

FIRST PART, QUESTION 7

The Infinity of God (In Four Articles)

After considering the divine perfection we must consider the divine infinity, and God's existence in things: for God is everywhere, and in all things, inasmuch as He is boundless and infinite.

Concerning the first, there are four points of inquiry:

- (1) Whether God is infinite?
- (2) Whether anything besides Him is infinite in essence?
- (3) Whether anything can be infinitude in magnitude?
- (4) Whether an infinite multitude can exist?

Whether God is infinite?

Ia q. 7 a. 1

Objection 1. It seems that God is not infinite. For everything infinite is imperfect, as the Philosopher says; because it has parts and matter, as is said in Phys. iii. But God is most perfect; therefore He is not infinite.

Objection 2. Further, according to the Philosopher (Phys. i), finite and infinite belong to quantity. But there is no quantity in God, for He is not a body, as was shown above (q. 3, a. 1). Therefore it does not belong to Him to be infinite.

Objection 3. Further, what is here in such a way as not to be elsewhere, is finite according to place. Therefore that which is a thing in such a way as not to be another thing, is finite according to substance. But God is this, and not another; for He is not a stone or wood. Therefore God is not infinite in substance.

On the contrary, Damascene says (De Fide Orth. i, 4) that "God is infinite and eternal, and boundless."

I answer that, All the ancient philosophers attribute infinitude to the first principle, as is said (Phys. iii), and with reason; for they considered that things flow forth infinitely from the first principle. But because some erred concerning the nature of the first principle, as a consequence they erred also concerning its infinity; forasmuch as they asserted that matter was the first principle; consequently they attributed to the first principle a material infinity to the effect that some infinite body was the first principle of things.

We must consider therefore that a thing is called infinite because it is not finite. Now matter is in a way made finite by form, and the form by matter. Matter indeed is made finite by form, inasmuch as matter, before it receives its form, is in potentiality to many forms;

but on receiving a form, it is terminated by that one. Again, form is made finite by matter, inasmuch as form, considered in itself, is common to many; but when received in matter, the form is determined to this one particular thing. Now matter is perfected by the form by which it is made finite; therefore infinite as attributed to matter, has the nature of something imperfect; for it is as it were formless matter. On the other hand, form is not made perfect by matter, but rather is contracted by matter; and hence the infinite, regarded on the part of the form not determined by matter, has the nature of something perfect. Now being is the most formal of all things, as appears from what is shown above (q. 4, a. 1, obj. 3). Since therefore the divine being is not a being received in anything, but He is His own subsistent being as was shown above (q. 3, a. 4), it is clear that God Himself is infinite and perfect.

From this appears the Reply to the First Objection.

Reply to Objection 2. Quantity is terminated by its form, which can be seen in the fact that a figure which consists in quantity terminated, is a kind of quantitative form. Hence the infinite of quantity is the infinite of matter; such a kind of infinite cannot be attributed to God; as was said above, in this article.

Reply to Objection 3. The fact that the being of God is self-subsisting, not received in any other, and is thus called infinite, shows Him to be distinguished from all other beings, and all others to be apart from Him. Even so, were there such a thing as a self-subsisting whiteness, the very fact that it did not exist in anything else, would make it distinct from every other whiteness existing in a subject.

Whether anything but God can be essentially infinite?

Ia q. 7 a. 2

Objection 1. It seems that something else besides God can be essentially infinite. For the power of anything is proportioned to its essence. Now if the essence of God is infinite, His power must also be infinite. Therefore He can produce an infinite effect, since the extent of a power is known by its effect.

Objection 2. Further, whatever has infinite power, has an infinite essence. Now the created intellect has an infinite power; for it apprehends the universal, which can extend itself to an infinitude of singular things. Therefore every created intellectual substance is infinite.

Objection 3. Further, primary matter is something other than God, as was shown above (q. 3, a. 8). But primary matter is infinite. Therefore something besides God can be infinite.

On the contrary, The infinite cannot have a beginning, as said in Phys. iii. But everything outside God is from God as from its first principle. Therefore besides God nothing can be infinite.

I answer that, Things other than God can be relatively infinite, but not absolutely infinite. For with regard to infinite as applied to matter, it is manifest that everything actually existing possesses a form; and thus its matter is determined by form. But because matter, considered as existing under some substantial form, remains in potentiality to many accidental forms, which is absolutely finite can be relatively infinite; as, for example, wood is finite according to its own form, but still it is relatively infinite, inasmuch as it is in potentiality to an infinite number of shapes. But if we speak of the infinite in reference to form, it is manifest that those things, the forms of which are in matter, are absolutely finite, and in no way infinite. If, however, any created forms are not received into matter, but are self-subsisting, as some think is the case with angels, these will be relatively infinite, inasmuch as such kinds of forms are not terminated, nor contracted by any matter. But because

a created form thus subsisting has being, and yet is not its own being, it follows that its being is received and contracted to a determinate nature. Hence it cannot be absolutely infinite.

Reply to Objection 1. It is against the nature of a made thing for its essence to be its existence; because subsisting being is not a created being; hence it is against the nature of a made thing to be absolutely infinite. Therefore, as God, although He has infinite power, cannot make a thing to be not made (for this would imply that two contradictories are true at the same time), so likewise He cannot make anything to be absolutely infinite.

Reply to Objection 2. The fact that the power of the intellect extends itself in a way to infinite things, is because the intellect is a form not in matter, but either wholly separated from matter, as is the angelic substance, or at least an intellectual power, which is not the act of any organ, in the intellectual soul joined to a body.

Reply to Objection 3. Primary matter does not exist by itself in nature, since it is not actually being, but potentially only; hence it is something concreated rather than created. Nevertheless, primary matter even as a potentiality is not absolutely infinite, but relatively, because its potentiality extends only to natural forms.

Whether an actually infinite magnitude can exist?

Ia q. 7 a. 3

Objection 1. It seems that there can be something actually infinite in magnitude. For in mathematics there is no error, since “there is no lie in things abstract,” as the Philosopher says (Phys. ii). But mathematics uses the infinite in magnitude; thus, the geometrician in his demonstrations says, “Let this line be infinite.” Therefore it is not impossible for a thing to be infinite in magnitude.

Objection 2. Further, what is not against the nature of anything, can agree with it. Now to be infinite is not against the nature of magnitude; but rather both the finite and the infinite seem to be properties of quantity. Therefore it is not impossible for some magnitude to be infinite.

Objection 3. Further, magnitude is infinitely divisible, for the continuous is defined that which is infinitely divisible, as is clear from Phys. iii. But contraries are concerned about one and the same thing. Since therefore addition is opposed to division, and increase opposed to diminution, it appears that magnitude can be increased to infinity. Therefore it is possible for magnitude to be infinite.

Objection 4. Further, movement and time have quantity and continuity derived from the magnitude over which movement passes, as is said in Phys. iv. But it is not against the nature of time and movement to be infinite, since every determinate indivisible in time and circular movement is both a beginning and an end.

Therefore neither is it against the nature of magnitude to be infinite.

On the contrary, Every body has a surface. But every body which has a surface is finite; because surface is the term of a finite body. Therefore all bodies are finite. The same applies both to surface and to a line. Therefore nothing is infinite in magnitude.

I answer that, It is one thing to be infinite in essence, and another to be infinite in magnitude. For granted that a body exists infinite in magnitude, as fire or air, yet this could not be infinite in essence, because its essence would be terminated in a species by its form, and confined to individuality by matter. And so assuming from these premises that no creature is infinite in essence, it still remains to inquire whether any creature can be infinite in magnitude.

We must therefore observe that a body, which is a complete magnitude, can be considered in two ways; mathematically, in respect to its quantity only; and naturally, as regards its matter and form.

Now it is manifest that a natural body cannot be actually infinite. For every natural body has some determined substantial form. Since therefore the accidents follow upon the substantial form, it is necessary that determinate accidents should follow upon a determinate form; and among these accidents is quantity. So every natural body has a greater or smaller determinate quantity. Hence it is impossible for a natural body to be infi-

nite. The same appears from movement; because every natural body has some natural movement; whereas an infinite body could not have any natural movement; neither direct, because nothing moves naturally by a direct movement unless it is out of its place; and this could not happen to an infinite body, for it would occupy every place, and thus every place would be indifferently its own place. Neither could it move circularly; forasmuch as circular motion requires that one part of the body is necessarily transferred to a place occupied by another part, and this could not happen as regards an infinite circular body: for if two lines be drawn from the centre, the farther they extend from the centre, the farther they are from each other; therefore, if a body were infinite, the lines would be infinitely distant from each other; and thus one could never occupy the place belonging to any other.

The same applies to a mathematical body. For if we imagine a mathematical body actually existing, we must imagine it under some form, because nothing is actual except by its form; hence, since the form of quantity as such is figure, such a body must have some figure, and so would be finite; for figure is confined by a term or boundary.

Reply to Objection 1. A geometrician does not

need to assume a line actually infinite, but takes some actually finite line, from which he subtracts whatever he finds necessary; which line he calls infinite.

Reply to Objection 2. Although the infinite is not against the nature of magnitude in general, still it is against the nature of any species of it; thus, for instance, it is against the nature of a bicubical or tricubical magnitude, whether circular or triangular, and so on. Now what is not possible in any species cannot exist in the genus; hence there cannot be any infinite magnitude, since no species of magnitude is infinite.

Reply to Objection 3. The infinite in quantity, as was shown above, belongs to matter. Now by division of the whole we approach to matter, forasmuch as parts have the aspect of matter; but by addition we approach to the whole which has the aspect of a form. Therefore the infinite is not in the addition of magnitude, but only in division.

Reply to Objection 4. Movement and time are whole, not actually but successively; hence they have potentiality mixed with actuality. But magnitude is an actual whole; therefore the infinite in quantity refers to matter, and does not agree with the totality of magnitude; yet it agrees with the totality of time and movement: for it is proper to matter to be in potentiality.

Whether an infinite multitude can exist?

Ia q. 7 a. 4

Objection 1. It seems that an actually infinite multitude is possible. For it is not impossible for a potentiality to be made actual. But number can be multiplied to infinity. Therefore it is possible for an infinite multitude actually to exist.

Objection 2. Further, it is possible for any individual of any species to be made actual. But the species of figures are infinite. Therefore an infinite number of actual figures is possible.

Objection 3. Further, things not opposed to each other do not obstruct each other. But supposing a multitude of things to exist, there can still be many others not opposed to them. Therefore it is not impossible for others also to coexist with them, and so on to infinity; therefore an actual infinite number of things is possible.

On the contrary, It is written, "Thou hast ordered all things in measure, and number, and weight" (Wis. 11:21).

I answer that, A twofold opinion exists on this subject. Some, as Avicenna and Algazel, said that it was impossible for an actually infinite multitude to exist absolutely; but that an accidentally infinite multitude was not impossible. A multitude is said to be infinite absolutely, when an infinite multitude is necessary that something may exist. Now this is impossible; because it would entail something dependent on an infinity for its existence; and hence its generation could never come to be, because it is impossible to pass through an infinite medium.

A multitude is said to be accidentally infinite when its existence as such is not necessary, but accidental. This can be shown, for example, in the work of a carpenter requiring a certain absolute multitude; namely, art in the soul, the movement of the hand, and a hammer; and supposing that such things were infinitely multiplied, the carpentering work would never be finished, forasmuch as it would depend on an infinite number of causes. But the multitude of hammers, inasmuch as one may be broken and another used, is an accidental multitude; for it happens by accident that many hammers are used, and it matters little whether one or two, or many are used, or an infinite number, if the work is carried on for an infinite time. In this way they said that there can be an accidentally infinite multitude.

This, however, is impossible; since every kind of multitude must belong to a species of multitude. Now the species of multitude are to be reckoned by the species of numbers. But no species of number is infinite; for every number is multitude measured by one. Hence it is impossible for there to be an actually infinite multitude, either absolute or accidental. Likewise multitude in nature is created; and everything created is comprehended under some clear intention of the Creator; for no agent acts aimlessly. Hence everything created must be comprehended in a certain number. Therefore it is impossible for an actually infinite multitude to exist, even accidentally. But a potentially infinite multitude is possible; because the increase of multitude fol-

lows upon the division of magnitude; since the more a thing is divided, the greater number of things result. Hence, as the infinite is to be found potentially in the division of the continuous, because we thus approach matter, as was shown in the preceding article, by the same rule, the infinite can be also found potentially in the addition of multitude.

Reply to Objection 1. Every potentiality is made actual according to its mode of being; for instance, a day is reduced to act successively, and not all at once. Likewise the infinite in multitude is reduced to act successively, and not all at once; because every multitude

can be succeeded by another multitude to infinity.

Reply to Objection 2. Species of figures are infinite by infinitude of number. Now there are various species of figures, such as trilateral, quadrilateral and so on; and as an infinitely numerable multitude is not all at once reduced to act, so neither is the multitude of figures.

Reply to Objection 3. Although the supposition of some things does not preclude the supposition of others, still the supposition of an infinite number is opposed to any single species of multitude. Hence it is not possible for an actually infinite multitude to exist.