quia non potest in tot quin possit in plura; unde infinitas determinatur in Deo secundum fluxum ad creaturas. Essentia de se non dicit fluxum, ergo infinitas ibi non est ex parte essentiae.” Divine power is infinite through extrinsic denomination because of its reference to endless creatures; God’s essence has no such reference directly and, hence, is not infinite. In Gueric’s *quaestio* contained in Codex Vat. Lat. 4245, folio 68rb, infinity occurs only once and concerns divine power: “Quaeritur quomodo ex finitis actibus intelligitur infinita Dei potentia Dicendum quod homo videns omnia mutabilia non potest sistere donec recurat ad aliquod immutabile, et videns finitos actus recurat ad infinitatem, et ad hoc ducitur per imperfectionem creaturarum” (see L. Sweeney, “Human Knowledge According to Gueric,” *Arts Libéraux et philosophie au moyen âge* [Paris: Vrin, 1969], p. 1129, n. 2).

16. Alexander of Hales in his *Glossa* on the *Sentences* (written ca. 1225) is similar to Gueric in that for him the beatific vision is not of the divine essence *per se* but *per speciem* and infinity merely locates God with reference to creatures, none of which can contain or circumscribe him (see Sweeney, “Some Mediaeval Opponents of Divine Infinity,” *Mediaeval Studies* [hereafter: MS], 19 (1957), pp. 241–42, n. 31; de Contenson, *RSPT*, 46 [1962], pp. 427–29). Albert the Great is even more akin to Gueric in his *Commentary* on the *Sentences* (ca. 1243): although he allows

that of Richard Fishacre, who taught at Oxford from ca. 1236 to 1248. True, Richard's view has similarities with Guerrić's: he elaborates it while studying the beatific vision; he aligns infinity with simplicity;¹⁷ he centers his discussion on divine power.¹⁸ But doctrinal similarity vanishes when he grounds the compatibility of infinity with simplicity on the freedom of an agent from matter and potency. Let us distinguish, he begins, what is infinite quantitatively from what is infinite virtually (lines 286–87). Let us further distinguish between what is virtually infinite through addition and what is so through separation or elongation from matter, which if present makes an agent's *virtus* be less in act and more in potency (lines 292–300, especially 299–300: “[*virtus*] elongata ab impedimento et faciente eam in potentia et minus in actu; et hoc est a materia”). Only the last sort is compatible with simplicity, as this consideration discloses. Light, for example, is less powerful when embodied than when not embodied, not because in the latter state any addition is made to light but rather because light is “elongated” from the factor which makes it less powerful. Again, the rational faculty is more powerful than the sensitive, not because it is more composite but because it is less flesh-bound; and the more it withdraws itself from flesh, the more powerful it is with respect to its operation (lines 300–

God to be called infinite with reference to creatures (hence, through extrinsic denomination), he affirms that in one sense he is “the most finite of all his power and in whatever else he is” (“finitioe qua finis dicitur finitus, finitissimus omnium Deus et potentia sua et quidquid ipse est”). See Sweeney, MS, pp. 244–45, nn. 37–40; F. J. Catania, “Divine Infinity in Albert the Great's Commentary on the ‘Sentences’ of Peter Lombard,” MS 22 (1960), pp. 27–42; *idem*, “Albert the Great, Boethius, and Divine Infinity,” RTAM, 28 (1961), pp. 97–114; de Contenson, RSPT, 46 (1962), pp. 435–39. On Jean Pagus (whose *In Sententiarum* is dated ca. 1243–45), see de Contenson, *ibid.*, p. 436, n. 103; *idem*, AHDL, p. 81, n. 190; P. Glorieux, “Les années 1242–1247 à la Faculté de Théologie de Paris,” RTAM, 29 (1962), 240 sq.

17. See his listing of questions to be discussed in his *Commentary* (written shortly before 1245) on the *Sentences*, I, d. 2, as edited by C. J. Ermatinger, TMS, 24 (1958), p. 216, lines 2–6: “Hic de Dei visione in patris quaeratur. Gratia cuius primo quaeritur an Deus sit infinitus; . . . tertio, quomodo se compatiatur infinitas vel numerositas et simplicitas summa”). References will be to lines in this edition, which runs pp. 213–35.

18. See L. Sweeney, S. J., and C. J. Ermatinger, “Divine Infinity According to Richard Fishacre,” TMS, 35 (1958), p. 199 (although God is infinite in power, wisdom, and goodness, the last two presuppose the first), pp. 199–205 (the “infinite distance” argument proves power to be infinite), pp. 206–10 (the blessed soul can see the infinite God because of the soul's own innate power and because of the divine power elevating the soul and actuating its power). The “infinite distance” notion shows up at least once in Guerrić too—see Guyot and Dondaine, RSPT, p. 237 (Qu. II, lines 161–63).

309). This argumentation again is not based on any addition to power (which would mean an increase in composition) but rather on an “elongation” from impediments. The conclusion to be drawn, therefore, is that an increase of power understood in terms of *elongatio ab impedimentis* does not involve greater composition but rather greater simplicity (lines 310–21).

When, then, is an agent’s power *infinite* according to the latter sort of increase? Manifestly, when he is absolutely and infinitely removed from impediments and from matter (*propter infinitam elongationem ab impedimentis et a materia*). And such removal and infinity are eminently consonant with simplicity (lines 322–26). God is such an agent. A substance which is completely separated from all else, a being who is simple in himself and who enters into composition with nothing outside, he is virtually infinite in his infinite separation from impediments and matter (lines 327–31: “Quia ergo Deus in se simplex est et carens compositione cum alio, ut sit pars compositi, patet quod est infinitus virtualiter, non propter additiones virtutis factas in infinitum, sed potius quia in infinitum elongatus est ab impedimentis et materia, cum sit substantia omnino separata”).¹⁹

According to that excerpt, Fishacre is aware not merely that the divine power is infinite but that *God Himself* is infinite (“Deus in se . . . est infinitus virtualiter”). *He* is infinitely removed from matter because *he* is a completely subsistent substance (“in infinitum elongatus est . . . cum sit substantia omnino separata”). True enough, he does not explicitly state that the divine essence or being is infinite, but that statement seems only a step away. It is a step Bonaventure and then Aquinas will both take, as we are about to see. But were they the first? Between the time Fishacre wrote his Commentary on the *Sentences* in the mid-forties and Bonaventure and Aquinas wrote theirs in the fifties, had anyone else explicated the infinity of God’s essence?

“Summa Fratris Alexandri”

What of the compilers of the *Summa Theologica* attributed to Alexander of Hales (d. 1245)? Although this did not achieve its final form as published in the Quaracchi edition until ca. 1260, it existed in an initial

19. The previous two paragraphs are taken from Sweeney and Ermatinger, *TMS*, pp. 203–205. D. E. Dubrule considers Fishacre to have influenced Gerard of Abbeville on infinity in *Quaestio Quodlibetalis*, XIII, (written ca. 1265)—see “Gerard of Abbeville . . .,” *MS*, 32 (1970), pp. 128–37. For a recent dissertation, see R. J. Long, “Problem of Soul in Richard Fishacre’s *Commentary* on the *Sentences*,” (University of Toronto: Doctoral Dissertation, 1968).

version by 1245.²⁰ It explicitly asks whether or not the divine essence is infinite and answers affirmatively.²¹ But that response can be misleading. The divine essence is infinite but solely with reference to creatures and, thus, through extrinsic denomination. This seems clear if we run through several *sed contra* arguments which the authors of the *Summa* set down and the *solutio* itself.²²

God's essence is infinite because it is one with His power (*Sed contra* #a, p. 55a), which is infinite because no matter how many created essences it may be present in, it still can be in more (*Sed contra* #b, p. 55a: "[Respectus sunt in essentia] prout intelligitur secundum extensionem, secundum quod dicimus quod se extendit divina essentia in omni esse rerum, sicut sua potentia in omni posse; sed hoc modo essentia est infinita.—Probatio quia potentia eius est infinita: quia non est in tot nec potest esse in tot quin adhuc posset esse in plura; ergo, si similiter non est dicere de divina essentia quod ita sit in essentiis rerum nec possit esse in pluribus, constat quod ipsa est infinita").²³ Again, just as goodness or power is said to be infinite inasmuch as it is the source of all goodness or power and none greater can be conceived, so too that being will be described as infinite which is the source of all being and none greater can be conceived—such is the divine being, which accordingly is infinite (*Sed contra* #c, p. 55b: "Ergo et illud esse dicetur infinitum a quo est omne esse et quo maius excogitari non potest; sed tale est esse divinum; ergo illud est infinitum"). Even if God's essence were not identified with but extended beyond his power, it would still be infinite since God is everywhere and thus can be beyond any place one may think of. Just as a body might be called infinite if it filled and went beyond the entire world, even if these were infinite, so the divine es-

20. That initial version consisted of all of Book I (except perhaps q. 74), besides most of Bk. II and fragments of Bk. III. See A. Emmen, "Alexander of Hales," NCE, 1 (1967), pp. 296–97; V. Doucet, *Alexandri de Hales Summa Theologica*, Tomus IV: *Prolegomena* (Quaracchi: Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1948), *passim*; I. Brady, "Alexander of Hales," EP, 1 (1967), pp. 73–75. The "authors" of the *Summa* include Alexander himself, John of Rochelle (who is almost certainly responsible for Book I) and others. On an anonymous Commentary on the *Sentences* found in three manuscripts, which is an important source of the *Summa* and which is likely to have been written by John of Rochelle, see B. Carra de Vaux Saint-Cyr, "Une source inconnue de la *Summa fratris Alexandri*," RSPT, 47 (1963), pp. 571–605.

21. S.T., I, tr. 2, q. 1, c. 1 (Quaracchi ed., p. 54): "Utrum divina essentia sit finita vel infinita." Subsequent references will be to the Quaracchi edition (1924).

22. That they agree with the considerations under "*Sed contra*" see *ibid.*, ad 3 (p. 57b): "sicut etiam probatum est in rationibus quae sunt ad veram partem."

23. Infinity is in fact defined in *sed contra* #a (p. 55a) as extension beyond what is finite: "Cum infinitum dicat extensionem ultra finitum"

sence should be called infinite (*Sed contra* #d, p. 55b: “Deus est ubique, nec tantum potest cogitari ubi sit quin adhuc possit dici quod ultra sit. Sicut ergo corpus diceretur infinitum quod totum mundum replet et ultra, si essent mundi infiniti, ita divina essentia debet dici infinita”).²⁴ Moreover, since God is the goal or final cause of all else, [every created essence is finite as “finalized” by something other than itself but] His essence is infinite [because non-“finalized” by anything outside Himself] (*Sed contra*, #f, p. 55c).²⁵

In the *solutio* the same approach is continued. The divine essence is infinite since nowhere in sacred Scripture does one find mention of its finitude. (p. 56a) Consequently, God is infinite in substance (unless one takes “finite” as synonymous with perfection),²⁶ in accord with John Damascene’s view that the best name for God is “He Who is” since “His being is like an infinite and indeterminate sea of substance because it embraces all reality within itself” (*ibid.*).²⁷ But can one explain that infinity more exactly? Yes, the divine essence is infinite because it is “finalized” by nothing else and yet it “finalizes” all else (see above, note 25). Second, the infinity of the divine essence is completely opposed to finitude: what is finite pertains only to so many and no more, whereas the divine essence is in all else, even if these were infinite (*solutio*, p. 56b–c: “Adhuc [essentia] est infinita, quia habet disparatam dispositionem respectu finitatis: dicimus enim aliquid finitum, cum in tot est quod non potest esse in plura. In Deo autem est dispositio disparata respectu huius, quae est quod divina essentia est in omnibus et extra omnia, et adhuc, si essent infinita, impleret illa”).

Essence infinite because it is identified with power; essence infinite

24. Also see *sed contra* #e (p. 55c); *ibid.*, inq. 2, tr. un., q. 5, *resp.*, p. 488c.

25. *Finis* as goal receives much prominence—see ad 1 and ad 2 (pp. 56–57). The author of this portion of the *Summa* seems attracted to the idea that while God can be called “infinite” with respect to any extrinsic goal, he is himself “finite” because he is his own *finis*. See *solutio*, p. 56a: “Proprie ergo est dicendum ipsum esse infinitum secundum substantiam et non finitum, nisi dicatur finitum ‘completum’.” One must eliminate, though, from “finitum” any connotations of passivity to prevent God being thought of as perfected—see *ibid.*, ad 2, p. 57a.

26. See above, note 25.

27. The quotation is from Damascene’s *De Fide Orthodoxa*, I, c. 9 (PG, 94, 835): “. . . totum enim in se ipso comprehendens habet esse velut quoddam pelagus substantiae infinitum et indeterminatum.” What the compiler of the *Summa* appears to intend here is this: God contains an infinite number of creatures (no matter how many created existents there are, there can be still more) and, thus, can himself be termed “infinite” with respect to them. The texts from Damascene, *ibid.*, c. 8, quoted in the *solutio* also and in *sed contra* #h (p. 55d), admit a similar interpretation. Besides my article on Damascene cited above, note 13, also see “John Damascene’s ‘Infinite Sea of Essence’,” *Studia Patristica*, 6 (1962), pp. 294–309.

inasmuch as it is present in an endless number of creatures as their source; essence infinite because not finalized by anything other than itself; substance infinite since it contains innumerable created beings—such is the position found in the *Summa Theologica*. Infinity is predicated of God's essence with reference not to itself so much as to creatures and, hence, through extrinsic denomination (see above, note 13). Nowhere—and this seems especially significant—is an attempt made to ground that infinity in the divine essence's freedom from matter, as had occurred with Fishacre.²⁸

If our interpretation is accurate, what may have happened is this. Rejecting Guerrić's view which depicted the divine essence as finite,²⁹ the compilers of the *Summa* affirmed it to be infinite. But unaware of or unimpressed by the metaphysical basis which allowed Fishacre to say God is Himself infinite, they aligned essence with power and computed its infinity in terms of the creatures it causes, contains, and is present in and not in terms of its separation from matter and potency.³⁰ This last computation Bonaventure and Aquinas will make in approaching the problem.

Bonaventure

In at least two texts Bonaventure analyzes infinity within a context of matter and form.³¹ In the first, he is discussing whether the trinity of divine persons might entail the presence in God of a material principle. He notes the attempt of some to prove its presence by arguing that finiteness in creatures comes from form but infiniteness from matter; but everything in God is infinite; therefore, a material principle is present in God.³² That argument is invalid, he replies, since there are

28. The *Summa* mentions prime matter in ad 5 (p. 57c) but only as that which leads one to acknowledge God's power as its infinite efficient and exemplar cause: "Unde prima materia, quae est infinita in potentia passiva, ducit in potentiam Dei infinitam, . . . in ratione qua ordinatur ad ipsum ut ad efficiens et exemplar." Also *ibid.*, I, p. 1, inq. 1, tr. 1, q. 3, [objectio] 1, p. 53a.

29. On Alexander's own earlier view in his *Glossa* of divine infinity as somewhat similar to Guerrić's, see above, note 16.

30. For my criticism of a different interpretation of the *Summa*, see *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 6 (1966), pp. 139–43.

31. J. Prather, *op. cit.*, pp. 22–27, lists 71 texts in her commentary on the *Sentences* in which Bonaventure mentions or discusses infinity.

32. In *I Sent.*, d. 19, p. 2, a. un., q. 3, *videtur quod* 4, p. 288b: "In rebus creatis finitas a forma venit, sed infinitas a materia; sed omne quod est in Deo, est infinitum; ergo cum Deo maxime conveniat passio consequens principium materiale, maxime competit et ipsum." An attempt to identify matter and God had previously been made by David of Dinant, who together with others was condemned in 1210. See P.-M. de Contenson, *AHDL*, pp. 49–51 (with references to other studies); M.

two sorts of infiniteness: that arising from lack of perfection belongs to matter but not to God, whereas that which issues from the absence of limitation pertains to God and pure form but not to matter (*ibid.*, ad 4, p. 289c: "Ad illud quod obicitur de infinitate, dicendum quod est infinitas ex defectu perfectionis, et haec competit materiae sed non Deo; et est infinitas ex privatione limitationis, et haec Deo et formae liberrimae, non materiae competit").

That short reply appears to suggest these points. Since matter without form is imperfect *and infinite*, the function of form must be both to perfect and *to determine* matter. Second, since form without matter is perfect (because without limitation) *and infinite*, the function of matter is both to render form less perfect and *to determine* it.

The second passage occurs when Bonaventure asks whether the divine power is infinite (*ibid.*, d. 43, a. un., q. 1: "Utrum potentia Dei secundum quod huiusmodi sit infinita"). Some answer negatively, he notes, because in created powers infiniteness is from matter but finiteness is from form; but divine power is solely form having no possibility whatever; hence, it is simply finite and in no way infinite.³³ In his rebuttal Bonaventure observes that something can be infinite in two ways: through lack of completeness or perfection and through absence of limitation. The first sort is a passive or recipient potency and is exemplified best in matter. The second is act and, hence, truly and properly characterizes him who is solely act—pure and most perfect act (*ibid.*, ad 3, pp. 607–608: "Ad illud quod obicitur quod infinitum est passio potentiae materialis, dicendum quod hoc verum est de infinito per privationem completionis sive completi esse; sed non est verum de infinito per privationem limitationis. Primum enim est infinitum potentia passiva sive receptiva, et ita primo inest materiae; secundum est infinitum actu, et ideo in illo solo vere est et proprie, qui est tantum actus et actus purus et perfectissimus").

That brief text intimates, in a way somewhat similar to the first, that whatever is infinite is so through an absence either of perfection or of limit, each of which would be a determinant if present; that limit is matter or potency, perfection is act or form; that matter or potency

Kurdzialek, "David von Dinant und die Anfänge der Aristotelischen Naturphilosophie," *La filosofia della natura nel medioevo* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 1966), pp. 407–16. Bonaventure reports an argument which seems inspired by David in *In I Sent.*, d. 19, p. 2, a. un., q. 3, *videtur quod* 6, p. 288b.

33. *Ibid.*, *sed contra* 3, p. 606b: "Videmus in potentiis creatis, quod infinitas est a materia, sed finitas est a forma; ergo cum potentia Dei sit omnino forma sive formalis, nihil omnino habens possibilitatis, ergo simpliciter est finita et nullo modo infinita."

would be *infinite* if lacking form or act; that act or form is an *infinite* perfection when free from potency or matter; that God is pure act and thus is genuinely infinite.

In the light of those two passages Bonaventure would seem aware of the fact that infinity of the divine essence had been (at least could be) conceived through God's freedom from matter and potency.³⁴ Elsewhere, he frequently calls God "pure act" and (often enough) "infinite" for that very reason.³⁵ But other factors in his position raise the question of how deeply and personally he was committed to that conception of infinity. He tends to think of matter not as Aristotle's pure potency in bodies but as Augustine's "almost nothing" ("prope nihil")³⁶ or as Boethius' "that by which something is" ("quo est").³⁷ He finds it even within angels.³⁸ Moreover, limitation or restriction ("arctatio") of a form or act, although grounded on occasion in the matter or potency receiving it,³⁹ appears more frequently to result in a more extrinsic manner. For example, a creature's being is limited by the fact it is composed of genus and species (*In I Sent.*, d. 8, p. 2, q. 2 *respondeo*, p. 134b: "Creaturae autem compositae sunt . . . quia habent esse limitatum et ita in genere et specie per additionem contractum"). Again: if God were not pure act but had some limitation and restric-

34. Was Bonaventure aware of Fishacre's conception? Almost certainly. He is said, in fact, to have had a manuscript copy of his Commentary. See W. A. Hinnebusch, *Early English Friars Preachers* (Romae: Ad S. Sabinae, 1951), pp. 364-69. But he does not here use Richard's language ("elongatio a materia et impedimentis").

35. For instance, see *In I Sent.*, d. 8, p. 1, a. 2, q. 1, *videtur quod* #c, p. 121d; *ibid.*, *respondeo*, p. 122c; *ibid.*, d. 19, p. 2, a. un., q. 3, ad 2, p. 289b; *ibid.*, d. 34, a. un., q. 1, *videtur quod* 2, p. 467b; *ibid.*, d. 37, p. 1, a. 1, q. 1, *respondeo*, p. 507a; *ibid.*, d. 43, a. un., q. 3, *respondeo*, p. 612d; *In II Sent.*, d. 13, a. 2, q. 1, ad 4, p. 321d.

36. See *In I Sent.*, d. 19, p. 2, a. un., q. 3, *sed contra* #b, p. 288c; *In II Sent.*, d. 3, p. 1, a. 1, q. 2, *sed contra* 1, p. 83d; *ibid.*, ad 1, p. 87a.

37. *Ibid.*, d. 8, p. 2, a. 2, *videtur quod* #a, pp. 132-33; *ibid.*, d. 19, p. 2, a. un., q. 3, *videtur quod* 5, p. 288b.

38. See *In II Sent.*, d. 3, p. 1, a. 1 ("De simplicitate essentiae in angelis"), which consists of these three questions: "Utrum angeli sint compositi ex materia et forma; Utrum materia, ex qua compositi sunt angeli, sit eadem cum materia corporalium; Utrum materia corporalium et incorporeum sit una numero" (pp. 79-92). For Avicenna's (seu Solomon ibn Gabirol) theory of "spiritual matter," which is influencing Bonaventure here, see Et. Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (New York: Random House, 1955), pp. 226-29.

39. See *In II Sent.*, d. 3, p. 1, a. 1, q. 1, *videtur quod* #c, p. 80a: "Cum hypothesis angeli sit finita et arctata et limitata, . . . necessario oportet quod ultra formam addat aliquid arctans substantiale sibi; hoc autem non potest esse nisi materia"; *In I Sent.*, d. 9, p. 2, a. un., q. 3, ad 3, pp. 289-90; G. P. Klubertanz, "Esse and Existere in St. Bonaventure," *MS*, 8 (1946), pp. 184-88.

tion, he would be finite; accordingly, a creature cannot be pure act or be infinite [but is limited and restricted in being] by the very fact it is a creature: it has received its being from what is outside and other than itself and is from nothing. In short: every creature is limited because it is from nothing and entails composition.⁴⁰

But what makes the Franciscan's personal acceptance of the alignment of infinity of essence with separation from matter and potency ever more suspect is that he is almost completely silent on it in his *ex professo* handling of the topic. "Is the divine essence infinite?" he inquires in *In I Sent.*, d. 43, a. unicus, q. 2 (p. 608b) and answers affirmatively for several reasons. It is infinite because it is one with God's power which is infinite;⁴¹ because such infinity is more harmonious with our Creed, according to which God is immense;⁴² because it harmonizes better with [the divine immensity which Alexander of Hales and other] contemporary teachers ascribe to God;⁴³ because it agrees more with

40. *Ibid.*, d. 8, a. un., q. 3, *respondeo*, pp. 612d and 613a: "Infinitum enim in actu est actus purus, alioquin, si aliquid haberet de limitatione et arctatione, esset finitum; sed quod est actus purus, est suum esse per essentiam, et nihil tale accipit esse ab alia essentia nec ex nihilo. Si igitur creatura, eo ipso quod creatura, aliunde est et ex nihilo, nullo modo potest esse actus purus, nullo modo potest esse infinita. . . . Necesse est omnem creaturam esse limitatam, eo quod ex nihilo, et eo ipso quod composita est"; *ibid.*, d. 37, p. 1, a. 1, q. 1, *respondeo*, p. 507a-b.

41. *Ibid.*, *videtur quod* #a-#c, p. 508c. Even the statement of the question is significant: "Utrum *essentia* sit infinita *sive divina potentia* sit infinita *quantum ad esse*" (italics added). "Essence" is equivalent to "power of being." In *ibid.*, *videtur quod* #d-f, the divine essence is considered on its own—a consideration which concentrates on its goodness and magnitude (#c), its being most perfect and best (#e), its nobility and goodness (#f) rather than on its independence of matter and potency.

42. *Ibid.*, *respondeo*, p. 610a: "Et hoc [quod essentia omnino infinita sit actu] concedendum est et tenendum est tamquam verum, et quod magis est consonum fidei, quae dicit Deum immensum." Bonaventure would be referring to "Symbolum 'Quicumque'": ". . . immensus Pater, immensus Filius, immensus (et) Spiritus Sanctus . . . nec tres immensi . . . sed unus immensus" (H. Denzinger and A. Schönmetzger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum* [32nd ed.; Friburgi, Brisg.: Herder, 1963], #75) or to "De Fide Catholica" of the Fourth Lateran Council held in 1215: "Firmiter credimus et simpliciter confitemur quod unus solus est verus Deus, . . . immensus" (*ibid.*, #800).

Immediately after referring to the Creed on God as "immensus," Bonaventure states that his view on the divine essence as infinite agrees also with the authoritative position of the Fathers of the Church—for example, John Damascene says that God is "quoddam pelagus substantiae infinitum" (*loc. cit.*, *respondeo*, p. 610a). In light of the context Bonaventure must think Damascene's text has to do with immensity. For interpretation of that quotation, see articles cited above, n. 27.

43. *Ibid.*, *respondeo*, p. 610a: ". . . magis etiam consonum magistrorum." That the then current "magistri" would include Hales and other compilers of the so-called

reason itself, as this consideration discloses. Infinity in God is the absence from him of anything which would terminate his perfections—an absence which is due to his supreme immensity (*loc. cit.*, *respondeo*, p. 610b: “Alio modo [abnegatio finis qui est terminus potest intelligi] negative, quod non habet terminum nec est natum habere; et hoc modo ponitur in Deo propter summam immensitatem”).

And why is God supremely immense? Because his essence extends to the same infinite extent as his power: he cannot make so many creatures but what his substance is present in them.⁴⁴ Again, there is no end to what his power can do (which is entirely in act and thus is truly infinite), and his essence can be proved to involve the same situation: [there is no end to where it can be].⁴⁵ Infinity is negative only in etymology and not in fact. What actually corresponds to it is full possession of perfections: nothing can be immense unless it has supreme and most perfect actuality with nothing restricting or determining it⁴⁶ to producing or to being present in merely a definite number or kind of

Summa Fratris Alexandri is an inference from the contents of that *Summa*. The second tractate of its Book I, is entitled “De immensitate divinae essentiae,” which then considers in its first question this topic: “De immensitate Dei quantum ad se seu de infinitate eius.” The first *caput* of this question asks “Utrum divina essentia sit finita vel infinita” (see above, for analysis), and part of its answer is a description of the immensity of God’s presence in creatures (see *Summa*, I, tr. 2, q. 1, c. 1, *sed contra* #b, p. 55a; *ibid.*, *sed contra* #d, p. 55b; *ibid.*, *solutio*, p. 56b–c; for exegesis, see above).

44. In *I Sent.*, *videtur quod* #c, p. 608c: “Nunquam Deus potest facere tot, quin eius substantia possit esse in tot.” Also see *ibid.*, *respondeo*, p. 609d: “Ad quidquid se extendit potentia sua ratione potentiae, et essentia.” This is a refutation of “quidam,” who solved the problem of how the blessed could see the divine essence itself by making it finite as essence but infinite as power (see above *re* Guerri; Bonaventure’s explanation of that position is very good—see *ibid.*). Also see *ibid.*, ad 2 *ad finem*, p. 610c.

45. *Ibid.*, *respondeo*, p. 609d: “Ipsa [potentia] non habet statum in possendo, et iterum est omnino actu, et ideo ponitur vere infinita; sic etiam probari de essentia.” Here Bonaventure is refuting “aliqui,” who solved the problem of the beatific vision mentioned in the previous note by postulating the divine essence and power to be finite in themselves and infinite only *re* creatures (on that position, see above, esp. note 16). Interestingly enough, Bonaventure himself does not hesitate to call God “finite” in the sense that the divine reality does not exceed the grasp of divine intellect. *Ibid.*, *sed contra* 3, p. 609a: “Divina essentia est veritati divinae cognitionis finita quia Deus ipsam comprehendit et novit perfecte.” *Ibid.*, ad 3, p. 610d: “Secundo modo [i.e., essentia non excedit comprehensionem ipsius Dei] Deus est finitus quia se non excedit, cum sit infinitus.”

46. *Ibid.*, ad 6, p. 611a: “Respondet ei [i.e., infinito divino] summa positio. Nihil enim dicitur immensum nisi quod habet summam et perfectissimum actualitatem et nihil coarctans et determinans.”

effects with limited duration.⁴⁷ God's presence in all things is, in fact, necessitated by his very perfection. Since he is supreme simplicity itself, he is supremely immense and infinitely powerful: he is within all creatures, which can *be* only through his presence conferring being upon them.⁴⁸

In his *ex professo* treatise on the infinity of God's essence, then, Bonaventure makes it equivalent to immensity, which in turn is equivalent to omni- or infini-presence: his causative being *is in* however many creatures there may be and is itself termed infinite only with respect to their potentially infinite number and kind. Infinity, accordingly, describes the divine essence with reference to creatures rather than directly in itself, as it would have done had Bonaventure continued the approach he made in the two earlier texts analyzed above. But instead of locating infinity in the divine being's freedom from matter and potentiality, Bonaventure appears to have preferred to identify it with divine immensity and omnipresence, as his Franciscan confreres had done earlier in the *Summa Fratris Alexandri*.⁴⁹

Thomas Aquinas

Aquinas' *ex professo* treatise on infinity occurs, as does Bonaventure's, in connection with Book One, d. 43, of Lombard's *Sentences*. But unlike the Franciscan, who discusses four questions,⁵⁰ the Dominican asks only two: "Utrum potentia Dei sit infinita" and "Utrum omnipotentia sua, quae convenit sibi secundum infinitatem potentiae, sit creaturae communicabilis" (*In I Sent.*, d. 43, q. 1, [*introductio*];

47. See *ibid.*, q. 1, *respondeo*, p. 606b: "Et ideo [divina potentia] est habens in se plenam et perfectam actualitatem respectu infinitorum."

48. *Ibid.*, d. 37, p. 1, a. 1, q. 1, *respondeo*, pp. 506-507: "Necessitas autem existendi Deum in omnibus sumitur . . . a parte ipsius propter summam immensitatem et summam potestatem; et utriusque ratio est summa simplicitas. Quia enim summe simplex est, ad nihil arctatum, ideo in omnibus invenitur tamquam immensum; quia summe simplex, ideo in infinitum virtuosissimum, et ideo virtus idem est quod substantia, et ideo necesse est quod sit in omnibus. Ex parte creaturae est necessitas . . . [quia] non potest esse nisi per praesentiam eius qui dedit ei esse." Also see *ibid.*, q. 2, *respondeo*, p. 509a.

49. Our interpretation of Bonaventure differs, then, from J. Prather's (*op. cit.*, pp. 119, 135-36), who thinks he makes that location in most if not all relevant texts. No one seems yet to have studied infinity in his writings subsequent to the commentary on the *Sentences*.

50. See Quaracchi ed. minor, p. 605a: "Primo quaeritur utrum potentia Dei sit infinita. Secondo, dato quod sic, quaeritur utrum ipsa essentia divina sit infinita, sicut potentia. Tertio quaeritur utrum Deus possit producere opus infinitum. Quarto, utrum ratio operandi sit infinita."

Mandonnet ed., p. 1001). Although “*essentia divina*” does not appear in the formulation itself of either question, it is at the center of each *solutio* since the status of power as infinite or finite is decided by whether the essence whence power issues is infinite or finite, and the infiniteness or finiteness of essence is computed explicitly in terms of the absence or presence in it of matter and potency. Thus, in the first *solutio* God’s power is infinite since it is consequent upon an essence which is infinite because the divine *esse* is “*absolutum et nullo modo receptum in aliquo*” (*ibid.*, a. 1, *solutio*, p. 1003).⁵¹ In the second, the power of no creature can be infinite because power there follows upon an essence which is not infinite since *esse* in a created existent is not subsistent but is received and limited by that very essence (*ibid.*, a. 2, *solutio*, p. 1005: “*Unde impossibile est ut essentiae finitae sit virtus infinita. Impossibile est autem aliquam essentiam creatam esse infinitam, eo quod esse suum non est absolutum et subsistens sed receptum in aliquo*”). And the key to what makes something be finite (or infinite) in its very nature is disclosed with admirable clarity: every item becomes finite through that which determines and confines its essence (*ibid.*, a. 1, *solutio*, p. 1003: “*Sic dicitur unumquodque finiri per illud quod determinat vel contrahit essentiam suam*”). By implication: an item is infinite if it is without that which would determine and restrict its essence.

Let us study that first *solutio* more in detail. Despite its clear disclosure of the principle guiding Aquinas’ approach to infinity and finiteness, it is awkward and a bit misleading in other ways because Thomas makes two divisions of infinity which overlap. The first is in line with whether what is absent from something (thereby called “infinite”) ought to be present. If it ought to be present, the absence is a privation or deficiency; if it ought not be present, the absence is merely a negation.⁵² The second division concerns what is and what is not quantitative. A quantitative item (e.g., a line) is finite or infinite when considered with or without that which terminates it (its final

51. This rooting of the infinity of power in that of essence will be constant throughout Thomas’ later texts on divine power. See *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, c. 43; *Compendium Theologiae*, I, c. 19; *De Potentia*, q. 1, a. 2 resp.; *S. T.*, I, q. 25, a. 2. For an exegesis see L. Sweeney S.J., “Divine Infinity in the Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas,” (Ph.D. dissertation, School of Graduate Studies, University of Toronto, 1954); *idem*, TMS, 48 (1970), pp. 88–89.

52. *Ibid.*, *solutio*, p. 1002: “*Respondeo dicendum quod infinitum potest dupliciter sumi: privative . . . vel negative.*” Also see *ibid.*, ad 1, p. 1004: “. . . de infinito quod privative dicitur, quod scilicet natum est habere formam et non habet”; *ibid.*, d. 3, q. 1, a. 1, ad 4, p. 92.

point).⁵³ Something which is itself without quantity is finite or infinite inasmuch as its essence is with or without what determines and confines it (*ibid.*: “Dicitur alio modo finis quantum ad essentiam rei. . . . Et sic dicitur unumquodque finiri per illud quod determinat vel contrahit essentiam suam”). Thus, a generic essence, e.g., “animal,” is finite when determined by a specific difference (“rational”), but infinite when thought of without that determination (*ibid.*). Or prime matter is finite as determined in a composite by a substantial form, e.g., human soul, but infinite because it itself is indifferent to all forms: it can receive any form (*ibid.*: “Et materia prima, quae de se est indifferens ad omnes formas, unde et infinita dicitur, finitur per formam”). Likewise, form is made finite by the matter receiving it, although it is also infinite insofar as it transcends any one matter (*ibid.*: “Et similiter forma, quae quantum in se est potest perficere diversas partes materiae, finitur per materiam in qua recipitur”).⁵⁴

Granted that here Aquinas has unmistakably explicated two important points: an item’s finitude or infinitude resides in its possessing or not possessing a determinant and, second, such determination is twofold: form (or, more generally, act) determines matter (or potency) by perfecting it, whereas matter (or potency) determines form (or act) by limiting it. But that explication is permeated with rather awkward and troublesome expressions. Logical conceptions (genus *re* specific difference), prime matter, and form are all listed under the same sort of infinity. Yet infinity for the first two is coterminous with imperfection (because it lacks specific determination, a generic nature is less perfect than a specific nature; prime matter of itself is pure potency and without any formal determination or perfection), while infinity for a subsistent form connotes perfection. Infinity for the first two is a privation, for the last a negation.

This trouble arose from Thomas’ dividing items according to whether they are or are not directly quantitative. Lines and other mathematical conceptions are in obvious contrast with logical notions, with prime matter and with form, in none of which is quantity itself a constituent. But otherwise the last three are so different that any attempt to bind

53. *Ibid.*: “Finis vel terminus multipliciter dicitur. Uno modo terminus quantitatis, sicut punctus lineae; et hoc modo dicitur a positione et a privatione talis finis finitum et infinitum, secundum quod est passio quantitatis.” Thomas’ concern with this second division arises most likely from his awareness (*see ibid.*) of “quidam,” who restrict infinity entirely to quantity, thereby predicating it solely of God’s *virtus* and not of his essence, which thus can be the object of the beatific vision. On “quidam,” *see above re* Guerric and n. 9.

54. That is, form as a specific perfection can perfect any one of many individual members of that species.

them together under one common sort of infinity was bound to come apart, and Aquinas no longer attempted it in his latest treatises.⁵⁵ But even here it does not interfere with his description of God's infinity itself, which grows out of his conception of form and act,⁵⁶ as the rest of the *solutio* shows.

The divine essence is, he concludes there, infinite through negation of whatever would determine and restrict it [namely, potency and matter], for form as form is infinite (*loc. cit.*: "Et a negatione talis finis essentia divina infinita dicitur. Omnis enim forma in propria ratione, si abstracte consideretur, infinitatem habet").⁵⁷ Consequently, that whose *esse* is absolute and in no way received in something else—in fact he *is* his *esse*—is strictly infinite. Hence, his essence is infinite, his goodness is infinite, all his other attributes are infinite: none of them is limited since limitation arises when a perfection is received in something, which thereby limits it to its own capacity (*ibid.*: "Et ideo illud quod habet esse absolutum et nullo modo receptum in aliquo, immo ipsemet est suum esse, illud est infinitum simpliciter; et ideo essentia eius infinita est, et bonitas eius, et quidquid aliud de eo dicitur; quia nihil eorum limi-

55. See *S. T.*, I, q. 7, a. 1, *resp.*, where the division of finite/infinite is according to matter and form; also *ibid.*, q. 86, 2, ad 1; *ibid.*, III, q. 10, a. 3 ad 1; *Quaestio Quodl.*, III, q. 2, a. 1 *resp.* Between *In I Sent.*, d. 43, q. 1, a. 1, and these texts there is a series of texts in which Thomas tries to reformulate his approach through quantity: *In III Sent.*, d. 13, q. 1, a. 2, *sol.* 2; *De Veritate*, q. 2, a. 2 ad 5; *ibid.*, q. 20, a. 4 ad 1; *ibid.*, q. 29, a. 3 *resp.*; *S.C.G.*, I, c. 28 and c. 43. But he completely abandoned that reformulation in the late texts listed above. In view of the awkward complexities in his expressing his position on infinity in *In I Sent.*, d. 43, I would judge it to be a first rather than a revised version—if such a distinction be valid (*see above*, note 5, second prgr.).

56. For similar descriptions in earlier texts *see ibid.*, d. 8, q. 1, a. 1, ad 1, p. 196; *ibid.*, a. 2, *contra* #b, p. 197; *ibid.*, q. 2, a. 1, *solutio*, p. 202; *ibid.*, a. 2, *solutio*, p. 205; *ibid.*, q. 4, a. 1 ad 1 and ad 2, pp. 219–20; *ibid.*, a. 2, *contra* #b, pp. 221–22; *ibid.*, q. 5, a. 1, *contra* #b, p. 226; *ibid.*, d. 35, q. 1, a. 1, *solutio*, p. 809; *ibid.*, d. 42, q. 1, a. 1, *solutio*, p. 893.

57. As the Latin quotation shows, Thomas actually says "form as form, *if abstractly considered*." He explains the italicized words by the example of whiteness. "In whiteness as abstractly taken, the nature of whiteness is not limited on the level of whiteness, although in it the intelligible natures of color and of being become determined and drawn within a definite species." That is, whiteness considered precisely as whiteness possesses all the perfection of whiteness and, thus, can be said to be infinite within the domain of whiteness. It is, however, not absolutely infinite, for whiteness is only one species of color and thereby is finite when considered precisely as color; similarly, whiteness is only one of the four species of quality, which in turn is only one of the nine general modes of accidental predication; accordingly, it is also finite when viewed *qua* being. Thomas continues to use whiteness as an example of partially infinite forms even in his late works; *see S. T.*, I, 50, 2 ad 4.

tatur ad aliquid, sicut quod recipitur in aliquo limitatur ad capacitatem eius").⁵⁸

But what of the question Thomas originally raised on God's power? Is it infinite? His answer consists of the single sentence he next adds: "And from the fact that the divine essence is infinite, it follows that the divine power is infinite also" (*ibid.*: "Et ex hoc quod essentia est infinita, sequitur quod potentia eius infinita sit").

Manifestly, Aquinas' theory of the infinity of divine being differs deeply from Bonaventure's. The former concentrates on essence, whence he moves to power; the latter concentrates on power and thence moves to essence. The former grounds the infinity of God's essence in its freedom from potency and matter: it is subsistent, God is existence. The latter (with the exception of two brief texts) identifies the infinity of the divine essence with its immensity: it is present in all creatures, however many and varied they may be.

Aquinas' theory on divine infinity is another proof that his is a universe of *being*, which is analogously common to God and to creatures.⁵⁹ In it form and actuation cause determination wherever found and, accordingly, matter can be considered as infinite because of itself it is without any form or act. But matter and potency are genuinely real as actually existing components in material things and, thereby, also are determinants by limiting the forms and acts which they receive and which are themselves determinants by conferring perfection on their recipients.⁶⁰ Now each creature is a being and God is Being. But each creature is a *finite* being because a composite of acts received and determined by potency, whereas God is *infinite* Being because an entirely subsistent Act and so without any recipient potency. Perfect *Being* because He is subsistent Actuality, God is *infinite* Being as free from the limiting determination of matter and all potency. Here infinity, al-

58. On the meaning of *esse* as existence and its relation to essence, see L. Sweeney, S.J., "Existence/Essence in Thomas Aquinas' Early Writings," *Proceedings of American Catholic Philosophical Association*, 37 (1963), pp. 97-131; *idem*, *A Metaphysics of Authentic Existentialism* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), pp. 67-95, 127-30.

59. For a list of 36 texts on analogy in *In I Sent.*, see G. P. Klubertanz, *St. Thomas on Analogy* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1960), pp. 165-76.

60. Such a view of matter and potency is basically Aristotelian—at least as Aquinas read the *Physics* and *Metaphysics*. If Bonaventure and other medieval authors do not approach divine infinity through form/matter and act/potency, it may indicate their basic metaphysics is radically un-Aristotelian. Some recent studies have challenged (unsuccessfully, I would say) the medieval interpretation of prime matter in Aristotle—for instance, see Robert Sokolowski, "Matter, Elements and Substance in Aristotle," *JHP*, 8 (1970), pp. 263-88 (with references to H. R. King, D. C. Williams).

though a negation and an absence, belongs properly and directly to the divine being itself because what is negated is within the very sphere of being: matter and potency belong, in their own way, to being as truly as do form and act, since matter and potency too are genuinely real in their own way. And just as their presence in an existent has actual repercussions on his very being by making it limited, so their absence in an Existent has genuine repercussions on his very being which thereby is unlimited. And this being is Thomas' God, whose infinity thus permeates his very entity.⁶¹

61. His description of God is in contrast with Plotinus', for whom God may be infinite in his very reality (= unity) but only because he transcends being. See L. Sweeney, S.J., "Another Interpretation of *Enneads*, VI, 7, 32," *TMS*, 38 (1961), pp. 289-303; *idem*, "Plotinus' Conception of Neoplatonism," in F. N. Magill and E. G. Welton (ed.), *Great Events From History* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Salem Press, 1972), II, pp. 823-28. For the meanings the Pre-Socratics gave to *apeiron*, see *idem*, *Infinity in the Presocratics: A Bibliographical and Philosophical Study* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972); for its meaning in Gregory of Nyssa, see E. Mühlhberg, *Die Unendlichkeit Gottes bei Gregor von Nyssa* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck u. Ruprecht, 1966).