BONAVENTURE'S THREE-FOLD WAY TO GOD

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  Though he became Minister General of the Franciscan Order in 1257, Bonaventure's heart never left the University of Paris, and during his generalate he delivered three sets of "collations" or university sermons at Paris. On 10 December 1270 ltienne Tempier, bishop of Paris, had condemned certain erroneous propositions. Bonaventure ruminated over these matters, and in the Spring of 1273 delivered his magisterial *Collations on the Hexameron*.[1] Left

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[1] For Bonaventure's dates see J.G. Bougerol, *Introduction a l'étude de saint Bonaventure* 2nd ed. (Paris: Vrin, 1988); J. Quinn, "Bonaventure" *Dict. of the M.A.* 2: 313-9. On the circumstances of the *Collations*, one friar noted: "But oh, no, no, no! Since the reverend Lord and Master who gave out this work has been elevated to a sublime position, and is leaving his way of life [as a friar], those attending his sermons have not received what was to follow [the missing last three collations]. . . . This work was read and composed at Paris, in the year of our Lord 1273, from Easter to Pentecost, there being present Masters and Bachelors of Theology and other brothers, in the number of 160." Bonaventure, *Opera Omnia* (ed. Quaracchi) 5: 450 n. 10; *Coll. in Hex.* ed. F. Delorme (Quaracchi: 1934) 275.

unfinished owing to his elevation to the cardinalate, in them he read the first chapter of *Genesis* spiritually, distinguishing seven levels of "vision" corresponding to the seven days of creation. The first level is "understanding naturally given" or philosophy, divided into logic, physics, and ethics. Physics includes all three areas of Aristotelian theoretical philosophy: metaphysics, mathematics, and natural philosophy. Metaphysics focuses on causal relations between God and creatures, and here "the philosophers—the finest and the ancient philosophers—came to this conclusion: there is a beginning and end and exemplar cause" of the universe.[1] The moderns at his beloved University, however, had split into factions. The problem was one of emphasis. Which kind of cause has priority of place for the metaphysician: God as *efficient* or *final* or *exemplar* cause of creatures?

I. Metaphysics and the Existence of God

An integral metaphysics conceives of God as cause in all three senses, to be sure; but God's efficient causality serves mainly to connect metaphysics to physics, while his final causality connects metaphysics with ethics. The "true metaphysician" centers his science on *exemplar* causality; focusing elsewhere betrays the discipline.[2] The Philosopher himself had erred in the direction of final causality and consequently denied exemplar causes altogether,[3] while Aristotle's Parisian followers erred in the direction of efficient causality. When he delivered this part of his sermon, the names of certain members of the University corporation—Master Siger of Brabant, but also Br. Thomas of Aquino—likely passed through the Minister General's mind.

The metaphysical approach to the existence of God taken in the *Collations*, Bonaventure had devel-

[1] *Coll. in Hex.* 6.1 (following the numbering of the *reportatio* in the Quar. ed.); 5: 360.
[2] *Coll. in Hex.* 1.13; 5: 331. Cf. Andreas Speer, "Bonaventure and the Question of a Medieval Philosophy," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 6 (1997) 30-1: "the proper subject of metaphysics is to think about being as the cause in an exemplary manner of all that exists."
[3] *Coll. in Hex* 6.2-5; 5: 360-1.

oped twenty years earlier. When commenting on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, Bonaventure had self-consciously eschewed arguments from efficient and final causality because at most they set up analogies of *extrinsic* attribution between creatures and God, where the analogue is not truly an attribute of God. A more positive theology requires argument through analogies of *intrinsic* attribution, where analogous attributes are really possessed by God and creature. Exemplar causality, a kind of formal causality in which God's perfect possession of an attribute provides the ultimate causal basis for its presence in creatures, gives a proper foundation for such analogies. For guidance in developing properly metaphysical arguments for God's existence securely based on exemplar causality, Bonaventure turned to the neoplatonic tradition.

When Augustine read "the books of the Platonists" the development of arguments for the existence of God took a decisive turn. The most important lesson he learned there was methodological: The trip to God takes a direction the reverse of what might seem natural: from the exterior world to the interior mind, and from the inferior human mind to the divine superior,[4] thereby opening up three routes for proving God exists.

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[4] Augustine, *Conf.* 7.10, ed. L. Verheigen (Turnhout: Brepols, 1981) CCSL 27: 103.

1)   The first begins with creatures outside the mind and proceeds from effect to cause. Kant called such arguments "cosmological," but to include any reasoning moving from real effects to God as cause the broader term *aitiological argument* is more accurate. While Aristotle had focused on the proximate causes of the motion of the heavenly spheres,[1] aitiological arguments of *neoplatonic* inspiration moved in the line of formal causality and, because highly abstract, concluded to God as universal cause.

2)   The second route also proceeds from effect to cause, but starts inside the human mind. Seeking the cause of intellectual truth present in his mind led Augustine to scout out this route in his *illumination* argument for God. These two pathways find their ultimate beginnings in the Platonic doctrines of participation and recollection respectively, and both proceed argumentatively from effect to cause.

3)   3) It is obviously impossible for an argument for God's existence to proceed in the opposite direction—from cause to effect, if its starting point is some creature outside the mind. But the neoplatonic movement from exterior to interior opened up the possibility of yet a third route to God, one which starts inside the mind, like the illumination argument, but rather than ask 'Where do mental notions come from?' this argument asks 'Where do they logically lead?' Such an argument proceeds from cause to effect, but *at the conceptual level*. So initially unpromising that Kant named it the "ontological" argument after the fallacy he thought it commits—treating existence as a predicate—this route might less pejoratively be called the *noetilogical argument*, based on how its proponents like Bonaventure thought it

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[1] Aristotle, *Met.* 12.6 (1071b3-27); 7 (1072a18-36); 8 (1073a14-1074b14). The argument in the *Physics*, 8.6 (259b27-260a5 and 8.10 (267a23-b7), seems to add efficient causality to the final causality of the *Met.*, which has led commentators either a) to import efficient causality into the *Met.* argument or b) to separate the entities to which the two arguments conclude.

proceeds: through   devel-oping   the   *logical* consequences of a *notion*.[2]

4)   Once   the noetilogical argument was first devised by Anselm, the fullest development of the neoplatonic approach to God stood ready to be realized if *all three routes* could be developed together by one and the same philosophical mind. That was not the mind of Plotinus, or Augustine, or Anselm himself; it was the mind of Bonaventure. For the first time in the history of metaphysics he attempted to realize the full potential of the neoplatonic approach to God.

It is not obvious, however, that all three routes can be pursued together. Did not Anselm abandon the *Monologion* for the *Proslogion* and Aquinas think sound aitiological arguments require him to abandon Anselm? Modern students of Bonaventure have not been any kinder.

Interpreting   Bonaventure   as   an Augustinian, in contrast to Aquinas's "Christian Aristotelianism," led I. Gilson to reduce Bonaventure's other two routes to the one way of illumination. In Bonaventure's *aitiological* argument Gilson thought the world of sense serves only to "bring into play notions belonging to the intelligible order which imply God's existence," so that the "*idea itself* must of necessity be our   real,   if   unrecognized,   starting   point." Consequently, "the second [aitiological] way *reduces* us to the first [illuminationist]" way. The *noetilogical* argument underwent a similar reduction. The "closely articulated, dialectical process" of Anselm's argument "is now simplified by St. Bonaventure to the point of vanishing altogether." Consequently, "St. Anselm's

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[2] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*   A598/B626: "all existential propositions are synthetic"; "Logically, [being] is merely the copula of a judgment." tr. Kemp Smith. This fallacy occurs when one takes *is*, which Kant thought merely the copula of a proposition such as *S is P* and reasons about it as though it were a predicate term *P* with content above and beyond its linking function. This "fallacy" is but one part of Kant's wider claim that the only possible evidence for *S is* would be experience of *S*.

argument from the idea of God is practically identical in St. Bonaventure's eyes with St. Augustine's argument from the existence of truth." The *illumination* argument to which he reduced the others Gilson thought simply a quest for the efficient cause of the innate idea of God: "An idea which *comes* neither from things nor from ourselves can come from none other than God." The net result is that "the proofs of God's existence as St. Bonaventure states them . . . seem so closely related one to another that neither we, nor even he, can easily make any rigorous separation between them."

Having reduced Bonaventure's three routes to one, Gilson then undercut their philosophical value, concluding that Bonaventure's arguments *always presuppose* faith and that "the very idea of a proof of God's existence" in Bonaventure is different from the purely philosophical proofs of Thomas. Bonaventure's routes to God were never meant to be philosophically rigorous proofs, but practical aids for the believer to use in returning to God.[3]

F. van Steenberghen found Bonaventure's argu-ments as little convincing as Gilson and drew even harsher conclusions: Bonaventure may have intended his ways to God to be philosophical, but he treated them "in summary fashion," a sign of his general philo-sophical superficiality. In saying the existence of God is evident to all Bonaventure made philosophical arguments for God superfluous.[4]

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[3] I. Gilson, *The Philosophy of St. Bonaventure*, tr. Trethowan and Sheed (Paterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guild, 1965) 110-126; from 3rd Fr. ed. (Paris: Vrin, 1953) 103-118.

[4] F. van Steenberghen, *Aristotle in the West,* 2nd ed. (Louvain: E. Nauwelaerts, 1970) Bonaventure's philosophy was "an *eclectic* Aristotelianism with neo-Platonic tendencies, put at the service of an Augustinian theology." 162. Cf. 159: "The difference between the two lies in this: St. Thomas had meditated deeply on philosophical problems and had carved out a solid system of philosophy before using it in theology; while St. Bonaventure did not do this to the same extent." Cf. *La philosophie au xiiie siècle* (Louvain: Publications Universitaires, 1966) 268-271.

If Gilson's Bonaventure was too fideistic an Augustinian, and van Steenberghen's a failed Aristotelian, J. Seifert has recently attempted to restore the philosophical cogency of Bonaventure's noeti-logical argument, though at the price of shaping Bonaventure too much in the image of Scotus and Aquinas.[5]

All these interpreters succumb to a common temptation: reductionism. The author of the *De reductione* certainly was not averse to reductionism, but of a positive kind, where analysis of one thing opens the mind to another, not the negative reduction which eliminates one in favor of the other. The liberal arts he so loved, for example, open the mind to theology and God, but Bonaventurean reduction does not destroy the liberal arts as distinct disciplines.[6]

The same thing holds true for the three routes to God. Reducing each argument to exemplar causality means merely that each takes the notion of exemplar cause as a principle; it does not mean that one route collapses into another. The way Bonaventure ranked them shows how different they are: Illumination (focusing on the human knower) makes us "certain" of God's existence; aitiological arguments (employing Aristotelian demonstration) give us "more certain" knowledge of this truth; and noetilogical arguments (focusing on the known object) show that God's existence is "a truth that is *most certain* in itself, in as far as it is the first and most immediate truth."[7]

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[5] J. Seifert, "*Si Deus est Deus,Deus Est,*" *Franciscan Studies* 59 (1992) 228-9: "[T]he '(*si*) *Deus est Deus*' must not be interpreted as a mere analytic proposition but rather as an expression of that identity with itself which only a meaningful, non-contradictory, and *necessary* essence possesses. [Avicenna/Scotus]. . . [I]n God alone *essentia* and *esse* are inseparably *one*. [Aquinas]. . . Such a 'having the ground of his own being within himself,' which is the arch-form and the ultimate embodiment of the sufficient reason for being, is only possible in God because He alone is *infinitely perfect*. [Scotus]"

[6] On reduction, see Bougerol, *Introduction* 140-5.

[7] *De mys. trin.* 1.1c (ed. Quar.) 5: 49; tr. Hayes 116.

In an effort never before even attempted, Bonaventure self-consciously tried to hold together *all three* routes to God. To do so, he turned to Aristotle. According to the canons of Aristotelian science, we come to know principles through insight coming out of induction, while we demonstrate conclusions deductively.[8] These two modes of argument provided Bonaventure with two different models for mounting arguments to prove God exists. He construed both illumination and aitiological arguments as *properly demonstrative*. Since Anselm's argument does not fit within the constraints of Aristotelian demonstration, Bonaventure re-interpreted it as an *argument for a principle*. In this way, he tried to hold together what might seem inconsistent: God's existence is an axiom known to all humans, *but* it also can be proven noetilogically, *and* can be demonstrated empirically.

II. Bonaventure's Illumination Argument

The demonstrative model requires middle terms to connect the subject and predicate of the demonstrated conclusion. Bonaventure's illumination and aitiological arguments are demonstrations of the fact (*quia*), moving from effect to cause. The kind of causality both employ is formal, and both are based on the formality of truth, which has two senses: The ontological sense of truth exists in things, as a transcendental attribute "convertible with being" and serves as the starting point for his aitiological argument. The epistemological sense of truth, which exists in minds, is the foundation for his illumination argument.[9]

The illumination argument starts from "affirm-ative" (and true) propositions:

> All *true understanding* proves and concludes to the truth of the divine being, because knowledge of the divine truth is impressed on every soul, and all knowledge comes about through the divine truth. Every affirmative proposition proves and concludes to that truth. For every such proposition posits something. And when something

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[8] *Post. Anal.* 1.4 (71b16-22); 2.19 (99b34-100b17).
[9] *In I Sent.*d. 8. 1.1. *ad contra* 1, c (ed. Quaracchi) 1: 150-151.

is posited, the true is posited; and when the true is posited, that truth which is the cause of the true is also posited.[10]

This reasoning moves from "the true (*verum*)" as effect to its cause, "truth (*veritas*)." Propositions are "true" when they correspond to reality, but being true in this way is an effect dependent on a higher cause: "divine truth." Here Bonaventure reduced to plain syllogisms the kind of stirring "dialectical meditations" (to use E.A. Synan's apt phrase)[11] which sprang to the mind of Augustine along his inward route to God:

> And admonished by all this to return to myself, I entered inside myself, Thou leading and I able to do so, because Thou had become my helper. And I entered, and with the eye of my soul, such as it was, I saw above that eye of my soul, above my mind, an unchangeable light. . . . Whoever knows the truth knows this light. . . . O eternal truth and true love and loved eternity, Thou art my God; to Thee do I sigh both night and day.[12]

Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* showed Bonaventure that to make such reasoning demonstrative requires more precision and less affection than Augustine offered.

In his *Commentary*, Bonaventure took the first step toward demonstration by limiting himself to "true understanding (*intelligentia recta*)," which involves abstract concepts, general propositions, their correspondence with reality, and their certainty. Bonaventure's argument is that at least one feature of "true understanding" depends on God. He did not isolate this factor in the *Commentary* but did identify it in *On the Knowledge of Christ* 4. There he said that *certainty* comes from God, while the other three features of "true understanding" come from created sources. To argue for this conclusion he distinguished three types of illumination theory.

In Platonism, to achieve "*certain* knowledge, the evidence of eternal light concurs as the *total and sole* cause of understanding." The problem is that Plato turned knowing the world into knowing God, by

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[10] *In I Sent.* d. 8. 1.2; 1: 155.
[11] "Augustine," *Dict. of the M.A.* 1: 657.
[12] Augustine, *Conf.* 7.10; CCSL 27: 103.

making God the *proper object* of all knowledge. According to him, God is both the formal cause providing human knowledge its content and the efficient cause generating human knowledge. At the other extreme were Muslim illuminationists such as Avicenna, who denied both causal functions of God and gave them to a creature—the tenth "intelligence" or "giver of forms." While Avicennism did not confuse knowing God with knowing creatures, it multiplied entities unnecessarily: the human mind can supply itself with whatever another created mind might offer. No creature, however, can do what it takes God to accomplish.[13]

Bonaventure then crafted an intermediate position, which had room for both divine and created causes of certain knowledge: "For certain knowledge, *eternal reason* is necessarily involved as a regulative and motive cause, however, not as the sole cause, or in its full clarity; but along with a *created cause*, and as contuited by us 'in part,' in accord with our present state of life."[14] Bonaventure's argument consists in describing what each kind of cause—divine and created, formal and efficient—does and does not contribute to certain knowledge.

For "created" causes he followed Aristotle, who was correct that the object of knowledge is the created essence, that we acquire knowledge through abstraction from sense, and that abstraction requires in the human mind itself powers which function like efficient and material causes of knowledge: the "agent intellect" which abstracts universals from sense and the "passive intellect" which is the repository of truth in the human mind. Contrary to the Muslim philosophers, these intellectual powers exist in the individual human soul. The *content* of human knowledge, then, is explained through four kinds of "created" causes: the passive intellect as *material* cause, the agent intellect as

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[13] *De sci. Chr.* 4c. (ed. Quar.) 5: 23; cf. Hayes tr. 132-4.
[14] *De sci. Chr.* 4c; 5: 23; cf. Hayes tr. 134.

efficient cause, the essence of creatures as *formal* cause, and epistemological truth as *end*.[15]

"Eternal reason," however, is responsible for certainty, the one feature of "true understanding" no created cause could ever produce:

> [I]f full knowledge requires recourse to a truth which is fully immutable and stable, and to a light which is completely infallible, it is necessary for this sort of knowledge to have recourse to the heavenly art as to light and truth: a light, *I say*, which gives infallibility to the [created] knower, and a truth which gives immutability to the [created] object of knowledge.[16]

To understand this argument, we need to see the problem to which illumination is the answer. In the mental acts of abstracting universals and arguing inductively, the human mind generalizes well beyond the data of our experience. It is one thing to be able so to generalize, quite another to know one has succeeded. Aristotle had recognized this difficulty and followed the process of inductive generalization with "understanding," a distinct mental act whereby principles are finally understood with certainty, through intuitive insight.[17] One sees the importance of *nous* in those who deny it. Empiricist Aristotelians from Hume to Barnes have denied that intuition can move the mind all the way to eternal truths[18] because they refuse to recognize the transition from induction to intuition.   Aristotle asserted that intuition is a *fact*, the question is *how* it comes about.   Here Aristotle's texts were silent, so Bonaventure turned to Augustine.

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[15] *In II Sent.* d. 24. 1.2.4; 2: 567-571. cf. J. Quinn, *The Historical Constitution of St. Bonaventure's Philosophy* (Toronto: PIMS, 1973) 345-352.

[16] *De sci. Chr.* 4; 5: 23; cf. Hayes tr.135.

[17] Aristotle, *Post. Anal.* 2.19, where he distinguishes three mental acts involved in knowing principles: 1) induction from sense experience to universal concepts (99b34-100a13); 2) generalizing from logically inferior to logically superior concepts (100a13-100b5); 3) understanding (100b6-17).

[18] Cf. J. Barnes, *Aristotle's Posterior Analytics,* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993) 267-271.

Bonaventure put his point in terms of the difference between intuition and contuition. *Intuition* is immediate and direct knowledge of an object, generally a universal essence; *contuition*, a Bonaventurean term of art, signifies knowing something else in the course of knowing the first object. In this way, knowing the essence of a creature is the occasion for understanding something about God. But it is not merely an occasion. Rather, contuition of God is a *necessary condition* for intuition of *any* created essence. Bonaventure arrived at this doctrine by looking carefully at the nature of intuitive knowledge. Intuition into the essence of a creature gives truths which are not only universal, but also eternal, necessary, and certain. Like all Platonists, Bonaventure was sceptical that anything short of *complete* enumeration of instances ever justifies generalizations because complete enumeration is the only *absolute* guarantee that no counter-example will crop up. God, as an infinitely perfect knower, is acquainted with the full extension of any universal because the divine idea of any truth consists in knowledge of that truth in *absolutely all its actual and possible instantiations*. Consequently, the infinite extension of God's knowledge is what makes divine understanding certain, and this certainty in the divine mind is in turn the only possible source for any human mind ever knowing a proposition with certainty.

Human knowledge, therefore, requires illumination from God—to be certain—and illumination from the human mind—to be true and universal. Bonaventure concluded his argument by noting the different principles responsible for these two illuminations:

> Since the soul is not an image in its entirety, together with these *eternal reasons* it attains to the likenesses of things abstracted from the sense image. These are the *proper and distinct* principles of knowledge, and without them the light of the eternal reason is insufficient of itself to produce knowledge as long as the soul is in this wayfaring state.[19]

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[19] *De sci. Chr.* 4c; 5: 23; cf. Hayes tr. 136. Neglecting Bonaventure's distinctions has led commentators to attribute too little or too much to God. 1) I. Gilson, *Phil. of*

The *content* of our knowledge, then, comes from its proper principles. The object known, the *formal* cause of the content of our knowledge, is the essence of a creature. This object is made known by the action of the *agent* intellect, a power existing in the individual soul, acting as *efficient* cause. These are the "created causes" of our knowledge. *Certainty*, however, comes from eternal reasons. These are divine causes analo-gous to the "proper" created causes of human know-ledge because they are also in the formal and efficient lines of causality. They act as a "regulative and motive cause (*regulans et ratio motiva*)." As *regulative*, the divine mind possesses a rule (*regula*) determining which human knowledge is certain because it is in accord with the eternal and unchanging essences of creatures as they exist in divine knowledge. In this respect, divine causality is in the line of the formal cause, not as giving content to the

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St. Bon. 125, thought Bonaventure held a Cartesian doctrine that at least *some* of our ideas are *innate*, produced by God as their *total* efficient cause. But Bonaventure is resolute that *all* ideas arise empirically. 2) T. Crowley, "Illumination and Certitude," *S. Bonaventura* (Grottaferrata [Roma]: Collegio S. Bonaventura, 1974) 3: 440, 448, denied that God is an efficient cause of knowledge in any way: "[I]f the human mind is divinely illumined, it can only be through a *created* light." Hence, Bonaventure's and Aquinas's theories of knowledge are "substantially the same." 3) J. Quinn, *Historical Constitution* 657, 660, said God's general "influence and cooperation" affects *all* mental actions as a remote cause combining with the human mind as proximate cause. Consequently, Quinn did not distinguish causing truth from causing certainty and collapsed the illumination argument into the aitiological argument. 4) While arguing dialectically against the Avicennian position, Bonaventure says that *if* illumination were a "special influence" *like* grace, then "all knowledge would be infused and none would be acquired or innate." Ignoring the hypothetical nature of this argument, A. Speer 39 thought Bonaventure himself held knowledge is either a) infused or b) acquired or innate, but cannot be both infused and acquired, so that "the influence of the [divine] light can nevertheless *not* be seen as having general application." Speer admitted this makes it virtually impossible to explain the "cooperation" between "the infallible light of truth" and "the individual subject." For Bonaventure, however infusion [illumination] by God and acquisition by the individual human are *not* mutually exclusive. Divine light *does* have general application, but does *not* eclipse the role of individual human faculties.

human mind (which would make God's ideas the object of human knowledge) but as providing the *formality of certitude* to human knowledge. As *motive* cause the "heavenly art" is a proximate efficient cause directly influencing the created mind by producing certitude in it.[20]

On Bonaventure's view, then, the "eternal rea-sons" illuminating the human mind are *exemplar* causes, because certainty in human knowledge comes by way of participation in the certainty of divine knowledge. Consequently, his illumination argument lives up to his own requirement that a metaphysical proof of God's existence involve *exemplar* causality.

III. Bonaventure's Aitiological Argument

The aitiological argument for God fits Aristotle's model of demonstration even better than illumination, because it begins with real effects outside the mind. This seems to be the reason Bonaventure ranked it higher. He was familiar with earlier neoplatonic aitiological arguments. Though Boethius's *Consolation* contained no argument for the existence of God, Lady Philosophy did present an aitiological argument for the existence of perfect beatitude, on the

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[20] Cf. *In II Sent.* d. 3. 2.2.2 *ad* 6m; 2: 124. Bonaventure's *cognitio innata* of God is not a Cartesian innate idea present from birth, but comes from Damascene, *De fide orth.* 1.3: "Cognitio existendi Deum *naturaliter* nobis *inserta* est." When emphasizing how illumination is caused by God, Bonaventure uses *impressa* as a synonym for *inserta;* when focusing on how universal knowledge of God is, he uses *innata* as a synonym for *naturaliter*, both words having the same root. *Natural* knowledge of God, then, does not come from innate ideas, the Platonic form of which he explicitly rejected. When Bonaventure (*De mys. trin.* 1.1 c; 5: 49) says "there *is inserted in* the rational mind a natural desire and knowledge and memory of that in whose image it is made," Hayes (116) mistranslates *insertus est* as "is innate to," giving the text a misleading Cartesian meaning.

grounds that imperfect happiness exists, and the imperfect exists only by reason of participation in the perfect. Anselm turned this line of argument into an aitiological proof of the existence of God in his *Monologion*.[21]

Familiar with this history, in the *Commentary* Bonaventure put his own aitiological argument succinctly:

> Every truth and every created nature proves and leads to the existence of the divine truth. For if there is being by participation and from another, there must exist a being due to its own essence and not from another.[22]

As he did with illumination, Bonaventure here packs his whole argument into a single syllogism: God, under the description "divine truth," is concluded to exist, based on two premisses: one *empirical*, which gives the argument its starting point, the other Bonaventure's version of *participation*. His argument takes the form of a simple conditional syllogism, but the content of each premiss Bonaventure states with technical precision.

Though *empirical*, Bonaventure's starting point is utterly abstract. He begins not with individuals but with *natures*, and in describing them passes over species, genus, and even the categories, moving to the transcendental attribute "truth." This abstraction was Bonaventure's major contribution to the aitiological argument. While Aristotle and his Commentator had

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[21] Boethius, *Cons. Phil.* 3.10. This argument provided the major premiss for Lady Philosophy's basic syllogism: Perfect good is the source of true happiness; God is perfect good; therefore, God is the source of true happiness. She did not demonstrate the goodness or existence of God, but did mount a noetilogical argument for the minor premiss *God is perfect good*. Anselm's *Monlogion* used the notions of goodness (c. 1), greatness (2), and being (3) to argue aitiologically for God: Denique non solum omnia bona per idem aliquid sunt bona, et omnia magna per idem aliquid sunt magna, sed quidquid est per unum aliquid videtur esse. (c. 3)

[22] *In I Sent.* d. 8. 1.2; 1: 155.

thought that metaphysics is the science of substance, Avicenna transformed it into a science of trans-cendentals. Scholastics before Bonaventure recognized four major transcendentals: being, one, true, and good.[23] By using transcendental truth Bonaventure placed his argument squarely within metaphysics.

All truth is relational, but epistemological and ontological truth involve different relations. Episte-mological truth is the correspondence between a finite mind and reality, while the certainty truth sometimes attains concerns that mind "in relation to its principle," as we have seen. Ontological truth is altogether different. It is limited to the "subject it informs," and consists in an internal relation *within* that being. Contrary to what one might expect, Bonaventure does not define ontological truth as a relation between creature and creator but as "the indivision of act and potency" within a being. Comparing creatures and God clarifies the point: In "God alone there is true indivision mixed with no diversity," while "in a creature there is indivision *combined with* difference between act and potency." In God ontological truth is a function of divine unity, divine truth is pure truth, and, since truth is convertible with being, God is pure being. By contrast, in creatures ontological truth is sullied by multiplicity, the creature being a mixture of truth and falsity, a combination of being and non-being as Augustine had said.

Further analysis of ontological truth in creatures leads to the center of Bonaventurean metaphysics. Unlike Aquinas, Bonaventure held the distinction between act and potency to be coextensive with that between form and matter. Bonaventure took Aristotle's definition of prime matter as pure potency to mean that everything containing potency, even angels, must contain matter. Consequently, the truth of creatures is incomplete because they are hylomorphic composites. Hylomorphism, in turn, leads to

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[23]Avicenna, *Met.* 1.5, 8. See J. Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Trancendentals: The Case of Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: Brill, 1996) 25-70, for the scholastic doctrine of the transcendentals before Aquinas.

Bonaventure's doctrine of being: "Matter gives independent existence (*ex-istere*) to form, while form gives the act of being (*essendi actum*) to matter."[24] The *act of being* Bonaventure invokes here is not the Thomistic act of being which comes from an external efficient cause and only makes the creature to be; Bonaventure's act of being comes from an internal formal cause and gives the creature its nature. Consequently, every created being (*ens*) is an ontological composite of independent existence (*existere*) and being (*esse*), where *esse* signifies the nature or essence of the thing. From rocks to angels, all creatures exist as individuals different from all others, yet sharing natures with them.   Sheer existence, however, is no guarantee that a creature will possess a given nature well. All creatures are true to the extent that they actualize the potential perfections of their natures, and they are false to the extent that they fail to do so. The difference between existence and *esse* in creatures, then, is the metaphysical basis for the gap between potency and act which is the hallmark of created ontological truth. The first level of actualizing the nature of a creature is produced by substantial form. Just being a human makes one truly a human, but only in a minimal way. One becomes *more truly* human by doing the kinds of thing that produce an outstanding human, that is, by adding accidental forms which increase the level of ontological truth present in a given creature.   Since no creature does this perfectly, all creatures are but *partial* actualizations of the truth of which they are capable.   This is the full account of the sad fact about "every truth and every created nature" which Bonaventure's *empirical* premiss presents.

His *participation* premiss is stated with technical precision: "If there is being by participation and from another, there must exist a being due to its own essence and not from another." *Participation* shows the inference moves from effect to cause within the line of formal causality.   As Bonaventure uses the term, participation is not limited to relations between creatures and God, but can also describe relations

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[24] *In II Sent.* d. 3.1.2.3c; 2: 110. Existere dat materia formae, sed essendi actum dat forma materiae.

within creation. *From another* adds that the attribute in question is due to some extrinsic cause. Bonaventure's premiss, then, means that a necessary condition for the existence of any attribute by participation is that the same attribute is present in its exemplar *essentially*, that is, due to an intrinsic cause. Although he offers no examples, they are not hard to imagine. A statue or computer can have certain human attributes, such as shape, color, size, or computational skill, all of which are caused by the artisan creating them. Absent a living human, in whom such attributes are part of its nature, to serve as model, no such statue or computer could ever be made. Consequently, Bonaventure thought participation works *within the created order.*

To move the argument beyond creatures to God, Bonaventure turned away from categorical to transcendental attributes.[25] While everything falling under the categories is inherently imperfect, the transcendentals do not necessarily imply imperfection. The real identity of all four transcendentals with each other allowed Bonaventure to change terms in the middle of the argument, from truth to being. Truth, however, has the advantage of setting up an analogy between creatures and God which avoids attributing to God any of the imperfections inherent in created natures. Inherently imperfect attributes (like white or horse or dirt) do not imply the existence of perfect exemplars in God, but participation in transcendental truth means that creatures imperfectly realizing their essences, whatever those essences might be, can only do so if there exists another being which perfectly realizes *its* essence, and as such is truth itself. Without God as the exemplar of this transcendental perfection no creature could be true at all.

In his aitiological argument, then, as with illumination, Bonaventure focused narrowly on a particular attribute which requires divine intervention: the attribute of ontological truth. Every creature is but partially true, since it incompletely realizes its own nature. Incomplete realization of categorical attributes implies that those attributes also exist in some other creature *per essentiam*. Transcendental attributes be-

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[25] Cf. Aquinas, *ST* 1.2.3, the fourth way.

have the same way: there should be exemplars for them as well. But no creature could be such an exemplar. This is especially clear for transcendental truth, because, no matter how great its essence, every creature realizes its own essence imperfectly. The sign of this fact is change, the hallmark of creatures, which is directed toward development and further perfection of created essences. The exemplar for ontological truth, as well as for the other transcendentals, must be God, who perfectly realizes his own essence, which is to say that God is true *per essentiam*. God's perfect realization of the divine essence, then, makes God's transcendental and ontological truth the only possible exemplar for the transcendental and ontological truth of creatures.

Bonaventure's aitiological argument bears out his claim that exemplar causality is at the center of metaphysics. Just as illumination requires God as formal and efficient cause, so the aitiological argument requires God as cause of truth in creatures. God possesses the formal perfection of truth and as such exercises formal and also final causality in drawing all creatures to himself. Even more, Bonaventure's aitio-logical argument offers a transition to his noetilogical argument, for the one ends just where the other begins, with a divine being described as perfectly and exem-plarily realizing all the potentialities of its own essence. For what does a noetilogical argument do but peer into the inner logic of such an exemplar essence and try to capture the logical consequence that such an essence must exist?

IV. Bonaventure's Noetilogical Argument

Bonaventure took up the noetilogical argument three times: in his commentary on the *Sentences* (1250-2), the *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity* (1256-7), and the *Journey of the Mind to God* (1259-60). Each treatment shows certain developments beyond Anselm, although Bonaventure never felt the need to rehearse the argument at full length or assemble all his innovations in one text. He seems to have thought of himself as simply fine-tuning Anselm's argument, but such humility can be deceptive. The arguments *pro* in *De mysterio Trinitatis* 1.1 can serve to

document Bonaventure's innovations. After ten illum-
ination and ten aitiological arguments, the last nine
arguments for God's existence are broadly noetilogical.
Three Anselmian (21-23) and three Augustinian (24-6)
arguments are succeeded by three arguments which
chart the areas where Bonaventure moved beyond his
illustrious forebear: Arg. 27 presents God's existence
as an *axiomatic* truth; arg. 28 changes the *terms* of the
noetilogical argument; while arg. 29 focuses on the
method of arguing noetilogically.

A. Axiomatic Truth

The same proposition can never be both
principle and conclusion in a given argument, and
normally the principles of an Aristotelian science, if
demonstrable at all, are only proven in another science.
But God's existence is an exception to many rules.
Albert and Aquinas said that *God exists* is both a
principle of theology (as an article of faith) and a
conclusion rationally demonstrated in theology as well
as philosophy.[26] Bonaventure's variation on this theme
is that *within the purely rational realm of philosophy*
God's existence is both principle and conclusion.
Though perhaps anomalous this view is not impossible,
as long as God can fall under different descriptions.
The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is known to
exist by the light of faith, while Bonaventure has
already argued that the God of transcendental
perfection, the illuminator of the human mind, can also
be proven to exist through rational demonstration. Why
could still another description of God not show God's
existence to be an axiom in the technical Aristotelian
sense: a truth obvious to all?

This thesis is implied by the very question
Bonaventure raised in his *Commentary*, for he asked
not "Does God exist?" but "Is the divine being so true
that it *cannot be thought not to be?*" Among principles
only axioms are indubitable. By putting the question in
terms taken from *Proslogion* 3, Bonaventure indicated

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[26] Albert, *In I Sent.* d. 1. 2; d. 3.6 (ed. Borgnet) 25: 15-
17, 97. Thomas, *In I Sent.* prol. 1; d. 3. 1.2 (ed.
Mandonnet) 1: 6-8, 93-5.

that God's existence is indeed an axiom. Two of the arguments *pro* reinforce the point: In the first, Anselm's formula for God is called a "common conception of the mind," a Boethian term for 'principle'; and the third argument likens knowing God exists to knowing the axiom (*dignitas*) 'the whole is greater than its parts.'[27]

In the *responsio* Bonaventure says: "The truth of the divine being, however, is evident both in itself and in proof (*evidens et in se et in probando*)."[28] The distinction here is not between the divine reality as such and our knowledge of it (as for Aquinas) but between two different ways in which God is evident to the human knower. *Evident in proof* means the evidence connecting *God* with *is* comes from a creature functioning as middle term in a demonstration, as happens in aitiological and illumination arguments. God's existence is also *evident in itself*. Here the evidence connecting *God* and *is* comes from the very meaning of the terms. This distinction, then, is nothing other than the difference between knowing demonstrated conclusions and knowing principles. By saying that God's existence is *evidens in se*, Bona-venture means first and foremost that this truth is an axiom known to all.

In addition, however, the claim sets up an analogy between knowing other philosophical principles and knowing God. In the *Commentary*, Bonaventure based his own version of the noetilogical argument on this analogy:

> We know *principles* to the extent that we understand the terms which make them up, because the cause of the predicate is included in the subject. This is why principles are self-evident. *The same thing is true about God*. For God, or the highest truth, is being itself, than which nothing greater can be thought. Therefore, God cannot not be, or be thought not to be, for the predicate is already included in the subject.[29]

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[27] *Dignitas* translates *axioma* at *PA* 1.2 (72a18), in the Latin translations of James of Venice (ca. 1150) and William of Moerbeke (ca. 1269).

[28] *In 1 Sent.* d. 8. 1.2; 1: 155.

[29] *In 1 Sent.* d. 8. 1.2; 1: 155.

The conclusion here could not be clearer. Objectively it is impossible for God not to exist (as Anselm said in *Proslogion* 2), while subjectively God cannot even be thought not to exist (cf. *Proslogion* 3). Since Bonaventure moves from knowing philosophical principles to knowing the existence of God, he implies that some particular principle provides the basis for seeing that God exists. Though not identified in the *Commentary*, in *On the Mystery of the Trinity* Bonaventure showed that the principle in question is the first principle of demonstration:

> As a union of things in the greatest degree distant from each other is entirely repugnant to our intellect, because no intellect can think that *one thing at the same time both is and is not*, so also the division of something entirely one and undivided is entirely repugnant to that same intellect. For this reason, just as it is most evidently false to say that *the same thing is and is not,* so also it is most evidently false to say at the same time that the same thing in the greatest degree is and in no way is.[30]

The first principle of demonstration (or non-contradiction) says that a given subject cannot at one and the same time have contradictory attributes. Denying existence to creatures never contravenes this principle, even when the denial is false, because the essence of a creature is open to existence and non-existence. But logic constrains our thoughts about God more rigorously than about creatures. Though the agnostic cannot run afoul of the principle because he neither asserts nor denies anything about God, the atheist does judge that *God is not*. This proposition is not only false; it violates the principle of non-contradiction. Defining its subject shows why: Since God "*is* in the greatest degree (*summe esse*)," the proposition *God is not* asserts that what *is in the greatest degree* also *in no way is*, a manifest contradiction. In short, Bonaventure thought the atheistic proposition a substitution instance violating the principle of non-contradiction.

Its opposite—the theistic proposition—he saw as "a completely evident truth." However, it is not a

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[30] *De mys. Trin.* 1.1; 5: 49.

mere substitution instance of the principle of non-contradiction, for the simple reason that the principle is negative. The principle says what cannot be; it does not prove what must be. Nonetheless, Bonaventure's mind moved from non-contradiction to the existence of God as easily as it had moved from knowing certain truths to knowing God in the illumination argument, and seemingly for the same reason. If *intuition* of necessary truths was the occasion for *contuition* of God's existence in the illumination argument, here the mental act of intuiting the first principle of demonstration seems to be the occasion for a second mental act, contuiting the existence of God.

Such was the first effect produced by Bonaventure connecting his noetilogical argument with the principle of non-contradiction in a way Anselm never had; but it was not the last. If this connection showed the first principle of demonstration more fecund than heretofore recognized, it also changed the noetilogical argument itself.

B. The Method of Noetilogical Proof

Bonaventure was a meticulous student of the noetilogical argument, who had read the sources in which we can trace its development. He knew the *Confessions* where Augustine had described God in terms of our inability to think of something better, thereby inventing the formula for describing God which Anselm would make famous. Augustine had assumed that God exists and that God is good, and used his formula to deduce, through a *reductio ad absurdum*, that God must also be incorruptible. For if God were corruptible one would "be able to think of something better."[31] Bonaventure was also familiar with Boethius's *Consolation*, where Lady Philosophy assumed that God exists but used Augustine's formula to prove his other assumption: that God is good: "The common conception of human minds shows that God,

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[31] Augustine, *Conf.* 7.4. The sentence containing the seed of Anselm's formula is: *neque* enim ulla anima umquam *potuit poteritve cogitare aliquid quod sit te melius*, qui summum et optimum bonum es.

the first principle of all things, is good. *For*, since nothing can be thought of better than God, who would doubt that that than which nothing is better is good?"[32]

Then came Anselm. If Boethius could use the formula to prove one of Augustine's assumptions, why could not Anselm use it to prove the other: the existence of God? Anselm's argument was deductive and took the form of a *reductio ad absurdum*: Belief in God gives the mind the peculiar notion of "something than which a greater cannot be thought." Now real being is greater than existing merely in thought, as Augustine had said that the incorruptible is greater than the corruptible and Boethius that good is greater than bad. Assuming as a hypothesis that God does not exist produces a contradiction: For one *can* think of something greater than a "God" existing only in the mind; while the original notion of God was of something than which a greater *cannot* be thought.   Since contradictions cannot hold in reality, any more than in thought, to avoid asserting a contradiction the assumption which led to it, namely, the assumption that God is not real, must be withdrawn. This seems to amount to asserting that God truly exists.[33]

It was completely clear to Bonaventure that without achieving a contradiction Anselm's argument would lead nowhere; but what was not so clear is how far beyond contradiction Anselm could go.   In particular, does his final step truly succeed in achieving positive knowledge that God exists? Here Bonaventure's study of Aristotelian philosophy in his Arts course made him more sensitive than Anselm to the limitations of *reductio* arguments. Positive insight into principles is more than negative *reductio* leading up to principles.[34]   Snaring the atheist in a contradiction is still one step away from truly understanding that God exists.

To make the noetilogical argument more than a negative *reductio* requires that it be recast, and meditating on God's existence as a principle showed

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[32] Boethius, *Cons. Phil.* 3. pr.10.

[33] Anselm, *Proslogion* 2.

[34] Cf. Aristotle's *reductio* against Parmenides in *Phys.* 1 and against those who deny non-contradiction in *Met.* 4.

Bonaventure how to rework it. Since principles are "self-evident (*se ipsis sunt evidentia*)," we come to know them through themselves (*per se*) and not through something else (*per aliud*) as we know demonstrated conclusions.[35] This sense of *per se* is true only of principles. To understand it, however, Bonaventure made use of Aristotle's wider sense of *per se,* which includes all scientific truths—principles and conclusions. Here *per se* means there is an intrinsic and necessary connection between subject and predicate, as distinct from incidental matters of fact (*per accidens*). Aristotle had said there are four modes of *per se* in this wider sense, the first two of which Bonaventure used to understand the narrow sense of *per se.* The first mode of *per se* are those propositions whose predicates help define their subjects, such as *triangles are made of lines*; while the reverse is true of propositions *per se* in the second mode, whose subjects fall into the definition of their predicates, such as *lines are straight or curved*, or *humans are risible*.[36] Now a definition is simply a formula describing the essence of something, and an essence is a formal cause. Interpreted causally, in the second mode of *per se* the subject causes the predicate in the way an essence causes some attribute. This mode thus provided Bonaventure with an ingenious explanation of why principles are self-evident: "We know principles to the extent that we understand the terms which make them up, because the cause of the predicate is included in the subject."

If essence is what connects the two terms in self-evident principles, this also should hold for *God exists.* Since one can argue for other principles by appealing to the meaning of their terms, Bonaventure thought the same thing should hold for God. Consequently, he modeled his noetilogical argument on such arguments for principles, focusing on the divine essence as a means of connecting *God* and *is.* This new focus demanded a new formulation of the argument, which Bonaventure rendered memorable: "If God is God, God is."

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[35] Cf. Aristotle, *Topics* 1.1 (100a31-b21).
[36] Aristotle, *Post. Anal.* 1.4 (73a34-b3).

The premiss *If God is God* is not an empty tautology, as J. Seifert has shown,[37] because the term *God* is not used univocally. As subject of both premiss and conclusion, *God* gives reference, while as predicate of the premiss it gives meaning. Reference is to that entity Bonaventure already knows by faith but which even the non-believer can entertain as a possibly existing thing. In the predicate of the premiss, however, *God* signifies the divine essence. The premiss consequently means 'if the entity to which the term God refers truly possesses the divine essence'; while the conclusion means that such an entity must exist. Interpreted this way, the inference to the existence of God runs *through the divine essence*. For Bonaventure, this formulation of the noetilogical argument shows that the way to understand *God exists* is to read this proposition like other metaphysical principles, where the subject of the proposition causes its predicate. What unites the subject *God* with the predicate *exists* is the essence of the subject, that is, the essence of God, not some extrinsic cause, for the divine essence entails the divine existence.

The elegance and power of Bonaventure's argument were immediately recognized. No less than Br. Thomas of Aquino, writing his own *Commentary* (1252-6) shortly after Bonaventure's (1250-52), readily admitted its truth, as far as the objective reality of God is concerned: "Speaking about God in himself (*secundum ipsam rem*), his existence *is* self-evident, and he is understood through himself (*per se*)."[38] While the noetilogical argument does in fact capture the reality of God, Aquinas found it an argument unconvincing to us.

In his *Commentary* Aquinas held that to understand the conclusion of the noetilogical argument we would need to have *comprehensive* knowledge of the divine essence. In *On the Mystery of the Trinity* (Paris, 1256-7) Bonaventure[39] replied to Aquinas by

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[37] J. Seifert, "*Si Deus est Deus, Deus est*" 216-217.

[38] Aquinas, *In 1 Sent.* d. 3. 1.2 (ed. Mandonnet) 1: 94.

[39] Bonaventure answered Aquinas in the course of dealing with two skeptical objections. *De mys. trin.* 1.1 *sed contra* 13; 5: 49: No one knows *that* God is

distinguishing three different levels of knowing what the term *God* means, the "full, fuller, and perfectly full" understanding of the divine essence that is had by wayfarers, the blessed, and God, respectively.   To Aquinas's view that only *comprehensive* under-standing of the divine essence would be enough to allow the noetilogical inference to go through, Bona-venture replied that *partial apprehension* of the essence of God is sufficient. This reply seems to have struck Aquinas deeply. He chose not to dispute Bonaventure's mod-erate claim that partial knowledge of God's essence is sufficient to ground the noetilogical argument, but struck off in a considerably more agnostic direction. If minimal knowledge of the divine essence might open the way for the noetilogical argument, one way securely to shut the door on it was altogether to deny positive knowledge of the divine essence.[40]

C. The Terms of the Noetilogical Argument

Thus far we have seen that construing *God exists* as an axiom known rationally to all led Bonaventure to connect this proposition with the first principle of demonstration, which in turn led him to think *God exists* has the same formal structure as other principles which are propositions whose subjects cause their predicates. Even more, the formal structure of this *proposition* led to Bonaventure's understanding of the formal structure of the noetilogical *argument*.   In Bonaventure's hands, Anselm's negative *reductio* thus became a positive deduction of the existence of God out of the divine essence. Perhaps the most telling advan-tage this reworking enjoys is that it shows the noetilogical argument is really a general argumentative strategy or *schema*, which can incorporate a number of particular arguments, diversified by how they describe the divine essence. Ever eager to embrace truth in all

without knowing *what* God is (*quid sit deus*). cf. *sed contra* 9; 5: 48: Since "God is hidden in the greatest degree. . .therefore there is the greatest degree of doubt about what concerns him."

[40] *ST* 1.3.prol.

its manifestations, this approach allowed Bonaventure to develop his own formulae for the argument while not turning his back on Anselm's.

Bonaventure did not hesitate to formulate the argument in Anselmian terms when appropriate.[41] But Anselm's middle term—the brilliant but obscure *quo maius* formula—presents two problems: The first concerns the inference to *is* in the conclusion *God is*. Anselm had chosen his formula so that denial of God's existence would generate a contradiction. But describing the divine essence purely in terms of our inability to think of something better gives no positive information about what God is. If the core of the argument is not just avoiding contradiction but drawing an inference from the divine essence to divine existence, as Bonaventure thought it was, then positive insight into the existence of God needs to be grounded in the divine essence positively described.[42] Bonaventure therefore chose new formulae to describe the divine essence, which we might call the properly *inferential* middle terms of the argument.

The second problem concerns the connection between the middle term and *God*. Anselm believed the *quo maius* formula signifies God, but Bonaventure was unwilling to leave the matter at the level of belief. The connection between the inferential middle, especially Anselm's *quo maius*, and the God of Christian belief and common acceptance, is not obvious. Another kind of middle term is needed to connect *God* with the inferential middle, thereby ensuring that the reasoning runs all the way from *God* to *is*. We can call such a term an *axiomatic* middle term, since it is designed to show that the conclusion of the noetilogical argument is an axiomatic truth. In this way, Bonaventure replaced Anslem's single, complicated middle term with two simpler middle terms, according to the following schema:

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[41] Cf. *Itin.* 6.2.

[42] *Itin.* 3.3 (ed. Quar.) 5: 306: "privations and defects can *in no way* be known except through something positive (*positiones*)." cf. Averroes, *In III de anima* (ed. Crawford) 462, who is less adamant on the point.

God ⊃ axiomatic middle ⊃   inferential middle ⊃ *is*

Most descriptions of the divine essence are inappropriate for the noetilogical argument, for the simple reason that most terms used to describe God, even in Scripture, necessarily connote imperfection. But defining such terms opens a passage to proper terms the argument can use. Rigorous definitions resort to more and more universal terms, as set out classically in Porphyrian genus-species trees. Bonaventure accepted Avicenna's argument that such trees are limited in height and that the process of uncovering higher genera ends with the transcendentals. While all ten categories, and the multitude of notions fitting under them, necessarily connote imperfection, the four transcendentals do not. These notions, then, are the right terms for the noetilogical argument. They do not imply imperfection, can be predicated non-metaphorically of God, and are primordial, the "first notions falling into the mind."[43] And it is fitting that the most fundamental *terms* be used to argue for "the first and most immediate *truth*."

All more specific concepts presuppose transcendental notions, and Anselm's own formula is no exception to this rule. Consequently, in order to make his argument clearer than Anselm's, Bonaventure reduced the *quo maius* formula to the transcendentals it presupposes, because they are terms more obvious to all minds. The first transcendental is not far to seek: *Greater*, which is actually a qualitative term not a quantitative one, depends upon the root notion of *good*. How to reduce the other central notions in the formula—*that than which* (*quo*) and *nothing*—is less obvious, but in the end they both depend for their intelligibility upon *being*. Consequently, Bonaventure chose formulae for the divine essence based on the transcendental notions of goodness and being.

D. The Noetilogical Argument from Goodness

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[43] *Itin.* 3.3; cf. Avicenna, *Met.* 1.5.

Bonaventure's argument based on *goodness* seems to have been what first led him to his peculiar formulation of the argument.

> No one can be ignorant of the fact that this is true: the best is the best; or think that it is false. But the best is a being which is absolutely complete. Now any being which is absolutely complete, for this very reason, is an actual being. Therefore, if the best is the best, the best is.[44]

The basic notion of *goodness* is not by itself sufficient to mount a noetilogical argument. It cannot serve as an axiomatic middle because it is not limited to God, nor as an inferential middle, since the bare notion of goodness does not imply the existence of that which is good. But Bonaventure remembered that Boethius had used the superlative "best (*optimum*)" to argue noetilogically that God is *good,* and that Anselm had used it to argue aitiologically that God exists. What was to prevent Bonaventure from using "best" to argue noetilogically for the existence of God? *Optimum* could serve as an *axiomatic middle term* for this kind of argument. When taken without qualification and absolutely (as here), that which is "the best" applies only to God. It is a truth about God all humans understand, as Boethius had noted,[45] for only God is unqualifiedly and in every respect "best." For his *inferential middle term* Bonaventure again relied on his training in Arts, where he had learned to think of goodness teleologically, as that which completes or perfects something. This approach to goodness allowed him to define that which is "the best" as "a being which is fully complete (*ens completissimum*)." Uniting the axiomatic middle with the inferential middle ensured that the conclusion is really true of God. What is unqualifiedly the best is also unqualifiedly or

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[44] *De mys. Trin.* 1.1 fund. 29; 5: 48. Item nullus potest ignorare hanc esse veram: optimum est optimum, seu cogitare ipsam esse falsam. Sed optimum est ens completissimum. Omne autem ens completissimum hoc ipso est ens actu: ergo si optimum est optimum, optimum est.

[45] Boethius, *Cons.* 3. pr. 10; Anselm, *Mon.* 1.

absolutely complete, that is, it must possess all possible perfections. Now existence is not just *a* factor in such ontological completeness, but is *the* most fundamental feature of such completeness. Consequently, such an absolutely perfect being must exist.   In sum, this version of the argument begins with the term *God,* adds an axiomatic middle term and then the inferential middle term which implies real existence:

$$\text{Deus} \quad \equiv \text{optimum} \; \equiv \; \text{ens completissimum} \; \supset \; \text{est}$$

Bonaventure was well aware of criticisms of the noetilogical argument, beginning with Gaunilo's retort that on this line of reasoning the greatest of all possible islands should also really exist. His reply to this sort of critique took advantage of putting the argument in terms of the transcendentals. The reason such objections are misplaced is that the analogy between God and the island breaks down. An island by nature is confined within the categories and therefore is an inherently imperfect being (*ens defectivum*); but *ens comple-tissimum* is clearly a transcendental notion, and consequently not inherently imperfect.[46] Anselm had made a similar reply to Gaunilo, but it was not as effective because not put with precision in terms of a developed doctrine of the transcendentals.

E. The Noetilogical Argument from Being

The argument from goodness shows that noetilogical arguments, as Bonaventure employed them, proceed by analyzing a conclusion (*God exists*) already accepted rather than synthesizing a conclusion previously unknown. Bonaventure recognized that intellectual analysis (*intellectus resolvens*)

> can happen in two ways: Either the intellect achieves full and complete analysis, or the intellect's analysis is deficient and partial. When the intellect analyzes *partially*, we can understand something to be (*esse*) without understanding the first being (*ens*). But when the

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[46] *De mys. Trin.* 1.1 *ad* 6; 5: 50.

> intellect analyzes *completely*, we cannot understand
> something without understanding the first being (*ens*).[47]

Bonaventure's noetilogical argument from goodness proceeds by analyzing the *notion* of goodness in a way appropriate for describing the divine essence. Substituting other definitions of God as middle terms in this argument *schema* produces other noetilogical arguments. Even more revealing than the argument from goodness is one based on being, the first of the transcendentals.

The participle *ens* is a term of art early used to translate the Greek present participle.[48] Concrete and normally a substantive, *ens* is perhaps best translated "*a being*," since it refers to anything which can exist. As was true about *bonum*, a noetilogical argument cannot be built on *ens* alone, and for similar reasons: *Ens* cannot be an axiomatic middle term because there are beings other than God. Nor can *ens* be an inferential middle term, since this notion by itself does not entail existence. Created beings do not have to exist. So Bonaventure searched the notions allied to *ens* for an appropriate description of the divine essence set out in the language of being.

As has been seen, every created being (*ens*) is composed of two ontological principles: *esse* and *existere.* Bonaventure followed Albert's etymology in construing *existere* as *sistere ex*, meaning *to stand as an effect apart from its cause.*[49] Since God is not an effect, Bonaventure eschewed *existere* and turned to the other component of *ens*, the notion of *esse*. As is true of *ens*, when taken without qualification the notion of *esse* is not limited to God, nor does it entail real existence. However, there is a difference between the two. *Ens* includes both potency and act, the possible and the actual, but *esse*, the active infinitive of the verb *to be*, signifies act alone, not potency.[50] Since *to be* is to be *something*, the actuality signified by *esse* is

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[47] Bonaventure, *In 1 Sent.* d. 28 dub. 1; 1: 504. cf. *Scholion;* 5: 314.
[48] Quintilian, *Inst. Orat.* 2.14.2. cf. 8.3.33.
[49] Albert, *In 1 Sent.* d. 5. 6 (ed. Borgnet) 25: 184.
[50] Cf. *Itin.* 5.3.

quidditative, as distinct from the sheer independent existence caused by matter (*existere*). To go further, however, and use *esse* as a middle term implying the real existence of God, Bonaventure needed to qualify it in some way.

In his *Commentary*, Bonaventure simply added *ipsum* to *esse* and substituted *ipsum esse* for Anselm's formula: "For God, or the highest truth, is being itself (*ipsum esse*), than which nothing greater can be thought."[51] Here he neither justified nor explained his new middle term, though the reflexive *itself* seems to focus on *esse*, as distinct from *ens* and *existere*. If so, the phrase *ipsum esse* could also be translated "just being" or simply "being." In the *Commentary*, then, Bonaventure clearly offers 'being' as a new middle term, but fails to clarify exactly what it means.

Beginning with Gilson, however, and perhaps too influenced by their reading of Aquinas, modern scholars have stepped in to clarify what Bonaventure did not and have used *Exodus* 3:14 to justify Bonaventure's insertion of *ipsum esse* in place of Anselm's *quo maius*.   P. Boehner, for example, thought "[t]hese metaphysical speculations, therefore, are made by the essentially Christian mind, which . . . is exhorted to fix its gaze on the *ipsum esse . . . as known from revelation*."[52]   More recent commentators have pressed the point even further, moving God to the forefront of our notions. Updating Boehner, S. Brown has said, "God, then, is the *first thing known*, even though we are not conscious of it." And A. Speer agrees: "The mind's *first concept* is the *esse divinum*; the divine being is an *a priori* condition for the entire possibility of knowing."

The difficulty with turning to *Exodus* is that using a datum of revelation to justify the middle term *ipsum esse* has the effect of undermining the rationality of the argument, a consequence Boehner was willing to accept. Bonaventure himself, however, employed the noetilogical argument *as a rational argument*

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[51] *In 1 Sent.* d. 8. 1.2; 1: 155.

[52]P. Boehner, *St. Bonaventure's Itinerarium mentis in deum* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 1956) 127.

throughout his writing career. Using *being* as a name of God is consistent with revelation, but the notion need not be taken *from* revelation. The fact that the reality of God is an objective condition of our knowing anything, as the illumination argument makes clear, does not mean that the mind's *first concept* is the concept of God or of *esse divinum*. In point of fact, Bonaventure did not reason from *Exodus* 3:14 to the conclusion that God is the first notion in the mind or that God must be conceived as *esse*. His thought moved in *precisely the opposite direction*. Because being is what first enters the mind, as Avicenna had taught, it follows that the first name of God is being, as *Exodus* 3:14 says it is:

> Therefore, the first point of speculative enquiry is God's existence. For the first proper name of God is being; since it is completely manifest and perfect, therefore it is first. *For the first thing a created mind comes to know is being.* Since whatever is said of God is *reduced* to being, *therefore* the proper name of God is being.[53]

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[53] *In Hex.* 2.3.11 (ed. Delorme) 129-130: Primum ergo speculabile est Deum esse. Primum nomen enim Dei est proprium esse, quia est manifestissimum et quia perfectissimum, et ideo est primum. *Primum enim menti creatae innotescit esse.* Quia quidquid de Deo dicitur, reducitur ad esse, unde esse est proprium nomen Dei. (with changes in punctuation) Cf. 10.10 (ed. Quar.) 5: 378. S. Brown, *The Journey of the Mind to God* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1993) 61 n. 99. A. Speer 31, working from the other *reportatio* (ed. Quar., 10.6; 5: 378), bases his view on: Esse enim divinum primum est, quod venit in mente. He takes *divinum* with *esse:* "For divine being is the first thing which comes into the mind." However, Bonaventure immediately adds: "Unde, Moysi quaerenti, quod esset *nomen Dei*, respondet Deus: Ego sum qui sum." *Nomen Dei* in the second sentence indicates it is better to take *divinum* with *primum* in the first: "For being is the first divine [name] which comes into the mind. *Therefore*, when Moses asked what is the name of God, God responds: I am who am." On *esse* as name of God, cf. *In I Sent.* 1, d. 22, 1.3c, referring to Damascene, *De fide orth.* 1.9; PG 94: 825; and Albert, *In I Sent.* 1 d. 8. 15 (ed. Borgnet) 25: 242.

In the *Commentary* Bonaventure offered no
further clarification about the sense of 'being' the
noetilogical argument requires. *On the Mystery of the
Trinity* offers no more help on the point, because in
presenting the noetilogical argument in the *responsio*
Bonaventure there focused on God's existence as a self-
evident *axiom* rather than an *inference*.[54]   In *The
Journey of the Mind to God* 5.3, however, Bonaventure
developed his noetilogical argument from being far
beyond anything previously done. Here for the first
time he clearly distinguished axiomatic from inferential
middles, finally bringing his argument based on being
into line with the one based on goodness. To do so he
qualified *esse* in two different ways, producing as
axiomatic middle *esse divinum*, and *esse purissimum* as
inferential middle. Since his argument uses both terms,
it is more complicated than earlier versions, and divides
into four parts: 1) a preliminary statement of the
noetilogical inference, 2) using *esse purissimum* as an
inferential middle term, 3) defending *esse purissimum*
as a component of transcendental *ens*, and 4)
connecting *esse purissimum* with *esse divinum* to
complete the argument.   The first two parts of the text
use the new inferential middle term (*esse purissimum*)
to deduce the real *existence* of God; while the last two
use the axiomatic middle (*esse divinum*) to ensure that
it is God who is so proven to exist. Consequently, the
schema of this argument closely parallels that of the
argument based on goodness:

Deus $\equiv$ esse divinum $\equiv$ esse purissimum $\supset$ est

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[54] "It is a truth most certain in itself, because it is the
first and completely immediate truth, in which not only
is the cause of the predicate included in the subject, but
also it is just being (*omnino esse*) which is predicated
and which is the subject" of the proposition *God is.*
Esse is seen here as both subject and predicate of the
proposition, which is what makes this proposition an
axiom. Consequently, *esse* is not conceived as a *middle*
term at all.

1) Bonaventure began by sketching the basic noetilogical argument in a cursory way:

> Now whoever wants to contemplate the invisible things of God, as far as unity of essence is concerned, first focuses attention on being itself, and sees that being itself is so completely certain in itself that it cannot be thought not to be.[55]

This introduction simply repeats the essentials of the argument as sketched in Bonaventure's *Commentary*: replacing Anslem's formula with *being itself*; using *being itself* as a description of the divine essence in order to infer that God exists; holding that this conclusion is certain and certain to the highest degree, as is appropriate for a rational principle. Bonaventure then moves well beyond the *Commentary* in each of the three following sections of text. He proceeds by way of conceptual analysis, using different ways of dividing both *ens* and *esse*.

2) Next Bonaventure appeals abruptly to his new middle term (*esse purissimum*), a term designed to make it easier to see the inference from being to the real existence of God:

> For completely pure being itself occurs only in full flight from non-being, just as nothingness is in full flight from being. Therefore, complete nothingness contains nothing of being or its attributes, so by contrast being itself contains no non-being, neither in act nor in potency, neither in reality nor in our thinking about it.[56]

At the outset *quia* clearly shows this section of the text is designed as an argument to buttress the

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[55] *Itin.* 5.3; 5: 308: Volens igitur contemplari Dei invisibilia quoad essentiae unitatem primo defigat aspectum in ipsum esse et videat, ipsum esse adeo in se certissimum, quod non potest cogitari non esse.

[56] *Itin.* 5.3; 5: 308: quia ipsum esse purissimum non occurrit nisi in plena fuga non-esse, sicut et nihil in plena fuga esse. Sicut igitur omnino nihil nihil habet de esse nec de eius conditionibus; sic econtra ipsum esse nihil habet de non-esse, nec actu nec potentia, nec secundum veritatem rei nec secundum aestimationem nostram.

"completely certain" conclusion that *God exists*. Focusing on the *inferential* aspect of the argument, Bonaventure here introduces his inferential middle term, defends its power to imply real existence, and notes in closing (contrary to Aquinas) that we know this inference to be true.

If *ipsum esse* refers to the *esse* of a creature, as distinct from its independent existence (*existere*), adding the superlative *completely pure* to *esse* is simply a way of mentally isolating the positive attributes of *esse*, that is, of essence, while abstracting from any privations which might also accompany the notion of that essence as it actually exists in creatures. *Pure*, then, means *pure from non-being*, and *esse purissimum* is the notion of an essence which by definition does not involve non-being in any way: a completely pure or perfect essence. The fact that Bonaventure here avoids the terms *esse divinum* and *esse creatum* is the strongest indication that he thinks he is offering a purely rational, deductive argument for the existence of God.[57] The notion of *esse purissimum* does not presuppose the real existence of God, though it does imply that real existence. At this point in the argument, however, it may not yet be clear why the notion of *completely pure being* actually entails the real existence of God, so

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[57] Following van Steenberghen, Boehner (128) and Brown in his revision of Boehner (67) thought the self-evidence of God destroys the noetilogical inference: "it is obvious that the 'reasons' or proofs which St. Bonaventure offers for the existence of God, in so far as they *infer* the existence of God, are not considered by him as proofs or reasons which *first* make known the existence of God, since the existence of God is *evident in itself*, and is immediately known in the proposition 'God exists'." While the noetilogical argument did not take Bonaventure from a state of ignorance to a state of knowing that God exists, this fact in no way undermines the argument's probative force. Rather, the argument shows *why* God's existence, which all humans in some way know, *must be* true. These commentators assume that God's existence must be either self-evident *or* provable, whereas Bonaventure sees it as both self-evident *and* provable.

Bonaventure devotes the rest of this section of his text to this clarification.

What follows is his substitute for Anselm's negative *reductio*. Bonaventure modeled it on the way Avicenna had argued for the *principles* of metaphysics. At the outset of his *Metaphysics*, Avicenna had used three correlative notions—necessary, possible, and impossible—as differentiae dividing being. Since *impossible esse* is a contradiction in terms, this division of being produced as a framework for ontology two different levels of being: necessary being (*necesse esse*) and possible being (*possibile esse*).[58] Bonaventure follows Avicenna's mode of argument, analyzing being (*esse*) into its parts by using the Augustinian notion *pure* and its correlatives, rather than Avicenna's *necessary*. This yields three divisions of being: *esse purum*, *esse mixtum*, and *nihil de esse*. These notions refer respectively to God, creatures, and nothing.

Created beings exist contingently; and since each is a composite being, its essence (*esse*) does not entail that it exists (*existere*). Since such intermediary things are only a backdrop to Bonaventure's present concern, he bypasses them. In contrast with creatures, which are mid-level on this scale of being, the notions of complete nothingness (*omnino nihil*) and completely pure being (*esse purissimum*) do have implications for existence, absolutely opposed implications. "Complete nothing-ness" is logically inconsistent with real existence. Consequently, there is a perfectly valid inference from the *notion* (or quiddity) of nothing to non-being (*non-esse*). It is true to say nothing does not exist; and equally it is false to say that nothing exists. By a kind of analogy, Bonaventure uses the truth about *nothing* to open the mind to the opposite truth about *completely pure being*. If the nature of nothing entails

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[58] Avicenna, *Met.* 1.6 (ed. Van Riet) 1: 43.8-13. Dicemus igitur quod ea quae cadunt sub esse possunt in intellectu *dividi* in duo. Quorum unum est quod, cum consideratum fuerit per se, eius esse *non est necessarium*; et palam est etiam quod eius esse non est *impossibile*, alioquin non cadet sub esse, hoc est in termino possibilitatis. Alterum est quod, cum consideratum fuerit per se, eius esse erit *necesse*.

its non-existence, the nature of its opposite, *completely pure being*, entails real existence. Bonaventure thinks that making use of the categories of his own metaphysics in this comparative and positive way shows more effectively than merely backing the mind into a contradiction (as Anselm had done) why the noetilogical inference is valid.

As we have seen, Bonaventure knew that Aquinas admitted the divine essence entails the existence of God, but also held that humans do not know the divine essence and consequently cannot draw the noetilogical inference with certainty. The final point Bonaventure makes in this section, then, is simply to note that the noetilogical inference holds both in reality (as Aquinas admitted) and for our thought about reality. The reason he is confident we can understand his noetilogical argument is that its very terms are primordial notions all humans understand.

(3) The next section of text Bonaventure seems to have written with Thomistic agnosticism in mind. The basis for his argument thus far is not a notion of God, but the notion of an essence completely pure of non-being: *esse purissimum*. One might ask from where Bonaventure takes this notion, seemingly drawn from thin air. His reply is that conceptual analysis of the first of all notions—transcendental being (*ens*)—reveals that this notion does not depend on revelation, but is a metaphysical and purely rational notion all humans have:

> Now since non-being is the privation of being, it does not fall into the mind except through being; while being does not fall into the mind through something else. For everything which is thought of is either thought of as a non-being, or as a being in potency, or as a being in act. Therefore, if a non-being is intelligible only through a being, and a being in potency is intelligible only through a being in act, and being denominates the pure actuality of a being, it follows that being is that which first falls into the intellect, and that this being is that which is pure actuality.[59]

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[59] *Itin.* 5.3; 5: 308: Cum autem non-esse privatio sit essendi, non cadit in intellectum nisi per esse; esse autem non cadit per aliud, quia omne, quod intelligitur, aut intelligitur ut non ens, aut ut ens in potentia, aut ut

To show what may not be immediately obvious, that all humans do have the notion of *esse purissimum* in their minds, Bonaventure begins this conceptual analysis with what Avicenna had said is obvious to all: the notion of transcendental being (*ens*). From the bottom to the top of the ontological hierarchy, one understands everything using the notion of being (*ens*). This opens up a new threefold division—*non ens, ens in potentia*, and *ens in actu*—because each individual creature is understood in terms of one or more of these notions. To understand *nothing* one must use the positive notion of a being (*ens*), and then mentally negate it, resulting in the notion *non-ens*. Within the realm of being, one understands a being in potency by reference to a being in act. But what makes a being in act intelligible to us? Here Bonaventure peers into the notion of a being (*ens*) and finds it has two component principles: independent existence (*existere*), which gives the being the potential to have a certain essence; and being (*esse*), the actuality of such an essence. It is *esse* rather than *existere* which "denominates the pure actuality of a being." Here actuality (*actus*) means 'that which makes the being actually intelligible, by giving it the actual essence it has.' This movement of *conceptual analysis* opens the mind to see that we can understand the kind of being (*ens*) a creature is only by referring to the notion of an act of being which is pure from non-being (*esse purum*), indeed, which is pure from *any* non-being (*esse purissimum*). Contained within the very *notion* of transcendental being (*ens*), and *a presupposition of our understanding the notion of transcendental being*, is the notion of being with no hint of non-being (*esse purissimum*). Even if only implicit, this notion must be present in the mind of anyone who understands being (*ens*), that is, everyone who understands anything at all.

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ens in actu. Si igitur non ens non potest intelligi nisi per ens, et ens in potentia non nisi per ens in actu; et esse nominat ipsum purum actum entis: esse igitur est quod primo cadit in intellectu, et illud esse est quod est purus actus.

(4) Once it has been shown that *esse purissimum* is a notion which implies real existence and that we all possess this notion as a component of the fundamental notion of a being (*ens*), it remains only to identify *esse purissimum* with God.   Bonaventure makes this final connection by resorting to yet a third conceptual analysis of being, this one involving his axiomatic middle term: *esse divinum*:

> But this is not particular being, which is limited being because mixed with potency, nor is it analogous being, because that has the least actuality, since it is to the least degree. Therefore, the result is that this being is divine being.[60]

Waiting until the end of his argument to introduce the divine essence (*esse divinum*) seems to have been Bonaventure's way of replying to Aquinas's criticism that the noetilogical argument is circular because it presupposes the *real* existence of the divine essence in beginning with that essence. Bonaventure's answer is that the inference to existence is based on the inferential middle term, the notion of *completely pure being*, and does not assume in its logic the real existence of God, divine being, or the divine essence. Only after proving the real existence of *esse purissimum* does he go on to identify the being so proven to exist with God.   While the notion, and therefore the reality, of God is lurking in the *notion* of being (*ens*) from the beginning, a process of analytic and deductive thinking is required to show *why* God was there all along.

The final step in this reasoning assumes yet another threefold division of being (*esse*).   Avicenna had distinguished the absolute consideration of essen-ces, without regard to the kind of being (*esse*) they enjoy, from existing essences, and he had further distinguished essence enjoying real being from essence having the intentional being which concepts have in the mind. Further distinguishing the real being of God from the

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[60] *Itin.* 5.3; 5: 308-9: Sed hoc non est esse particulare, quod est esse arctatum, quia permixtum est cum potentia, nec esse analogum, quia minime habet de actu, eo quod minime est. Restat igitur, quod illud esse est esse divinum.

real being of creatures yields three kinds of being: *esse divinum*, *esse particulare* (the real being of individual creatures), and *esse analogum*, Bona-venture's term for intentional being in the mind, so called because the mental concept is only analogous to the real essence it signifies. The concept has a formal likeness to that essence but is not really identical with it, since it is mental while what it signifies is real. Bonaventure's argument in this last section is that if *esse purissimum* really exists, as has been proven, it must exist in one of these three modes. Since particular and intentional being cannot be completely perfect, as *esse purissimum* must be, it remains that *esse purissimum* must be identical with the divine being, making this term but another name for God.

The starting point, then, for Bonaventure's noetilogical argument in the *Itinerarium* is the notion of *esse purissimum*, taken not in its subjective mode of existence as a concept in a human mind, but in its objective meaning,[61] that is, as signifying a certain kind of quiddity or essence. At the outset of the argument, this essence had not yet been proven really to exist, even if it is already thought or even known to exist

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[61] Cf. J. Seifert, "*Si Deus est Deus, Deus est*" 218, for whom the argument takes its "starting point in the *objective essence* and not in a *mere concept* of God." A concept has merely intentional existence but signifies the essence of a certain kind of object. When based on the kind of existence in the mind the concept of God has, the noetilogical argument takes the form of arguing that, since real being is better than intentional being, a *quo maius* with real being must be better than a *quo maius* without real being, and therefore must really exist. This construction of the argument does not proceed to the conclusion by way of a contradiction, but conceives of existence as simply one among many perfections which such a being must have. It must be rejected, as Seifert says. Correctly interpreted, the noetilogical argument is based on the *content* of a certain kind of essence, content which is really independent of the mode of existence concepts enjoy in the mind. This content necessarily implies the real existence of God.

through some other means of cognition, such as faith or common sense. The achievement of the noetilogical argument, as Bonaventure saw it, is twofold: it shows that this essence must really exist, and it shows that this essence is none other than God.

For those like Aquinas who demand that God's existence be demonstrated in strictly Aristotelian fashion, Bonaventure has two answers. First, he offered his illumination and aitiological arguments, which have securely empirical starting points. Aristotle himself, however, had recognized that principles cannot be demonstrated; they are acquired through a different kind of argument, one he called dialectical. In both modes of argument, one knows the conclusion through insight, but with this difference: The formal, deductive necessity in demonstrative arguments forces the mind to the conclusion and thereby to insight into the conclusion; while dialectical arguments do not 'coerce' insight in the way demonstrations do. Although Bona-venture never applied the term *dialectical* to his noetilogical argument for God's existence, the argu-ment has this one feature in common with dialectical arguments for principles: There is no substitute for intellectual insight (*intellectus*) into the real existence of God; and no argument modeled on the way one argues for principles could avoid the need for intuition to follow on the discursive reasoning of the argument itself. Bonaventure thought this was true of Anslem's argument, and of his own. His second answer, then, to those like Aquinas who find the noetilogical argument unsatisfying was that they ask it to do more than an argument for principles possibly could do. Such an argument cannot wring concessions from the mind in the way demonstration does, and asking it to do so is a kind of *ignoratio elenchi*.

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As is appropriate to Bonventure's conception of metaphysics, each of his routes to God involves a kind of exemplarity. In the illumination argument, God is an exemplar because the proximate efficient cause which injects certitude into human knowledge. We participate in a divine certainty which is beyond our

innate cognitive powers. Bonaventure's aitiological argument starts with the ontological truth found in every creature. Each creature is true to the extent that it realizes its own essence. But every creature imitates only imperfectly God's perfect realization of the divine essence. Consequently, the truth of the creature is a participation in the truth of God.

Finally, exemplar causality enters into Bonaventure's noetilogical argument because God's *esse* is the exemplar for how *esse* entails certain attributes. The *esse*, that is, the essence of a creature necessarily implies certain attributes. The *esse* of triangles entails their having three angles equal to 180 degrees; the *esse* of humans entails risibility. But no creature has *esse* which requires it to exist (*existere*). Since creatures are made to exist by another, they must have matter which allows them to 'stand apart' (*existere*) from their cause. Since existence in creatures is a function of their matter, no creature actually exists due merely to its form. But this is precisely what happens in God, the only pure form in the universe. Consequently, the divine form, which causes the divine essence (*esse*), must be the source of God's existence, for there is no other principle which could cause God to exist. Since *esse* is but the actuality given by form, it follows that the divine *esse* entails in God real existence. Consequently, the divine *esse* is an exemplar for the power of all *esse* to necessitate real consequences. By thus resorting to the proper principles of his own metaphysics, Bonaventure succeeded in making the noetilogical argument more strictly scientific.

We see here a profound point of comparison between Aquinas and Bonaventure. Both agree that God's nature should most properly be described as *esse* and that *esse* is a component principle in a created being (*ens*). Further, both agree that God is that principle as subsistent. For Aquinas, the essence of creatures is the source of knowledge of them, while their *esse* is obscure to us and we do not even have a properly formed concept of it.[62] It is no wonder that the God of St. Thomas—subsistent *esse*—is hidden from

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[62] I. Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers,* 2nd ed. (Toronto: PIMS, 1949) 190-215.

the human mind. For Bonaventure, God is also most properly described as *esse*. But for him, *esse* in creatures is the principle making them intelligible, different from the matter which clouds our understanding of them. Their *esse* is their form, or speaking more precisely it is caused by their forms. How could a God who is subsistent *esse*, in a metaphysics where *esse* is the source of intelligibility in each thing, be anything but supremely intelligible, both in itself (as even Aquinas admitted) and to us?

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