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Bruce McCuskey

Chapter 20
The Platonic Roots of Aquinas' Account of Divine Infinity

Abstract: This chapter examines Thomas Aquinas' reception of the Platonic tradition through a case study of his discussion of a particular divine attribute. Scholarship has traditionally conceived of Aquinas' relationship with the Platonic tradition as one of very qualified appropriation. Most of the time, he rejects Platonic positions. In those cases when he does endorse ~~a~~ Platonic ~~position,~~ he offers an Aristotelian argument for it, which ultimately transforms the otherwise view that he endorses. The attribute of divine infinity presents an interesting case study because it ~~as an attribute ascribed to the first principle specifically~~ in late antique Platonism, whereas Aristotle effectively denies that infinity could be ascribed to God. ~~Through a source-critical analysis,~~ this chapter demonstrates that throughout his writings Aquinas argues for the ascription of infinity to God, which constitutes him endorsing a Platonic position. Yet he does not offer an Aristotelian argument for it. Rather, he offers an argument ultimately drawn from Proclus, mediated by the *Liber de Causis*, though in his own commentary on the *Liber de Causis*, he ultimately recognizes the Proclean roots of the argument. Aquinas' account of divine infinity thereby constitutes a thoroughly Platonic dimension of his thought.

1 Introduction

There are two primary ways by which the question of Aquinas' relationship to Platonism has been approached. On the one hand, there is the lexicographical approach pioneered by Robert J. Henle. He undertook the daunting task of collecting all the Thomistic texts in which Plato or the Platonici were mentioned in an effort to establish "a sort of Thomistic Corpus Platonicorum".[1] By gathering these Thomistic texts, Henle sought to avoid a form of confirmation bias by creating his own definition of Platonism and then identifying Aquinas' endorsement or rejection of these doctrines at specific points in his writings. Instead, he thought that under his approach:

1 Henle 1956, 3.

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> The Platonism of these texts is self-defining; it is whatever Saint Thomas says that it is. For if he anywhere states a conception of Platonism, one may reasonably expect to find it in his explicit and formal references. Moreover, this avoids the danger of setting up an abstraction of Platonism in contrast to the multiple concrete Platonisms.[2]

Using this method, he identified the dominant methodology that Aquinas employed in relating to Platonism. Henle noted that the major conclusions and doctrines of philosophers were described as *positiones* or *opiniones*, and the arguments in support of those conclusions were termed *rationes* or *viae*. Each *positio* "is commanded and imposed by the *via*".[3] Two philosophies that were opposed to each other in their conclusions might also employ not only contradictory arguments but also characteristically different approaches to the solution of problems, approaches that constitute distinctive and mutually exclusive *viae*. These *viae* can themselves evidence a fundamental philosophical presumption that Aquinas calls a "*radix*, *principium*, or *fundamentum*".[4]

This distinction allows for three distinct kinds of philosophical criticism or refutation. Aquinas can reject both the *ratio* and the *positio*, reject the *ratio* but endorse the *positio*, or reject the *positio* while endorsing the *ratio*. Henle never mentions an example of the third kind, but Aquinas' approach to Platonism does involve criticisms of the first two kinds. Most of his engagement with Platonism involves a rejection of both the *ratio* and of the *positio*. Nevertheless, in certain instances when evaluating some Platonic positions Aquinas rejects the *ratio* but ultimately endorses the *positio* after transposing it into a new argumentative schema. According to Henle, such a strategy resulted in a *positio* that is "no longer formally Platonic; it can only be said to be materially Platonic".[5] For quite some time, Henle's position remained the dominant approach to characterizing Aquinas' relationship to Platonism.

On the other hand, there is the approach developed by Wayne Hankey, which stemmed from the growing scholarly interest in Neoplatonism over the course of the twentieth century. Hankey demonstrated Aquinas' deep engagement with Neoplatonic themes, especially through his appropriation of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*.[6] Throughout his scholarship, Hankey noted several seemingly paradoxical, if not outright contradictory, aspects of Aquinas' relationship with Platonism. On the one hand, not having access to Plato's own works, such that he

2 Henle 1956, xxi.
3 Henle 1956, 298–299.
4 Henle 1956, 298.
5 Henle 1956, 303.
6 See Hankey 1982, 1997, 2000, 2002, and 2016.

could see the dialectical development of Plato's own thought and its relationship to his Neoplatonic successors, Aquinas' understanding of Platonism was distinctly ahistorical. On the other hand, Aquinas consistently inserted Plato's thought into a historical dialectic that interpreted it as a necessary reaction to and refutation of pre-Socratic materialism and naturalism. Over and above these conflicting approaches was Hankey's most fundamental point: the influence of Dionysius, Augustine, Macrobius, and other Neoplatonic writers to whom Aquinas had access meant that his criticisms of Plato took place from within the Platonic tradition.

Despite his vast erudition and productive scholarship, methodologically Hankey's writings are often guilty of just what Henle tried to avoid: constructing a definition of Platonism and then finding confirmation of its pre-eminence within Aquinas' works and thought. Yet the lexicographic method of Henle has its own shortcomings. Primarily, in relying on Aquinas' own description of what constitutes a Platonic doctrine, be it attributed to Plato or to the *Platonici*, it relies on Aquinas' own incomplete knowledge of the history of the Platonic tradition. Indeed, in reporting Plato's positions, Aquinas is often simply repeating Aristotle's characterization of Plato. Thus, Henle's work often demonstrates Aquinas' uptake of Aristotelian thought as much as his genuine engagement with Platonism.

In what follows, I will combine the approaches of both Henle and Hankey. I will focus not on what Aquinas describes as a "Platonic" position, but on his engagement with a series of texts classified by modern scholars as "Neoplatonic", namely, Proclus' *Elements of Theology*, the *De Divinis Nominibus*, and the *Liber de Causis*. Furthermore, I will identify a concept within these texts that noticeably diverges from strict Aristotelianism: infinity. To establish this, I will first briefly survey the history of infinity and its relation to divinity. Then, I will outline Aquinas' own account of divine infinity, distinguishing it from the preceding Latin theological tradition. Finally, I will show that his sources for this concept lie in the aforementioned Neoplatonic texts, and that Aquinas explicitly acknowledges his dependence on those texts at least once in his writings.

2 The Development of the Notion of Divine Infinity in Classical Thought

At several points in his writings, Aquinas provides a cursory treatment of divine ~~itude.~~ In so doing he is not unique among contemporaries such as Bonaventure, Henry of Ghent, and his teacher Albert the Great. Yet only a few decades previously such a concern was not apparent. The source of this ~~Christian~~ reticence about divine infinity stems from its checkered history within the classi-

cal philosophical tradition. The infinity of the divine first principle had been a central theme of Greek philosophy from Anaximander down to Aristotle. The Stagirite himself testifies to this fact even as he prepares to reject it:

> εὐλόγως δὲ καὶ ἀρχὴν αὐτὸ τιθέασι πάντες· οὔτε γὰρ μάτην αὐτὸ οἷόν τε εἶναι, οὔτε ἄλλην ὑπάρχειν αὐτῷ δύναμιν πλὴν ὡς ἀρχήν· ἅπαντα γὰρ ἢ ἀρχὴ ἢ ἐξ ἀρχῆς, τοῦ δὲ ἀπείρου οὐκ ἔστιν ἀρχή· εἴη γὰρ ἂν αὐτοῦ πέρας. ἔτι δὲ καὶ ἀγένητον καὶ ἄφθαρτον ὡς ἀρχή τις οὖσα· τό τε γὰρ γενόμενον ἀνάγκη τέλος λαβεῖν, καὶ τελευτὴ πάσης ἐστὶ φθορᾶς. διὸ (καθάπερ λέγομεν) οὐ ταύτης ἀρχή, ἀλλ᾽ αὕτη τῶν ἄλλων εἶναι δοκεῖ καὶ περιέχειν ἅπαντα καὶ πάντα κυβερνᾶν, ὥς φασιν ὅσοι μὴ ποιοῦσι παρὰ τὸ ἄπειρον ἄλλας αἰτίας, οἷον νοῦν ἢ φιλίαν· καὶ τοῦτ᾽ εἶναι τὸ θεῖον· ἀθάνατον γὰρ καὶ ἀνώλεθρον, ὥς φησιν ὁ Ἀναξίμανδρος καὶ οἱ πλεῖστοι τῶν φυσιολόγων.
>
> And again, all those who accept it are quite right in regarding it as a "principle"; for, if it exists, it must affect things somehow, and it cannot affect them except as a principle; for everything is either determined by some principle or is a principle itself, and the undetermined cannot be determined at all, and so cannot depend upon anything else as its principle. And further, being a principle, it can have no beginning or end of existence; for whatever comes into being must come to an end, and there must be a term to any process of perishing. So the "unlimited" cannot be derived from any other principle, but is itself regarded as the principle of the other things, "embracing and governing all", as it is said to do by such as accept it, unless indeed they accept other principles alongside of it, such as "Intelligence" or "Amity". This unlimited, then, would be the divinity itself, being "immortal and indestructible", as Anaximander and most of the physicists declare it to be (*Physics* 203b5–15, text and translation by Cornford and Wicksteed 1957).

The argument that self-evidently the ultimate Source must be infinite because there can be nothing beyond it to limit it, whilst conversely it contains or limits all other things, will be powerfully revived by late ancient Platonists. Aristotle, however, rejected it. According to his own account he was in fact rejecting the entire previous philosophical tradition (*Physics* 203ab), denying the possibility of an "actual infinite" (*Metaphysics* 1026b, *Physics* 204d–205a, and *De Caelo* 271b–278a), essentially because it was unintelligible ("the infinite qua infinite is unknowable"; *Physics* 187b12–13). This denial extended to his arguments for a finite universe. Infinity survives in Aristotle as prime matter, which though constitutive of all beings of this world, is forever limited by one Form or another. Therefore, it is never an actual, as opposed to a potential, infinite (*Physics* 206a). Form is for Aristotle the principle of Limit, whilst Matter is Unlimit. Moreover, insofar as the Unmoved Mover possessed infinity it was an externally manifested infinite power to reduce the universe from potency to act.

Plato's *Philebus* had followed a similar line of reasoning but universalized this opposition in a way that would be decisive for late ancient Platonists. According to that dialogue, there must be two constituents of things, the Unlimited and

the Limit, of which each existing thing must be a mixture (*Phil.* 23c). Since these two ultimate contraries would not naturally co-operate, something different from them must ensure that the unlimited is bound fast by the limit (*Phil.* 27e) which could only be a "wondrous regulating intelligence" (*Phil.* 28d).[7] Plotinus explicitly develops this, arguing that the First Principle is both unlimited and the source of the Forms or Limits. For him, forms or limits must emerge from something wider, itself intrinsically incapable of being limited (*Enneads* V.5.6). The interaction of two infinities, Matter and the One, generates beings.

Proclus and his colleagues in the Neoplatonic school of Athens would further refine Plotinus' understanding of the role of limit and unlimit in the generation of reality. Proclus asserted that "all true being is composed of limit and infinite".[8] For him, Limit and the Infinite constitute the elements of both the Forms and beings in the sensible world. To maintain this doctrine, Proclus must show how the Infinite can enter something like pure form, which is itself a principle of Limit. He resolves this issue by structuring Limit's relation to the Infinite as that of substance to potency. Dodds claimed that the essential character of the Infinite for Proclus is δύναμις, but it would be more accurate to characterize the Infinite as uncircumscribed δύναμις.[9] From the infinite active power of the intelligibles down to the pure passive potentiality of pure matter, the Infinite manifests itself insofar as is possible at the different levels of reality. On each level it is present according to the way that each level is uncircumscribed with respect to the level below it. At the level of the intelligibles the infinite is present as uncircumscribed active informing power; at the level of Soul, it is present as the uncircumscribed power of becoming, etc. Paired with this is the essential character of Limit as uniformity or measure, manifesting itself in diminishing degrees in eternity, the intelligences, the soul, the periodic motions of the heavens, and bodies with their finite extensions. This interplay generates another triad, that of πέρας, ἄπειρον, and μικτον, which mostly parallels μόνος, πρόοδος, and ἐπιστροπή. As primordial principles of the constitution of beings Limit and the Infinite precede that which is a mixture of the two principles in existence. As Proclus puts it:

> εἰ γὰρ τῶν τινὸς ὄντων τὰ ἐφ' ἑαυτῶν ὄντα προϋφέστηκεν ὡς κοινὰ πάντων καὶ ἀρχηγικὰ αἴτια καὶ μὴ τινῶν, ἀλλὰ πάντων ἁπλῶς, δεῖ πρὸ τοῦ ἐξ ἀμφοῖν εἶναι τὸ πρῶτον πέρας καὶ τὸ πρώτως ἄπειρον. τὸ γὰρ ἐν τῷ μικτῷ πέρας ἀπειρίας ἐστὶ μετειληφὸς καὶ τὸ ἄπειρον πέρατος· τὸ δὲ πρῶτον ἑκάστου οὐκ ἄλλο ἐστὶν ἢ ὅ ἐστιν· οὐκ ἄρα δεῖ περατοειδὲς εἶναι τὸ πρώτως ἄπειρον καὶ ἀπειροειδὲς τὸ πρῶτον πέρας· πρὸ τοῦ μικτοῦ ἄρα ταῦτα πρώτως.

7 The Greek reads: νοῦν καὶ φρόνησίν τινα θαυμαστὴν (Fowler 1925).

8 Proclus, Prop. 89 (Dodds 2004). A more literal rendering of the Greek would be "limit and unlimit" or "finite and infinite" to capture the exact verbal parallel of "ἐκ πέρατός . . . καὶ ἀπείρου".

9 See Dodds 2004, 247.

> For if prior to the characters of individuals there subsist these characters in themselves as universal and originative causes, belonging not to some but to all without restriction, then before their common product there must exist the first Limit and the primitively Infinite. For the limit contained in the mixture has a share of infinitude, and the infinitude of limit; but the first manifestation of any principle is free from alien elements, and hence the primitively Infinite can have no infusion of limit, nor the first Limit of infinitude: therefore these characters exist primitively prior to the mixture (Prop. 90).

One crucial entailment of Proclus' account is the development of the notion of comparative infinites. Stated succinctly, this doctrine establishes that a being is infinite from the perspective of those beings that are lower than it on the chain of reality. This ascription results from the understanding of the infinite as that which is uncircumscribed. As Proclus argues:

> ᾧ γὰρ ἄπειρον ἕκαστον, τούτῳ καὶ ἀπερίγραφον ὑπάρχει. πᾶν δὲ ἐν ἐκείνοις ἑαυτῷ τε ὥρισται καὶ τοῖς πρὸ αὐτοῦ πᾶσι. μόνοις δὴ λείπεται τοῖς καταδεεστέροις ἄπειρον εἶναι τὸ ἐν ἐκείνοις ἄπειρον, ὧν ὑπερήπλωται τῇ δυνάμει τοσοῦτον ὥστε πᾶσιν αὐτοῖς ἀπερίληπτον ὑπάρχειν. κἂν γὰρ ἐφ' ὁσονοῦν ἐκεῖνα πρὸς αὐτὸ ἀνατείνηται, ἀλλ' ἔχει τι πάντως ἀπ' αὐτῶν ἐξῃρημένον· κἂν εἰσίῃ πάντα εἰς αὐτό, ἀλλ' ἔχει τι κρύφιον τοῖς δευτέροις καὶ ἀκατάληπτον· κἂν ἐξελίττῃ τὰς ἐν αὐτῷ δυνάμεις, ἀλλ' ἔχει τι δι' ἕνωσιν ἀνυπέρβλητον, συνεσπειραμένον, δυνάμεις, ἀλλ' ἔχει τι δι' ἕνωσιν ἀνυπέρβλητον, συνεσπειραμένον, ἐκβεβηκὸς τῆς ἐκείνων ἀνελίξεως. ἑαυτὸ δὲ συνέχον καὶ ὁρίζον οὐκ ἂν ἑαυτῷ ἄπειρον ὑπάρχοι· οὐδὲ πολλῷ μᾶλλον τοῖς ὑπερκειμένοις, μοῖραν ἔχον τῆς ἐν ἐκείνοις ἀπειρίας· ἀπειρότεραι γὰρ αἱ τῶν ὁλικωτέρων δυνάμεις, ὁλικώτεραι οὖσαι καὶ ἐγγυτέρω τεταγμέναι τῆς πρωτίστης ἀπειρίας.
>
> For to whomsoever anything is infinite, to him it is also uncircumscribed. But among things that have Being each is determinate both to itself and to all principles prior to it. It remains, then, that the infinitude in such things is infinite only to inferior principles, above which it is so supereminent in potency as to escape the grasp of any of them. For thought they extend themselves toward it with whatsoever reach, yet it has something that altogether transcends them; though all of them enter into it, yet it has something unattainable in its unity, an unexpanded life, which evades their explication. But containing and determining itself as it does, it cannot be infinite for itself; and still less for those above it, since it possesses but a parcel of the infinitude that is in them. For the potencies of the more universal terms are more infinite, being themselves more universal and nearer in rank to the primal Infinity (Prop. 93).

With this doctrine Proclus has crucially shifted the concept of infinity from a quantitative to a qualitative register. The former cannot admit degrees, while the latter can. Qualitative infinitude proper to Proclus' ontological hierarchy is relative to an ascending soul, just as that which is unknowable is relative to a knower. Each grade of reality is infinite not in the sense that it has no limit, since everything has limit except the One that is above limit and matter that is below limit, but rather in the sense that its content can never be exhausted in or by any subsequent principle or ~~collection of subsequent~~ principles. Hence, a given grade of re-

ality can neither be infinite ~~for its own self~~, since it is self-defined by the Limit as manifested at that grade, nor can it be infinite for the grades above it, since its potency is included in theirs.

This shift from quantitative to qualitative infinity marks a noticeable departure from Aristotelian conceptions of infinity. For Aristotle infinity could only be an external marker of something power over others or the external enumeration of a potential series. Proclus' hypostatization of the Infinite resurrected the pre-Aristotelian notion of infinity as an essential characteristic. ~~It should be noted, however, that Proclus explicitly refrained from calling the One infinite. Since the Infinite is participible, it cannot be the utterly transcendent One. Rather, the "cause of all things infinite in potency and cause of all infinitude in things, Infinity falls between the First Principle and Being".~~[10]

Damascius ~~would be~~ the late ancient Platonist who ~~forthrightly~~ identified the First Principle with the Infinite.[11] His identification of the First Principle with the Infinite in fact radicalizes the Plotinian insight that the power of that which is utterly One must be unlimited.[12] Damascius deduces from this insight that Infinity identifies the One. He affirms the Aristotelian claim that an actual infinite would be necessarily unknowable but then employs that entailment to justify its identification with the One.[13] Only that which is delimited can be comprehensively known. Neither the infinite nor the One can be comprehensively known. Thus, the Infinite and the One are reckoned identical because both are unknowable. ~~Thus, while Proclus reconceived infinity as an essential characteristic that a being could possess but refrained from attributing this characteristic to the One, Damascius has done just that.~~ Infinitude now not only indicates the external power of the One to cause all existing things but also indicates something about the internal nature of the One. For Damascius what it indicates is precisely the unknowability of the One.

Damascius' innovation would enter the tradition of Christian Platonism by way of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*. At several points in the *Corpus*, the Areopagite explicitly connects divine unknowability with divine infinity. In fact, he does so at the very beginning of the *Corpus*:

> ὥσπερ γὰρ ἄληπτα καὶ ἀθεώρητα τοῖς αἰσθητοῖς ἐστι τὰ νοητὰ καὶ τοῖς ἐν πλάσει καὶ τύπῳ τὰ ἁπλᾶ καὶ ἀτύπωτα, τοῖς τε κατὰ σωμάτων σχήματα μεμορφωμένοις ἡ τῶν ἀσωμάτων

10 Proclus, [illegible] 92.

11 See Ottobrini 2019, 133–152.

12 Ottobrini 2019, 143.

13 Damascius, *Problems and Solutions Concerning First Principles* I.85.18–86 (translated by Sara Abhel-Rappe 2010).

> ἀναφὴς καὶ ἀσχημάτισ τος ἀμορφία, κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν τῆς ἀληθείας λόγον ὑπέρκειται τῶν οὐσιῶν ἡ ὑπερούσιος ἀπειρία καὶ τῶν νόων ἡ ὑπὲρ νοῦν ἑνότης.
>
> Just as the senses can neither grasp nor perceive the things of the mind, just as representation and shape cannot take in the simple and the shapeless, just as corporeal form cannot lay hold of the intangible and incorporeal, by the same standard of truth beings are surpassed by the infinity, intelligences by that oneness that is beyond intelligence (*DN* 588B, Suchla 1990; translated by Luibheid and Rorem 1987, modified).

According to Dionysius, as this passage indicates, the limits of human cognition and true infinitude coincide. More specifically, hyper-substantial infinity (ἡ ὑπερούσιος ἀπειρία) exceeds human reason. Such hyper-substantial infinity is characteristic of ~~the nature~~ and is so occult as to be unspeakable and unthinkable. It is only because of the condescension of divine revelation that such divinity has become open to human discourse. In this respect, Dionysius offers a way out of a problem that Damascius cannot completely resolve. Namely, how one can speak of the First Principle as infinite and unknowable without self-contradiction. The Areopagite can affirm that the infinite God is unknowable by reason alone but not thereby incapable of communicating Godself to human beings through revelation.

Dionysius does not, however, merely adopt Damascius' insight into the coincidence of divine infinity and unknowability. Within the framework of God who is internally infinite he incorporates both the Proclean account of infinity as that which works with limit to provide form and the older sense of infinity as externally manifested power. When describing Christ's divinity, the Areopagite characterizes it in the following way:

> ὡς πᾶν καὶ μέρος καὶ ὅλον ἐν ἑαυτῇ συνειληφυῖα καὶ ὑπερέχουσα καὶ προέχουσα, τελεία μέν ἐστιν ἐν τοῖς ἀτελέσιν ὡς τελετάρχις, ἀτελὴς δὲ ἐν τοῖς τελείοις ὡς ὑπερτελὴς καὶ προτέλειος, εἶδος εἰδοποιὸν ἐν τοῖς ἀνειδέοις ὡς εἰδεάρχις, ἀνείδεος ἐν τοῖς εἴδεσιν ὡς ὑπὲρ εἶδος, οὐσία ταῖς ὅλαις οὐσίαις ἀχράντως ἐπιβατεύουσα καὶ ὑπερουσίως ἀπάσης οὐσίας ἐξῃρημένη, τὰς ὅλας ἀρχὰς καὶ τάξεις ἀφορίζουσα καὶ πάσης ἀρχῆς καὶ τάξεως ὑπεριδρυμένη. Καὶ μέτρον ἐστὶ τῶν ὄντων . . .
>
> Within its total unity it contains part and whole, and it transcends these too and is antecedent to them . . . It is the form that is the source of form for the formless. But it also transcends form among the formed. It is the Being pervading all the beings and remains unaffected thereby. It is the suprabeing beyond every being. It sets the boundaries of all sources and orders and yet it is rooted above every source and order. It is the measure of beings (*DN* 648C, Suchla 1990; translated by Luibheid and Rorem 1987, modified.

What Dionysius emphasizes here is the way in which the transcendent nature of divine infinity allows for God to impart the limits necessary for distinct created beings to come into existence. As that which is unlimited, God can provide the

limits that constitute individual forms and the order of arrangement between them. Note, though, the continued presence of Damascian language about how the divine is that which encompasses and surpasses the whole and its parts.

When the Areopagite treats divine infinity explicitly later in *De Divinis Nominibus*, he does so in terms of infinity as a characteristic of externally exercised power. In fact, he discusses infinity under the divine name of Power:

> Λέγωμεν τοίνυν, ὅτι δύναμις ἔστιν ὁ θεὸς ὡς πᾶσαν δύναμιν ἐν ἑαυτῷ προέχων καὶ ὑπερέχων καὶ ὡς πάσης δυνάμεως αἴτιος καὶ πάντα κατὰ δύναμιν ἄκλιτον καὶ ἀπεριόριστον παράγων καὶ ὡς αὐτοῦ τοῦ εἶναι δύναμιν ἢ τὴν ὅλην ἢ τὴν καθ' ἕκαστον αἴτιος ὢν καὶ ὡς ἀπειροδύναμος οὐ μόνον τῷ πᾶσαν δύναμιν παράγειν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῷ ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν καὶ τὴν αὐτοδύναμιν εἶναι καὶ τῷ ὑπερδύνασθαι καὶ ἀπειράκις ἀπείρους τῶν οὐσῶν δυνάμεων ἑτέρας παραγαγεῖν καὶ τῷ μὴ ἄν ποτε δυνηθῆναι τὰς ἀπείρους καὶ ἐπ' ἄπειρον παραγομένας δυνάμεις τὴν ὑπεράπειρον αὐτοῦ τῆς δυναμοποιοῦ δυνάμεως ἀμβλῦναι ποίησιν, . . .
>
> Thus we say that God is power insofar as all power is initially contained within his own self. He is power insofar as he exceeds all power. He is the cause of all power. He gives being to all things through his power that is total and unthwarted. He is the cause of power in its totality and in its specific form. His power is infinite because all power comes from him and because he transcends all power, even absolute power. He possesses a superabundance of power that endlessly produces an endless number of other powers. The created powers never blunt the super-unbounded work of his power-producing power (*DN* 889D–891D, Suchla 1990, translated by Luibheid and Rorem 1987, modified).

Following the pattern set by other divine names, such as goodness and being, God is called Power insofar as he is the cause of created powers. Yet the Areopagite stresses that God's power is infinite because both divine and creaturely powers come from God's transcendent self. Hence, the ~~infinitude of the essence~~ establishes and undergirds the infinitude of exercised divine power. The order proceeds from infinity as an internal essential characteristic to infinity as externally exercised activity. In so doing, Dionysius is following the Proclean model of infinity even as he discusses the aspect of divine infinity involving external manifestation.

By the end of Late Antiquity, then, infinity had been transformed into something very different from its model in Aristotelian physics. Instead of something that could not be actual and could only signify the pure potentiality of prime matter, infinity now named the divine First Principle. It could do so because of a bifurcation between God's intrinsic infinity, couched in terms of God's unknowable and unlimited essence, and God's extrinsic infinity, couched in terms of God's infinite power over creatures. The order in which these different aspects of infinity were considered began with the intrinsic aspect, from which the extrinsically active aspect of divine infinity was issued. Furthermore, the extrinsic aspect of divine infinity allowed Proclus and others to speak of comparative infinities,

whereby each level of the ontological hierarchy was relatively infinite in comparison to the levels beneath it. It was this notion of infinity that Aquinas would incorporate into his own account of divine infinity.

3 The Latin Theological Background

Before turning to Aquinas' own thought, however, it is necessary to survey briefly the Latin tradition, both Patristic and Scholastic, prior to Aquinas. Obviously a truly thorough survey is impossible. Thus, ~~I be useful to use~~ Peter Lombard's *Sentences* as an inflection point, since it both distils the preceding Latin tradition and is necessary background for Aquinas. On three occasions Lombard uses the term "infinite" to refer to God. None of these uses, however, names the divine essence itself. The term first occurs when Lombard discusses the omnipotence of God. Lombard argues that the triune God is truly omnipotent because he can accomplish both whatever he wishes and whatever he wishes to be able to do. To reject this position would be to curtail God's power, which is *infinite*.[14] So, Lombard clearly maintains that divine power is infinite. That is not the same thing, however, as affirming that the divine essence is infinite, since infinity can be predicated of power simply through extrinsic denomination. The divine power can be characterized as infinite but only with respect to its effects because God is powerful enough to cause an infinite variety of creatures.

The other major instance where Lombard uses the term infinite with reference to God is found in his discussion of divine simplicity. Responding to the question of why the divine nature is simple, Lombard reasons that God must be simple because his being excludes even the possibility of parts and accidents, to such an extent that there is nothing in God that is not totally identified with God's nature. Hence, citing Hilary of Poitiers he claims that God's nature does not possess infinity, but is its own infinity, though he does not elaborate here.[15] To ascertain what Lombard here means by infinity, it is naturally necessary to refer to

14 Peter Lombard, *Sent.* I, Pars II, Liber I, d. 42, c. 3, 297: *Quidam tamen de hoc sensu gloriantes, Dei potentiam coarctare sub mensura conati sunt. Cum enim dicunt: hucusque potest et non amplius, quid est hoc aliud, quam eius potentiam, quae infinita est, restringere et concludere ad mensuram? Aiunt enim: non potest Deus aliud facere quam facit, nec melius facere id quod facit, nec aliquid praetermittere de his quae facit*.

15 Peter Lombard, *Sent.* I.2, d. 8, c. 8, 101: *Idem [Hilarius] in VIII libro De Trinitate*: *Non humano modo ex compositis Deus est, ut in eo aliud sit quod ab eo habetur, et aliud sit ipse qui habeat, sed totum vita est, natura scilicet perfecta et infinita et non ex disparibus constituta, sed vivens ipsa per totum.*

the text from Hilary's *De Trinitate*, since Lombard himself gives no explanation of the term here. In the passage quoted, Hilary is narrating his search for God. Having become convinced that whatever else God is, he must be eternal, Hilary found both solace and confirmation in the words of Exodus 3:14. God's own self-definition, as he puts it, dovetailed with his own conviction about divine eternality. Then Hilary states that "for this meaning of infinity enough had been done by saying 'I AM who I AM'".[16] For Hilary and consequently for Peter Lombard, to be infinite seems to mean to be eternal. ~~Although eternality can name essential, intrinsic infinity,~~ Thomas will maintain that divine infinity refers not ~~on~~ly to divine duration but ~~also and indeed~~ more properly to the divine essence itself. Furthermore, that for Aquinas eternality and infinity are quite distinct terms, with quite distinct *rationes*, is clear from the fact that in the *Summa Theologiae* he will treat them in distinct questions, which do not follow each other in immediate succession.[17] I will pass over Lombard's last statement, that God possesses *infinita sapientia*, because it is made with no further elaboration whatsoever,[18] which renders conceptual archaeology relatively impossible.

It should be noted that Lombard's espousal, however underdeveloped, of divine infinity was not uncontested in Aquinas' day.[19] Notable opponents of divine infinity at Paris in the thirteenth century included William of Auvergne and Alexander of Hales. These figures argued against divine infinity for three reasons. First, in the minds of these opponents of divine infinity, quantity and infinity are necessarily linked. Only divine power can involve quantity, and then only virtual quantity. Hence, infinity cannot be truly ascribed to the divine essence. Second, perfection is conceivable only in terms of finitude and determination, since perfection involves completion, which infinity would seem to preclude. Hence, if God were called essentially infinite then God would seem to be essentially imperfect. Third, only something finite can be comprehensively known. Since, especially after a condemnation issued in 1241, it was maintained that the blessed in heaven directly and comprehensively see God, the divine essence must be finite. The first argument levelled against divine infinity deserves further comment. The rigorous linking of infinity with quantity indicates Aristotelian leanings on the part of these opponents. Hence, Aquinas' defence of divine infinity would require him to show that there could be qualitative and not merely quantitative aspects of infin-

16 Hilary of Poitiers, *Trin*. VIII.43, 341 (Hurter 1887): *Et ad hanc quidem infinitatis significationem satis fecisse sermo dicentis: Ego sum qui sum, videbatur*.

17 Divine infinity is treated in *ST* I.7 and eternality in I.10.

18 Peter Lombard, *Sent*. I.2, d. 34, c.3.

19 See Sweeney 1957, 233–245.

ity. To do this, he would have recourse to the Platonic texts and concepts available to him.

4 Aquinas' Account of Divine Infinity

Turning now to Aquinas' account of divine infinity, I will first outline the constructive account(s) that he offers before drawing out the Platonic sources of those accounts. Aquinas treats divine infinity several times throughout his works.[20] His earliest treatment of divine infinity comes in his *Commentary on Peter Lombard's Sentences*. There he derives two questions from Lombard's text. The first question asks whether God's power is infinite; the second asks whether the omnipotence of God can be communicated to creatures.[21] Neither question mentions the *essentia divina* but Aquinas' response to each turns on the infinity of the divine essence. For Aquinas, the infinity of divine power depends on whether or not the essence from which the power issues in activity is infinite. Thus, God's power is infinite because it stems from an essence that is infinite because it is "absolutely and in no way received in anything".[22] No creature's power can be truly infinite, however, because each creature's power follows upon an essence that is not infinite, since its *esse* is not self-subsistent but is received and limited by that same *essentia*.[23] The key to what makes something finite in its very nature is that which determines and confines its essence. Consequently, that which is infinite in its very nature is that which is without anything that determines or restricts its essence.

At this stage in the development of his thought, Aquinas' account of divine infinity seemingly equivocates between quantitative and qualitative notions of infinity. The former kind of infinity focuses on mathematical objects such as lines, which are deemed infinite if they have no endpoint. The latter kind of infinity is determined by the presence or absence of privations. Hence, according to this lat-

20 Excluding the commentarial works that will be discussed below, Aquinas' primary treatments of divine infinity include *Scriptum Super Libros Sententiarum Petri Lombardi*, I.I, d.43, q.1–2; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I.43; *Quaestiones Disputatae de Potentia Dei*, I.2–3; *Summa theologiae*, I.7, I.25.2; *Compendium Theologiae* I.18–20; *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*, III.1–3.

21 Thomas Aquinas, *Super Sent.* I.I, d.43, q.1–2 (Fretté and Maré 1873), 518–520.

22 Thomas Aquinas, *Super Sent.* I.I, d.43, q.1–2 (Fretté and Maré 1873), 518: *Absolutum et nullo modo receptum in aliquo*.

23 Thomas Aquinas, *Super Sent.* I.I, d.43, q.1–2 (Fretté and Maré 1873), *Unde impossibile est autem aliquam essentiam creatam esse infinitam, eo quod esse suum non est absolutum et subsistens sed receptum in aliquo*.

ter kind, generic essences, such as animal, are finite when determined by a specific difference, such as rational, but infinite when conceived of without that determination. Likewise, form becomes finite when received in matter, but infinite when abstracted from it. This last example reveals an important aspect of this account of infinity. On the one hand, something's finitude or infinitude depends on whether it possesses a determinant. On the other hand, that determination is twofold: it arises both from form, which determines something by perfecting it, and matter, which determines something by delimiting it. According to some interpreters, it is not clear how Thomas distinguishes between the quantitative and qualitative kinds of infinity, even if this attempted distinction does not obscure his description of the infinity of the divine essence itself.[24] Thomas can straightforwardly conclude that God's essence is infinite. One must negate whatever would restrict, determine, or limit the divine essence because such limitation could only happen if it were received by matter or form. It should be noted that Aquinas has yet to answer the question that he posed in response to Lombard's text: is God's power infinite? He answers that question very briefly: *Et ex hoc quod essentia est infinita, sequitur quod potentia eius infinita sit*.[25] Therefore, his account of divine infinity is one that moves from the infinity of the divine essence to the infinity of divine power, not the other direction.

Aquinas reuses an expanded form of this argument in the *Summa Theologiae*. The argument stems from a consideration of matter and form. In good Aristotelian fashion, matter is reckoned as merely potentially infinite, being *in potentia ad multas formas, sed cum recipit unam, terminatur per illam*.[26] When matter is reduced to finitude, however, as was indicated above, it is perfected because it has become actual. Aquinas then supplements this analysis with an analysis of form. According to this analysis, when form is determined to a particular thing, it loses perfection insofar as it is contracted to matter, whereas it has the nature of something infinite insofar as it exists without matter. Thomas then moves to the crux of his demonstration:

> *Illud autem quod est maxime formale omnium, est ipsum esse, ut ex superioribus patet. Cum igitur esse divinum non sit esse receptum in aliquo, sed ipse sit suum esse subsistens, ut supra ostensum est; manifestum est quod ipse Deus sit infinitus et perfectus.*
>
> The Being that is the most formal of all is itself esse, should be clear from the preceding remarks. Therefore, since the divine esse does not receive being in any way, but is its own

24 Sweeney 1974, 71–91.

25 Thomas Aquinas, *Super Sent.* I.I, d.43, q.1–2 (Fretté and Maré 1873), 518.

26 Thomas Aquinas, *ST* I.7.1.

> subsisting esse, as was shown above, it is clear that God himself is infinite and perfect (*ST* I.7.1).

The argument can be reformulated in the following way. The formal is infinite. God is maximally formal. Therefore, God is infinite.

Aquinas' argument here has left several commentators unconvinced.[27] In seemingly the entire tradition of philosophical reflection sketched above, form was understood as Limit, not Unlimit. Therefore, Form could be said to "contract and determine" matter but the latter could not do the same to Form. It is important, though, to understand where Aquinas thought he had proved that God is indeed maximally formal. He seems to be relying on *ST* I.3.a2, where he argues that God cannot be composed of matter and form because, on the one hand, matter is sheer potentiality, so that God, as *actus purus*, can contain no matter, and on the other hand since everything composed of matter and form owes its perfection and goodness to its form, God is the goodness itself, every agent acts by its form, and so the manner in which it has its form is the manner in which it is an agent. Therefore, whatever is primarily and essentially an agent must be primarily and essentially form. Since God is the first agent, he is therefore of his essence form (*per essentiam suam forma*) and not composed of matter and form. For some, this line of argument is seemingly a non sequitur.[28] Even if one accepts Aquinas' account of form as the perfection of, and the agent in, any corporeal substance, it still does not follow that God, as goodness itself, and the first agent, must be "form" since, as in Plotinus, the perfect good and first agent could be beyond form. Moreover, Thomas elsewhere seems explicitly to reject the notion that there is a formal or essential element in God.

Undaunted by what seems to bedevil his critics, Aquinas intensifies the conclusion of article one in article two of I.7. In article two, he argues in favour of the uniqueness of God's essential infinity. The argument could be reformulated in the following way.[29] To be infinite *simpliciter* requires that something be its own

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27 Burns 1998a, 123–139.

28 Burns 1998a, 127.

29 *ST* I.7.2: *Respondeo dicendum quod aliquid praeter Deum potest esse infinitum secundum quid, sed non simpliciter. Si enim loquamur de infinito secundum quod competit materiae, manifestum est quod omne existens in actu, habet aliquam formam, et sic materia eius est terminata per formam. Sed quia materia, secundum quod est sub una forma substantiali, remanet in potentia ad multas formas accidentales; quod est finitum simpliciter, potest esse infinitum secundum quid, utpote lignum est finitum secundum suam formam, sed tamen est infinitum secundum quid, inquantum est in potentia ad figuras infinitas. Si autem loquamur de infinito secundum quod convenit formae, sic manifestum est quod illa quorum formae sunt in materia, sunt simpliciter finita, et nullo modo infinita. Si autem sint aliquae formae creatae non receptae in materia, sed per se sub-*

being and not receive its being. No creature is its own being; they all receive their being from another. Only God is his own being. Therefore, only God is infinite *simpliciter*. Although his stated goal in article two is to demonstrate the uniqueness of divine infinity, Aquinas devotes much of the *Respondeo* to explaining how creatures can nevertheless be relatively infinite. Matter can be relatively infinite even when it is determined to some substantial form because it still has the potential to contract many accidental forms. It is relatively infinite with respect to those accidental forms. Forms can be relatively infinite inasmuch as they are not contracted to matter. They can be uncontracted either because they are angels or because they are abstracted forms. In each case they will be relatively infinite to those existing at a lower ontological level. Once again, this position has confounded some interpreters. One critic of the position went so far as to say that Aquinas "is coming perilously near to arguing that white is black".[30] The problem is that he had just previously been arguing for the infinity of forms, only now to develop an argument relying in part on their finitude (i.e., when they are contracted to matter). How can a form be both absolutely finite and relatively infinite?

5 Aquinas' Platonic Sources

To answer this question let us turn to the sources for Aquinas' argument in these two articles. Both Leo Sweeney and Robert Burns, who have offered the most thorough and most recent treatments of Aquinas' account of divine infinity, identify John Damascene as the crucial background source for Aquinas' argument here.[31] There is some textual evidence to support this claim, namely, the fact that Aquinas cites Damascene's *De Fide Orthodoxa* in both the *Solutio* for I.I.43.1 of his *Commentary* on Lombard's *Sentences* and in the *Sed Contra* of *Summa Theologiae* I.7.1. As I have shown, the argument in both instances turns on the fact that God's being is in no way received. Yet even Sweeney acknowledges that Damascene nowhere offers an argument for divine infinity in terms of God not being received in anything and comparative infinities. Rather, his reflections on infinity are "el-

sistentes, ut quidam de Angelis opinantur, erunt quidem infinitae secundum quid, inquantum huiusmodi formae non terminantur neque contrahuntur per aliquam materiam, sed quia forma creata sic subsistens habet esse, et non est suum esse, necesse est quod ipsum eius esse sit receptum et contractum ad determinatam naturam. Unde non potest esse infinitum simpliciter.

30 Burns 1998a, 128.

31 Sweeney 1961, 76–106, and Burns 1998b, 65–67.

liptical and rather diffuse".[32] Therefore, it seems ultimately untenable to ascribe the source of Thomas' thought here to the writings of Damascene, despite the aforementioned citations.

If we step back and collect the different parts of Aquinas' account of divine infinity, then where one should look for the sources of his account might become apparent. First, it is clear that Aquinas has abandoned the Aristotelian model of quantitative infinity. The infinity of the divine essence is not simply interminable succession, but rather the lack of metaphysical limits or determinants. His account of the infinity of the divine essence also moves from the infinity internal to the divine essence to the infinity of externally exercised divine power. Furthermore, even though he establishes the singular nature of divine infinity, Aquinas takes pain to emphasize that this does not preclude a chain of comparative creaturely infinities. This account of divine infinity strikingly mirrors the late ancient Platonist account of infinity generally and divine infinity in particular that was described above. The major sources for this account in its most developed form were Proclus, Damascius, and the *Corpus Dionysiacum*. Although no text of Damascius was known in the Latin West during Aquinas' lifetime, Proclus' thought was known via the *Liber de Causis* and eventually William of Moerbeke's translation of the *Elements of Theology*, while the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, both in Eriugena and Sarrazin's translations, formed the centrepiece of Aquinas' early education under Albertus Magnus. The question then becomes whether these works and their discussions of infinity could be the sources of Aquinas' account of divine infinity.

There are three salient propositions in the *Liber de Causis* that discuss infinity in general and divine infinity in particular: Propositions 4, 16, and 17. Proposition 4, which asserts that the first created thing is being, deals with infinity only in passing. In the author's own argument for the proposition, he maintains that multiplicity enters being because it is only relatively simple, yet composed of the infinite and the finite. Propositions 16 and 17, however, deal more exclusively with infinity.[33] The first of these propositions presumes the existence of grades of comparative infinities, contending that all such unlimited powers are nonetheless dependent on the first infinite. This Proposition is derived from Propositions 92 and 93 of Proclus' *Elements*, which respectively delineated that the whole series of infinite potencies is dependent on a first infinite that mediates between the

32 Sweeney 1961, 80 and 99.

33 See Thomas Aquinas, *Super de causis*, Prop. 16 and 17, respectively (Saffrey 2002): *Omnes virtutes quibus non est finis, pendentes sunt per infinitum primum quod est virtus virtutum, non quia sunt acquisitae, fixae, stantes in rebus, immo sunt virtus rebus habentibus fixionem* and *Omnis virtus unita plus est infinita quam virtus multiplicata.*

One and the series of beings below it but that each comparative infinity is not infinite either with respect to itself or to those higher than it in the ontological hierarchy. In a departure from the Proclean source material, the author identifies this first infinite with God rather than an intermediary between the One and Being. Proposition 17 glosses the comparative infinities whose existence was only assumed in Proposition 16, stating that power participating more in unity is more infinite than a power participating more in multiplicity.

From these three propositions Aquinas distils a series of reflections on infinity that form a coherent whole. Commenting on the role of the infinite and finite in generating multiplicity in created being in Proposition 4, Aquinas correctly identifies Proposition 89 from Proclus' *Elements* as lying behind this particular part of the *Liber*.[34] Here he employs Proposition 89 specifically to reject a quantitative, Aristotelian understanding of infinity. Sempiternal being is infinite not according to its multitude or magnitude, but according to the power of its essence. That which has infinite power but participates in nothing else must be God. Yet this distinction does not preclude those that receive their being via participation from having relatively infinite power. Insofar as it participates in being it is finite, but insofar as its power of being, i.e., ability to perdure in being, is without limit it is infinite. This way of framing the nature of infinity might raise the same worries seen above in response to *ST* I.7.2, yet Aquinas explicitly notes that the issue will receive greater elaboration in Proposition 16.

In his commentary on Proposition 16, Aquinas interprets the whole series of propositions running from 16 to 24 as explaining how inferiors depend on superiors, which requires first explicating how lower infinities depend on the first infinity. The sempiternal beings discussed in Proposition 4 are the most obvious exam-

34 See Thomas Aquinas, *Super de causis*, 4.8–30: *Quam quidem compositionem etiam Proclus ponit LXXXIX propositione, dicens: Omne enter ens ex fine est et infinito. Quod quidem secundum ipsum sic exponitur: Omne enim immobiliter ens infinitum est secundum potentiam essendi; si enim quod ptest magis durare in esse est maioris potentiae, quod potest in infinitum durare in esse est, quantum ad hoc, infinitae potentiae. Unde ipse praemisit in LXXXVI propositione: Omne enter ens infinitum est, non secudnum multitudinem, neque secundum magnitudinem, sed secundum potentiam solam, scilicet existendi, ut ipse exponit. Si autem aliquid sic haberet infinitam virtutem essendi quod non participaret esse ab alio, tunc esset solum infinitum; et tale est Deus, ut dicitur infra in 16 propositione. Sed, si sit aliquid quod habeat infinitam virtutem ad essendum secundum esse participatum ab alio, secundum hoc quod esse participat est finitum, quia quod participatur non recipitur in participante secundum totam suam infinitatem sed particulariter. In tantum igitur intelligentia est composita in suo esse ex finito et infinito, in quantum natura intelligentiae infinita dicitur secundum potentiam essendi; et ipsum esse quod recipit, est finitum. Et ex hoc sequitur quod esse intelligentiae multiplicari possit in quantum est esse participatum: hoc enim significat composito ex finito et infinito.*

ples of such lower infinities. Here Aquinas endorses the Platonic position that whatever is found in many things must be reduced to a single principle, from which they receive their character through participation. This position holds true for the levels of comparative infinity as well. Thus, those beings that are infinite are reduced to that which is essentially infinite, or infinity itself. Departing from Proclus while still adhering to the *Liber de Causis*, Aquinas maintains that the essentially infinite is not an infinity that yet participates in unity and goodness but rather the First Principle itself. General created being, however, is infinite with respect to those beings lower than it on the ontological hierarchy because it is not circumscribed by them. Aquinas acknowledges that the same may be rightly said of each level of the ontological hierarchy, thereby endorsing the notion of comparative infinities. Moreover, he explicitly roots this position in the argumentation offered in support of Proposition 93 of Proclus' *Elements*. Aquinas interprets Proclus as classifying beings as infinite or not depending on the extent to which they are circumscribed or limited. It is from this account of infinity as that which lacks ontological limit or determination that Aquinas develops an interpretation of what it means for every being to be composed of the infinite and finite. He finds support for this account in Proposition 17. Those comparatively greater infinities higher on the ontological hierarchy participate more in the infinite, whereas those lower on the ontological hierarchy participate more in finitude. To the degree that something is closer to the First Principle, to that same degree it participates in the infinity of the First Principle. This position further entails a point that is made explicitly in Proposition 17: the more comparatively infinite something is, the simpler and more unified it must be. In his comments on Proposition 18, which he recognizes is drawn from Proposition 102 of Proclus' *Elements*, a proposition that also discusses the role that infinity plays in forming beings, Thomas relates the foregoing reflections on infinity to the giving of form. Specifically, the closer something is to the First Principle, the more that its form will be free of material delimitation.

Aquinas comments on infinity in the *Liber de Causis* parallel his remarks on infinity in his commentary on the *De Divinis Nominibus*, which was written roughly around the same time as the *Prima Pars* of the *Summa Theologiae*.[35] Re-

35 Torrell 2013, 24. The *Prima Pars* was written sometime between 1265 and 1268 and the commentary on the *De Divinis Nominibus* was written, according to Torrell, in 1266. Earlier theories regarding the dating of Aquinas' works maintained that his commentary on the *Liber de Causis* was composed around the same time as the Prima Pars of the *Summa Theologiae*. See "Introduction" in *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 1920). Either way, it seems that Thomas composed his latest synthetic account of divine infinity while commenting on a deeply Platonic work.

call that in that work the Areopagite had equated divine infinity with divine unknowability. More specifically, that which is ἡ ὑπερούσιος ἀπειρία is beyond all knowledge. Working within the framework of the condemnation of 1241, which required that he teach that the blessed behold the divine essence in the eschaton, Aquinas still interpreted this passage in terms that connected divine infinity with divine unknowability. He simply glossed unknowability as referring to the inability for humans to have comprehensive knowledge of God's essence. Indeed, he seems to read this passage as referring to the grades of comparative infinity outlined in the Proclus and the *Liber de Causis*:

> *Superior gradus entium comprehendi non potest per inferior, sicut intelligibilia comprehendi non possunt perfecte per sensibilia, nec simplicia per composita, nec incorporea per corporalia; sed Deus est super omnem ordinem existentium; ergo per nihil existentium comprehendi potest.*
>
> Superior grades of beings cannot be encompassed by inferiors, just as intelligibles cannot be perfectly comprehended through sensibles, nor simples through composites, nor incorporeals through corporeals; but God is above every order of existents. Therefore, he can be comprehended through no existent (*In div. nom.* I, Lectio 1.23.3–8, Pera 1950).

This connection between divine infinity, comparative infinities, and incomprehensibility becomes even stronger when Thomas treats Dionysius' explicit remarks on the infinity of divine power later in the work. The Areopagite argues that the infinity of divine power is evidenced insofar as God creates power itself and could create an infinite number of infinitely powerful creatures. Thomas understands these remarks as revealing something about God's internally infinite essence, not merely the external exercise of divine power.[36] There are three crucial points of emphasis from this brief treatment of divine infinity. First, God's infinity is yet again not one of magnitude but rather the lack of limitation or

36 Thomas Aquinas, *In div. nom.* VIII, Lectio 1.750.1–13: *Est autem considerandum quod infinitum in Deo non dicitur per extensionem sicut in quantitate continua, sed per negationem quia scilicet non finitur aut determinatur aliquo. Sic ergo virtus Dei quintupliciter dicitur infinita: primo quidem quia non determinatur ad aliquem effectum, sed omnem virtutem producit; secundo, non solum propter hoc, sed eo quod non terminatur per commensurationem alicuius virtutis, sed est super omnem virtutem particularem et ulterius super omnem ipsam per se virtutem, quia hoc ipsum quod nomine communi virtutis intelligitur, est minus divina virtute; tertio, quia non terminatur per ea quae sunt, sed potest infinitis modis et infinitas alias virtutes producere, praeter eas quae sunt; quarto, quia si infinitis modis etiam infinitas virtutes produceret praeter eas quae sunt, non propter hoc hebetaretur aut debilitaretur eius actio superinfinita, quae est factiva omnis virtutis; et sic etiam patet quod nec sua actione finitur, secundum quod actio ad effectus terminatur; quinto, dicitur infinita eo quod non terminatur intellectu est enim ineffabilis et ignota et quae cogitari non potest, divina virtus cuncta excedens.*

boundedness that would result from the reception of existence. Second, the infinity of the divine essence is evidenced by the fact that it transcends comparison. Third, despite the second point, Aquinas nonetheless affirms God's power to create such infinities. Additionally, this account harmonizes with the account that Aquinas distils from Proclus and the *Liber de Causis*.

What should also be clear by now is that the account of divine infinity present in these commentaries on Platonic works also harmonizes with, and provides necessary explanatory background for, the account of divine infinity developed in the commentary on Lombard's *Sentences* and the *Summa Theologiae*. These works supply a qualitative account of infinity rooted in an understanding of infinity as uncircumscribed existence, which is approached through comparatively ever greater created infinities. Moreover, read against this Neoplatonic background, it supplies an answer to the worry over how creaturely forms can be both absolutely finite and relatively infinite. Understood with reference to God, that which is truly infinite, such forms are finite in the absolute sense. Understood within the ontological hierarchy of creation, however, such forms can be comparatively infinite inasmuch as they are less circumscribed than those beings lower than them on the hierarchy. The more that some being partakes in multiplicity, the less infinite it is, since it is increasingly circumscribed by higher forms. Hence, the more purely formal something is, the less circumscribed, and more infinite, it is. Therefore, God is essentially infinite because he is purely formal, since that which would be utterly formal would not be circumscribed in any way. One comes to grasp this fact through an understanding of how Proclean comparative infinities function.

If, however, these Platonic concepts enliven Aquinas' account of divine infinity, then why does he not cite them in his synthetic treatments of the topic. The answer is that he does just that. In fact, he cites these works in his earliest treatment of the subject, in his commentary on Lombard's *Sentences*. In the *Solutio* to the first article of I.43.1, Aquinas first chides those who can only conceive of infinity in quantitative terms.[37] He then introduces his distinction between negation as privation and negation as the denial of limits, which grounds the infinity of every form insofar as it exists apart from fewer receivers. Building upon this point, that which exists without being received in anything, namely, God, would be truly infinite, from the infinity of its essence it would be infinitely powerful.

37 Thomas Aquinas, *In div, nom.* I.43.1.1 (Pera 1950): *Quidam enim, accipientes finitum et infinitum solum secundum quod sunt passiones quantitatis, non poterant in Deo invenire infinitatem, nisi secundum quod inveniebant in eo rationem quantitatis virtualis; unde dicebant Deum esse infinitum, quia virtus eius est infinita. Ideo accidit quod quidam negaverunt essentiam Dei esse infinitam in ratione essentiae consideratam, et sic a sanctis eam videri asserebant. Sed istud erroneum est.*

Aquinas then cites Proposition 16 of the *Liber de Causis* as explicitly providing the argument for this position:

> *Et ex hoc quod essentia est infinita, sequitur quod potentia eius infinita sit; et hoc expresse dicitur in lib. De Causis, propos. 16, quod ens primum habet virtutem simpliciter infinitam, quia ipsummet est sua virtus.*
>
> And from this fact that the essence is infinite, it follows that his power is also infinite; and this is said explicitly in Proposition 16 of the *Liber de Causis*, that the first being has infinite power simpliciter, because he himself is his own power (*In div. nom.* I.43.1.1, Pera 1950).

Thus, Aquinas was explicitly drawing on a source that he would later recognize as Platonic. The fact that he did not cite the *Liber de Causis* when outlining this argument in *ST* I.7 might simply indicate that by that point in his intellectual development, he had so thoroughly internalized this Platonic principle that he did not even think to cite a source.

This is not to say that the source had receded completely from his mind. Not only did he feel the need to defend the principle when commenting on the *Liber de Causis*, but he also used the notion of comparative infinities to explain another distinctive doctrine of his. Specifically, he invoked Proposition 16 to articulate the notion that angels are self-subsisting forms with no admixture of matter. There is nothing against such creatures being considered "relatively infinite" because such forms are not delimited by matter.[38] In contrast, God is said to be infinite *simpliciter* because the self-subsistent forms of angels, which should be well-nigh perfectly infinite, insofar as they are purely formal, are finite in relation to God as the bestower of the existence which they receive. Therefore, it is God who is more truly formal than angels. The wider significance of Aquinas' dependence on Platonic notions of infinity here comes into view.

38 Thomas Aquinas, *ST* I.50.1.a4: *Ad quartum dicendum quod omnis creatura est finita simpliciter, inquantum esse eius non est absolutum subsistens, sed limitatur ad naturam aliquam cui advenit. Sed nihil prohibet aliquam creaturam esse secundum quid infinitam. Creaturae autem materiales habent infinitatem ex parte materiae, sed finitatem ex parte formae, quae limitatur per materiam in qua recipitur. Substantiae autem immateriales creatae sunt finitae secundum suum esse, sed infinitae secundum quod eorum formae non sunt receptae in alio. Sicut si diceremus albedinem separatam existentem esse infinitam quantum ad rationem albedinis, quia non contrahitur ad aliquod subiectum; esse tamen eius esset finitum, quia determinatur ad aliquam naturam specialem. Et propter hoc dicitur in libro de causis, quod intelligentia est finita superius, inquantum scilicet recipit esse a suo superiori; sed est infinita inferius, inquantum non recipitur in aliqua materia.*

6 Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, Aquinas' account of divine infinity exemplifies two distinct ways in which he received Platonic thought into his own system. First, it is a clear case in which both Platonic texts and Platonic concepts were received by Aquinas and incorporated into his thought. In articulating divine infinity, he has clearly opted for the Platonic account over and against a strict Aristotelian account. Second, and perhaps more interestingly, his account of divine infinity is one instance where he did not follow the method uncovered by Henle, in which the Platonic *positio* was endorsed yet transformed by means of the *ratio* used to argue for it. Rather, he argued for the *positio* of an infinite divine essence by means of the Proclean *ratio* of comparative infinities. Hence, Thomas' relationship to the Platonic tradition was far more diverse and favourable than is sometimes presented.

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