Divine Attributes

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1 The Formal Framework of the Debate about the Divine Attributes in Early Modern Scholasticism

Right from the beginning of medieval scholastic theology, the detailed discussion of the divine essence and the divine attributes figured among the staple topics in the theological teaching on God.[1] Gradually a summarizing, systematic way of dealing with them evolved in the form of an independent genre of theological treatise, as is already clearly illustrated by comparing Aquinas's *Summa* with the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard. In the 16th century, under the influence of Cajetan[2] and the early School of Salamanca, the *Summa theologiae* finally gained acceptance as the authoritative text on which to base theological instruction and literature. As a result, the structural scheme adopted by Aquinas became the established pattern on which to model the teaching on God. In addition, the enormous growth in volume and the wealth of detail contained in the treatises reinforced the distinguishing of two main parts: *De deo uno* and *De deo trino*. The best way of gaining an overview of the central works on the doctrine of God in early modern scholasticism and of their authors is to focus on the important schools deeply connected with the leading intellectual orders of the time, Dominicans, Jesuits, and Franciscans. This approach also makes it possible to note certain peculiarities in their manner of theological presentation.

It is striking that hardly any treatises on the *Prima pars* from the first and second generation of theologians from the School of Salamanca found their way into print. Only in more recent times have occasional pieces been published from those works of Francisco de Vitoria, Domingo de Soto, Melchor

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1 See Thomas Marschler, "Die Attribute Gottes in der katholischen Dogmatik," in *Eigenschaften Gottes: Ein Gespräch zwischen systematischer Theologie und analytischer Philosophie*, eds Thomas Marschler and Thomas Schärtl (Münster: 2016), 3–34.

2 See Thomas de Vio (Cajetan), *Commentaria in summam theologicam Sancti Thomae Aquinatis*, vol. 1: *Commentaria in primam partem summae theologiae* (Lier: 1892 [1st ed. 1508]). The text of his commentary is also printed along with that of Aquinas's *Summa theologiae* in the *Editio Leonina*.

Cano, Pedro de Sotomayor, Ambrosio de Salazar, Mancio de Corpus Christi, or Bartholomé de Medina that have come down to us in manuscript form.[3] The first large, printed commentary on the *Prima pars* from the Dominican School of Salamanca was written by Domingo Báñez.[4] It contains echoes of the voices of the preceding doctors. Likewise already published before 1600 was the treatise on the essential properties by Pedro de Ledesma.[5] Like Báñez, most Dominicans in the late 16th and 17th centuries fashioned their writings on the doctrine of God in the form of commentaries on Aquinas, as is testified by, for example, the *Elucidationes* of Serafino Capponi a Porreta[6] or the works of Giovanni Paolo Nazario[7] and Francisco Araujo.[8] The comprehensive *Cursus theologicus* by the Portuguese João Poinsot (John of St. Thomas)[9] is also closely modelled on Aquinas. A number of Dominicans freed themselves to a greater degree from the commentary pattern by concentrating on the "Controversies" (Sante Mariale[10]) or "Disputations" (Pedro de Godoy[11]) that can be linked with articles in Aquinas's *Summa*.

Among the Jesuits, the tendency to compose independent treatises began earlier and more consistently.[12] Whereas the theology of the first Jesuit

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3   Examples as well as information on the relevant manuscripts are to be found in Mauro Mantovani, *An Deus sit (Summa Theologiae I, qu. 2): Los comentarios de la "primera Escuela" de Salamanca* (Salamanca: 2007); idem, *La discussione sull'esistenza di Dio nei teologi domenicani a Salamanca dal 1561 al 1669: Studio sui testi di Sotomayor, Mancio, Medina, Astorga, Báñez e Godoy* (Rome: 2011); idem, "La critica di san Tommaso all'argomento ontologico (ST I, qu. 2, a. 1) nella lettura dei maestri domenicani della 'Scuola di Salamanca'," *Espíritu* 64 (2015), 97–120.

4   Domingo Báñez, *Scholastica commentaria in primam partem angelici doctoris S. Thomae* (Douai: 1614 [1st ed. 1584]).

5   Pedro de Ledesma, *De divina perfectione, infinitate et magnitudine* (Salamanca: 1596).

6   Serafino Capponi a Porreta, *Elucidationes formales in Summam theologiae divi doctoris Thomae de Aquino* (Venice: 1588).

7   Giovanni Paolo Nazario, *Commentaria et controversiae in primam partem Summae D. Thomae Aquinatis* (Venice: 1610).

8   Francisco Araujo, *In primam partem D. Thomae commentaria*, vol. 1–2 (Madrid: 1647).

9   João Poinsot, *Cursus theologici*, vol. 1–3 (Paris: 1931–1937 [1st ed. 1637–1643]).

10   Sante Mariale, *Bibliotheca interpretum ad universam Summam theologiae Div. Thomae Aquinatis*, vol. 1 (Venice: 1638).

11   Pedro de Godoy, *Disputationes theologicae in primam partem Divi Thomae*, 3 vols. (Venice: 1696 [1st ed. 1666]). Godoy's work was generously borrowed from by Jean Baptiste Gonet, *Clypeus theologiae Thomisticae contra novos eius impugnatores. Tom. 1: De Deo uno, trino, et angelorum creatore* (Paris: 1875 [1st ed. 1659]).

12   See Bernhard Knorn, "Theological Renewal after the Council of Trent? The Case of Jesuit Commentaries on the Summa Theologiae," *Theological Studies* 79 (2018), 107–127.

cardinal, Francisco de Toledo,[13] still largely retains the character of a commentary, the works by Luis de Molina,[14] Gregorio de Valencia,[15] Gabriel Vázquez,[16] and others appear as a combination of commentary and disputations following on from it thematically in which the topics pre-established in Aquinas are markedly expanded and given their own distinct emphases. Francisco Suárez already composed his treatise *De deo uno* entirely as a sequence of such disputations, dispensing completely with commentaries on Aquinas's text.[17] This approach subsequently continued to be taken by most Jesuit authors. Their rich literary output in the 17th-century covers every facet of how the theology of the time was able to treat the essence and attributes of God. The "Disputations" on the *Prima pars* cover the whole spectrum of subjects dealt by Aquinas[18] or selected parts of it. The names of these elaborations differ more than their contents: *Cursus theologicus* (F. Amico, T. Compton Carleton, M. de Esparza Artieda), *Theologia speculativa* (C. Haunold, J. de Marin), *Praelectiones theologicae* (T. Mlodzianowski), *Tractatus theologici* (V. Herice, A. Pérez, R. Lynch), *Quaestiones theologicae* (F. Albertini, S. Mauro), *Theologia scholastica* (A. Tanner, D. Alarcón, F. de Lugo, J. Ulloa), *Problemata theologica* (D. de Avendaño), *Assertiones theologicae* (P. Sforza Pallavicino), *Summa* (M. Becanus, L. Ribas). In these works, too, the teaching on the divine attributes was either comprehensive or merely selective. Occasionally, disquisitions *De essentia Dei et attributis* were published as separate treatises (M. Borrull,[19] T. Muniessa[20]). Leonard Lessius also included the spiritual relevance of the doctrine of attributes.[21] The *Dogmata theologica* of Denis de Petau (Petavius)

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13   Francisco de Toledo, *In Summam theologiae S. Thomae Aquinatis enarratio*, vol. 1 (Rome: 1869).

14   Luis de Molina, *Commentaria in primam D. Thomae partem, in duos tomos divisa* (Concha: 1592).

15   Gregorio de Valencia, *Commentariorum theologicorum tomus primus* (Ingolstadt: 1597).

16   Gabriel Vázquez, *Commentariorum in primam partem S. Thomae tomus primus/secundus* (Ingolstadt: 1609 [1st ed. 1598]).

17   Francisco Suárez, *De deo uno et trino*, in idem, *Opera omnia* 1 (Paris: 1856 [1st ed. 1606]).

18   Especially detailed treatises by Jesuits on the doctrine of God are for example: Cristovão Gil [Gillius], *Commentaria theologica de sacra doctrina et essentia atque unitate Dei* (Cologne: 1610); Girolamo Fasolo [Fasolus], *In primam partem Summae S. Thomae Commentaria* (Lyon: 1623); Louis Le Mairat [Maeratius], *Disputationes in Summam theologicam S. Thomae*, 3 vols (Paris: 1633); Giulio Cesare Recupito, *Theologia. Tractatus primus de Deo uno: Pars prima et secunda* (Naples: 1637–1642); Leonardo Peñafiel, *Tractatus et disputationes in primam partem Divi Thomae*, 2 vols (Lyon: 1663–1666) [2nd ed. under the title: *Theologia scholastica naturalis* (Lyon: 1678)].

19   Matthias Borrull, *De essentia, attributis et visione Dei* (Lyon: 1664).

20   Tomas Muniessa, *Disputationes de essentia et attributis Dei* (Barcelona: 1687).

21   Leonard Lessius, *De perfectionibus moribusque divinis* (Paris: 1881 [1st ed. 1620]).

stands out for the fact that it classifies its subjects according to the scholastic scheme, but as far as content is concerned presents them in a way that takes its positive-theological bearings almost exclusively from Patristic sources.[22]

Seventeenth-century Franciscan theologians normally avoided adopting Aquinas's *Summa* as the text on which to base their discussions. Instead, these were either loosely linked to Lombard's *Sentences* (B. Mastri,[23] M. Pérez de Quiroga[24]) or took the form of a discussion of Scotus's *Ordinatio* (F. Fabri[25]). Just as with the other schools, here, too, one encounters free forms of thematic disputations (T. Smising[26]) or controversies (A. Briceño[27]) and their presentation in a *Cursus theologicus* (J. Punch [Poncius].[28]) Often the title itself already expressed their indebtedness to the teaching of John Duns Scotus, which his order's school sought to develop in a systematic form.[29] A distinguishing comparison with the teaching of the Thomists is offered by the *Controversiae* of Juan de Rada.[30] Occasionally, however, even Scotist works have been modelled according to the structure of Aquinas's *Summa*.[31]

With theologians who did not belong to any of the orders named so far, their relationship to the major schools or school authorities must be clarified on a case-by-case basis. Among those writings belonging to the Thomist school are

22   Denis de Petau [Petavius], *Dogmata theologica*, vols. 1–3 (Paris: 1865 [1st ed. 1643–1650]).

23   Bartolomeo Mastri, *Disputationes theologicae in libros sententiarum*, vol. 1 (Venice: 1698 [1st ed. 1655]). On his doctrine of God also: Marco Forlivesi (ed.), *"Rem in seipsa cernere": Saggi sul pensiero filosofico di Bartolomeo Mastri (1602–1673)* (Padua: 2006).

24   Martin Pérez de Quiroga, *Disputationes theologicae in primum librum sententiarum ad mentem doctoris subtilis Ioannis Duns Scoti*, 3 vols (Segovia: 1704–1708).

25   Filippo Fabri, *Disputationes theologicae librum primum Sententiarum complectentes* (Venice: 1613).

26   Theodor Smising, *Disputationum theologicarum tomus primus de Deo uno* (Antwerp: 1624).

27   Alonso Briceño, *Prima pars celebriorum controversiarum in primum Sententiarum Ioannis Duns Scoti*, 2 vols (Madrid: 1638–1642).

28   John Punch, *Integer theologiae cursus ad mentem Scoti* (Paris: 1652).

29   See Claude Frassen, *Scotus Academicus seu universa Doctoris Subtilis theologica dogmata*, vol. 1 (Rome: 1900).

30   Juan de Rada, *Controversiae theologicae inter s. Thomam et Scotum* (Salamanca: 1586).

31   "Eventually, only the Franciscan-Scotist tradition would remain an anti-Thomistic fortress, but sometimes rebuilt according to a Thomist plan: the Neapolitan Franciscan Angelo Volpi (d. 1647) composed a multi-volume Scotist *Summa Theologiae Scoti* (1622–46) but organized its contents as Aquinas did, and Girolamo da Montefortino (1662–1738) composed a work that completely mimics the Summa in Scotistic terms". Jacob Schmutz, "From Theology to Philosophy: The Changing Status of the Summa Theologiae, 1500–2000," in *Aquinas's* Summa Theologiae: *A Critical Guide*, ed. Jeffrey Hause (Cambridge: 2018), 221–241, 225. See Angelo Volpi, *Sacrae theologiae summa*, pars 1, vol. 1 (Naples: 1622); Girolamo da Montefortino, *Duns Scoti Summa Theologica ex universis eius operibus concinnata*, 5 vols (Rome: 1900–1903).

the Commentary on the *Prima pars* by the Mercedarian Francisco Zumel[32] and the famous *Cursus Salmanticensis* written by various Carmelite theologians of the convent of San Elias.[33] The Carmelite Raimundo Lumbier[34] exemplifies this greater independence from being bound to a particular school.

While the doctrine of the divine attributes does not play a central role in modern research into post-Tridentine scholasticism, its connections with philosophy assured it of greater scholarly attention than other purely theological topics. A number of comparative studies have been produced on the various early modern scholastic positions regarding proof of the existence of God. These pay particular attention to renewed variants of the ontological proof of God,[35] though only with respect to a small number of attributes. The studies by Igor Agostini[36] on the infinity and unity of God and of Jacob Schmutz[37] on the relationship between God's intellect and the possible things cover the full breadth of the literature of the epoch. Krzysztof Charamsa[38] has investigated selected Dominicans with respect to their teaching on the immutability

32 Francisco Zumel, *De Deo eiusque operibus, commentaria in primam partem S. Thomae Aquinatis,* vols 1–2 (Salamanca: 1585–1587).

33 See *Collegii Salmanticensis fratrum discalceatorum cursus theologicus summam theologicam Angelici Doctoris D. Thomæ complectens,* vols 1–2 (Paris: 1870–76 [1st ed. 1631]).

34 Raimundo Lumbier, *Tractatus primus de essentia et attributis* (Zaragoza: 1677).

35 See Ramón Ceñal, "El argumento ontológico de la existencia de Dios en la Escolástica de los siglos XVII y XVIII," in *Homenaje a Xavier Zubiri,* ed. Agustín Albarracín Teulún, vol. 1 (Madrid: 1970), 247–325 and the already cited (n. 3) works of M. Mantovani.

36 See Igor Agostini, *L'infinità di Dio: Il dibattito da Suárez a Caterus. 1597–1641* (Rome: 2008); idem, "Sull'unità di Dio in Descartes e nella Scolastica moderna," in *Saperi in dialogo: Scritti in onore di Mario Signore,* 2 vols, eds Virgilio Cesarone et al. (Naples: 2005), II, 227–238; idem, "Oltre la *distinctio rationis*: L'inclusione reciproca degli attributi divini nella Scolastica moderna," *Divus Thomas (P)* 34 (2008), 62–99.

37 See Jacob Schmutz, *La querelle des possibles: Recherches philosophiques et textuelles sur la métaphysique jésuite espagnole, 1540–1767.* 3 vols (Brussels: 2003); idem, "Un Dieu indifférent: La crise de la science divine durant la scolastique moderne," in *Le contemplateur et les idées: Modèles de la science divine du néoplatonisme aux temps modernes,* eds Olivier Boulnois, Jean-Luc Solère, and Jacob Schmutz (Paris: 2002), 185–221; idem, "Le miroir de l'univers: Gabriel Vázquez et les commentateurs jésuites," in *Sur la science divine,* eds Jean-Christophe Bardout and Olivier Boulnois (Paris: 2002), 383–411; idem, "Sebastián Izquierdo: De la science divine à l'ontologie des états de choses," in *Sur la science divine,* eds Jean-Christophe Bardout and Olivier Boulnois (Paris: 2002), 412–435; idem, "Dieu est l'idée: La métaphysique d'Antonio Pérez (1599–1649) entre Néo-Augustinisme et crypto-Spinozisme," *Revue Thomiste* 103 (2003), 495–526; idem, "Science divine et métaphysique chez Francisco Suárez," in *Francisco Suárez: "Der ist der Mann." Libro Homenaje al Profesor Salvador Castellote Cubells* (Valencia: 2004), 347–359.

38 See Krysztof Olaf Charamsa, *L'immutabilità di Dio: L'insegnamento di San Tommaso d'Aquino nei suoi sviluppi presso i commentatori scolastici* (Rome: 2002).

of God. Most other contributions on the doctrine of God in early modern Scholasticism concentrate on its important authors individually,[39] above all on Francisco Suárez.[40] In addition, aspects of the doctrine of God's essential properties appear in works from that period dealing with metaphysics and Trinitarian theology.[41]

2   Definition and Classification of the Divine Attributes according to Francisco Suárez

In order to understand the significance and structure of the treatise on God's essence and attributes in the scholastic theology of the early modern period it is helpful to look at one of those authors who preceded their discussion of the individual attributes with reflections on their general characterisation and internal order (i.e. a chapter *de attributis in communi*). The respective chapter from the doctrine of God by the Jesuit Francisco Suárez (1548–1617) suggests itself as suited to this purpose in that it is comparatively detailed and remained an important reference text for theologians of all schools over the subsequent decades.

What Suárez has to say in the proem to his work *De Deo uno*, first published in 1606, can itself be regarded as representative of reflection on God's essence in 17th-century scholastic theology. He points to the great proximity of the chapters on "God as one" to philosophical theology, which belongs to the subject area of metaphysics.[42] The theological treatise confirms and complements from the perspective of supernatural revelation what can already be said about God through natural reason. Nevertheless, not a great deal is added to philosophical theology by way of strictly supernatural content. Suárez points to the calling of the creatures to the beatific vision and to the closely connected topic of predestination. For this reason, he wishes his theological teaching on God to be read in close conjunction with the earlier *Disputationes metaphysicae*,

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39   See, e.g. Gian Pietro Soliani, *L'apparire del bene: Metafisica e persona in Antonio Pérez S.J.* (*1599–1649*) (Bari: 2018).

40   To mention just two monographs: Josef Leiwesmeier, *Die Gotteslehre bei Franz Suarez* (Paderborn: 1938); Aza Goudriaan, *Philosophische Gotteserkenntnis bei Suarez und Descartes im Zusammenhang mit der niederländischen reformierten Theologie und Philosophie des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Leiden: 1999).

41   See Thomas Marschler, *Die spekulative Trinitätslehre des Francisco Suárez S. J. in ihrem philosophisch-theologischen Kontext* (Münster: 2007).

42   See Francisco Suárez, *De deo uno*, Prooemium, in idem, *Opera omnia*, vol. 1 (Paris: 1856), XIII.

within which Disp. 30 "Concerning first being insofar as it can be known by natural reason"[43] already offers a detailed doctrine of the divine attributes.

Theologia naturalis is occasionally even to be found in the Jesuit literature of the subsequent period – as was also common among authors belonging to Protestant Orthodoxy (Alsted, Scheibler, Heinsius, Calov) and still in 19th-century Catholic Neo-Scholasticism – as the title of metaphysically orientated teaching on God (Raynaud, Peñafiel). Now and again the treatment of the attributes in metaphysics could be used as an argument to ignore them completely in the disputations on the *Prima pars* as long as "supernatural theology" was not being touched on.[44] Although most of the philosophy courses written by Jesuits (e.g. Hurtado de Mendoza, Arriaga, Oviedo, Bernaldo de Quiros) have distinctly briefer chapters than Suárez devoted especially to the *ens supremum*, they nevertheless do regularly contain scattered statements on the doctrine of attributes.

As was already the case in Thomas Aquinas, the reflection *de deo uno* in the post-Tridentine epoch takes the question of God's existence as its starting point and from there proceeds to look at God's essence (his *quid*) and the attributes that (for us) explain this essence.[45]

Since God, unlike the creatures, is essentially "being," he can be fully called "substance"; as such he is independent of every other ontological bearer (*subiectum*). Nevertheless, he is at the same time clearly distinguished from creaturely substances in that he does not possess any mutable properties (accidents).[46] The detailed discussion of the subsistence of this substance (the incommunicable *esse per se*) is relegated to Trinitarian theology since according to Christian belief it cannot be adequately performed by natural reason alone. Some of the authors who came after Suárez supported this way of proceeding[47] whereas others did in fact include chapters on it in the treatise *De essentia et attributis*.[48]

43   Francisco Suárez, *Disputationes metaphysicae*, in idem, *Opera omnia*, vol. 26 (Paris: 1877), 60a-224b.

44   See Bernardo Aldrete, *Commentarii ac disputationes in primam partem Divi Thomae* (Lyon: 1662), vol. 1, tr. 1, praefatio, 1: "De unitate Dei, et perfectionibus quae ad Dei existentiam, eiusque unitatem consequuntur, disputavi in Metaphysica, ubi naturalem Theologiam investigavi."

45   On the origin of speaking explicitly of "attributes" in scholasticism, see Recupito, *Theologia*, vol. 1, l. 3, qu. 1, cap. 1, n. 1, 159b.

46   See Suárez, *De deo uno*, lib. 1, cap. 3, n. 4, *Op*. 1, 9a-b.

47   See Recupito, *Theologia*, vol. 1, lib. 3, cap. 2, n. 5, 161b.

48   For example Lumbier, *Tractatus primus de essentia et attributis*, qu. 5, a. 3-4, n. 192-207, 58-62; Muniessa, *De essentia et attributis*, disp. 6, 99a-118b.

The highly controversial debate among theologians on the recognition of an "absolute subsistence" of the divine essence anterior to or alongside the relative subsistences (the divine persons) is even more frequently conducted within the context of Trinitarian theology. From the fundamental statement about the substantial character of God, Suárez derives further determinations of essence.[49] God's being is spiritual, not physical. God is essentially living, existing in the form of purest knowledge totally uninfluenced by any instance other than himself. He is absolutely simple, and for this reason also incapable of entering into any kind of composition.[50] The transcendental properties belonging to every being as such can also be predicated of God.[51] He is one and unique, true (knowable) and good (appetible). Since it is necessary in order to elucidate these attributes first to discuss the perfections expressed in them in general, the scholastic treatises on God are frequently important sources for the philosophical teaching on the transcendentals.

Beyond these *praedicata transcendentia*, the Bible and the faith tradition contain other predicates that can be attributed to God. It is only with these, so Suárez argues, that one enters the sphere of *attributa divina* in the proper sense.[52] Their possibility is grounded in the fact that in their earthly knowledge of God human beings are incapable of grasping the perfection of God "as it is in itself." We can only express it in various "concepts and names" that are attributed to God ("attribuuntur Deo") based on the creatures. In recognising a multiplicity of these attributes, the post-Tridentine authors generally reject the reservation expressed in nominalism that this jeopardizes the undividedness of the divine essence.

With respect to the divine attributes, Suárez first of all distinguishes predicates belonging in the proper sense to God from those that can be attributed to him in a merely figurative, metaphorical sense.[53] Among the former are those which in a formal respect do not imply any imperfection, i.e. pure perfections. It is always a feature of them that they are in no way bound to materiality, which, as has already been shown, does not belong to God. If this criterion is not fulfilled, only a metaphorical attribution is possible, and the predicates

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49   See Suárez, *De deo uno*, lib. 1, cap. 3, n .5–16, *Op.* 1, 9b-12b.
50   See ibid. c. 4–5, *Op.* 1, 13a-18a.
51   See ibid. c. 6–8, *Op.* 1, 18a-26a.
52   See ibid. c. 9, n. 2, *Op.* 1, 26b. On alternative ways, differing in nuance, of understanding "attribute" in the doctrine of God see Francisco de Lugo SJ, *Theologia scholastica in primam partem S. Thomae* (Lyon: 1647), disp. 16, c. 1, 163b-165a; Peñafiel, *Tractatus et disputationes*, vol. 1, disp. 2, s. 1, 92a-95a.
53   See Suárez, *De deo uno*, lib. 1, cap. 9, n. 2, *Op.* 1, 26b-27a.

employed in this manner must be traceable back to the former. They have no substantive role to play within a scientific doctrine of God, even though they are frequently used in the Bible.

In a second step, Suárez distinguishes negative and positive predicates for God. A number of attributes belong unquestionably to the first (*increatus, incorporeus, infinitus, immensus, immutabilis, incomprehensibilis, invisibilis, ineffabilis*[54]), whereas the assignment of others is disputed (*simplex, unus, aeternus*[55]). Clearly among the positive attributes are some of those treated under the transcendental properties of the divine essence (*ens/res, verum, bonum*), while further affirmative predicates which express a less general perfection can only be applied to God from the creatures.[56] They capture God's essence either under a "generic concept" (*substantia, spiritus, vivens, intellectualis*) or under one that indicates a determination in the creaturely sphere which completes and perfects the essence (*duratio, praesentia, intellectus, voluntas, potentia*). The predicates obtained in this way each call for further sub-differentiations. According to Suárez, all God's attributes can be embraced using the classifications described here. Whereas the negative determinations are largely undisputed, the justification of the positive attributes has been contested in approaches advanced by a consistently apophatic theology that could be associated from the medieval tradition with the names of Moses Maimonides and Avicenna.[57] Suárez opposes this thesis with, among other things, the argument that it is incapable of doing justice to how God is spoken of in Holy Scripture, where, for example, God's (positive) love for the creatures is absolutely indispensable. He also calls to mind the significance of the positive attributes for the theological understanding of the mystery of the Trinity, i.e. in order to explain the processions within the Godhead on the basis of the divine acts of knowing and willing.[58] This underlines the fact that for the scholastic authors the doctrine of the divine attributes is the (philosophical) basis for Trinitarian theology. According to Suárez, the objections on the part of negative theology can be avoided by knowing with Aquinas[59] how to distinguish between the formal content of a positive attribute, the *res formaliter significata*, which contains no imperfection of any kind, and the *modus significandi*,

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54   See ibid. n. 4, 27a-b.
55   See ibid. n. 5, 27b.
56   See ibid. n. 6–7, 27b-28a.
57   See De Lugo, *Theologia scholastica*, disp. 18, cap. 1, n. 2–3, 205.
58   See Suárez, *De deo uno*, lib. 1, cap. 9, n. 9, *Op.* 1, 28b.
59   See Thomas Aquinas, *S. Th.* I, 13.

which turns out differently when referring to something creaturely from when it refers to God.[60]

Finally, a third classification of the attributes distinguishes between predicates that are "absolute" (referring to God in himself) and those that are "respective" (describing God's relationship to the creatures).[61] Among the latter, some of them belong necessarily to God because they relate to the creatures insofar as, according to their eternal status of possibility, they are to be found in God himself or even express a transcendental relationship of God to these creatures (e.g. *omnipotentia; idea/ratio rei factibilis; scientia simplicis intelligentiae*). Others, however, lack this necessity because they denote a relationship of God to the actual creation that was realised in freedom (e.g. *creatio, dominium*). Whether the last-mentioned attributes can in the proper sense be predicated of God is, according to Suárez, a matter of debate among theologians. In the field of God's relationship to the creatures, it is possible to imagine a limitless multiplication of divine attributes since in this respect God can be grasped from ever new aspects. On the other hand, as far as the predicates describing God's essence are concerned, the assumption of a limited number suggests itself since we can only find a specific series of generic-predicamental determinations in the creatures that can be applied analogously to God.[62]

From these preliminary reflections it is possible to understand better the structure Suárez follows in his treatment of the essence and attributes of God in *De deo uno*. After considering those (negative as well as positive) determinations which belong directly to the essence (Treatise 1, Book 1), in Books 2 and 3 which follow he discusses the further negative and positive attributes that he has previously distinguished, arranging them in a way that likewise reflects the already mentioned intrinsic interdependence of the individual notions. The detail in which Suárez examines the problem of how God can or cannot be seen[63] by the rational creature is in line with the relevance of this topic in particular for the foundation of the whole supernatural order. For the same reason, the treatment of predestination is even moved to its own treatise, following the first on the divine essence and attributes. In a third major treatise, Suárez is discussing Trinitarian theology.

Whereas the material listing of the attributes as found in Suárez is repeated among contemporary authors without varying to any great extent across the boundaries of the different schools, there are differences in the classification

60 See Suárez, *De deo uno*, lib. 1, cap. 9, n. 10–11, *Op.* 1, 28b–29b.
61 See ibid. n. 12–13, 29b–30a.
62 See ibid. n. 16, 30b.
63 See ibid. lib. 2, c. 5–30, *Op.* 1, 58b–181b.

schemes[64] and, consequently, various possible sequences in which the individual attributes are treated. Authors who adhere more closely to the model of Thomas Aquinas occasionally endeavoured to offer an explicit justification of his arrangement such as can be found, for instance, in the explications provided by John of St. Thomas.[65] Scotists like to group important (negative) essential predicates together under the title "intrinsic modes" before treating the attributes derived from the creatures in the narrower sense.[66] The extent to which evidence is adduced from Scripture and tradition varies from author to author. Among the Jesuits before Petavius, this type of argumentation was greatly valued, in particular by Vázquez, Fasolo, and Ruiz de Montoya. Later authors were fond of making use of the material collected by them and referring to it when they themselves restricted their writings predominantly to the speculative contents.[67]

3   Core Issues from the Discussion about God's Essence and Attributes in Early Modern Scholastic Theology

By no means all scholastic authors developed the chapters on God's essence and attributes in such great detail as Suárez. Above all in the second half of the seventeenth century the overall topic decreased appreciably in relevance. Instead, the discussion focussed more and more on particular specific problems. Questions regularly treated in the chapter on the attributes in general were those of the metaphysical essence of God and of the metaphysical distinctions in God. By contrast, a treatment of all the individual attributes was quite often dispensed with. Instead the specific discussions on the cognizability of God by the creatures (*de visione Dei*, including eschatological problems,

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64 See, e.g., Diego de Avendaño SJ, *Problemata theologica*, vol. 1 (Antwerp: 1668), s. 2, probl. 4, diff. 4, n. 257, 194b; Lumbier, *Tractatus primus*, qu. 4, a. 1, n. 142–150, 44–46.

65 See Poinsot, *Cursus theologici*, vol. 1, Ordinatio primae partis, 151–154. The author distinguishes between (1) the attributes belonging to the entitative order; (2) those belonging to the *cognoscibilitas passiva* (since cognizability is a consequence of being); (3) the attributes belonging to the active order.

66 For example, the titles of the first tree chapters of the treatise *De deo uno* in the popular Scotus handbook by Jean Gabriel Boyvin, *Theologia Scoti*, vol. 1 (Paris: 1665; repr. 1688) are: (1) De praedicatis pure quidditativis naturae Dei; (2) De modis intrinsecis naturae Dei; (3) De praedicatis non pure quidditativis, seu de attributis essentiae Dei.

67 See Rodrigo de Arriaga SJ, *Disputationes theologicae in primam partem D. Thomae*, vol. 1 (Antwerp: 1643), Praefatio, XVIII; Antonio Bernaldo de Quiros SJ, *Selectae disputationes theologicae de Deo* (Lyon: 1654), tr. 2, praefatio, 42–43.

occasionally also in association with the divine attribute of *incomprehensibilitas* or *veritas*), on God's knowledge (*de scientia Dei*), his will (*de voluntate Dei*) as well as his providence and predestination (*de providentia et praedestinatione*) became increasingly complex, with the result that they could even take the form of independently published treatises.[68] The chapters on the knowledge and will of God contained a detailed reflection on every possible object; corresponding explications are to be found in philosophical teaching on intellect and will, but also in similar sections of Christology and angelology. These attributes (which had already been given special emphasis in medieval commentaries on the Sentences) also became of interest because dealing with them provided important foundations for the theology of grace, a subject that was discussed in great depth in the early modern period. In the following, I will examine two main topics mentioned in Suárez's chapter *De attributis in communi* (3.1–2) and illustrate the basic outlines of the discussion of one individual attribute (3.3).

3.1   *The Metaphysical Doctrine of Distinctions as Applied to God*

There was hardly a scholastic writer who could fail to take account in his teaching on God of the great issue of the possibility of a distinction between God's essence and his attributes or between the attributes among themselves. Unlike all the other schools, the Scotists answered this in the positive. It was popular to place the debate on this topic in the general chapters about the doctrine of attributes, but it also kept reappearing in the more specific ones. This issue is crucial in deciding whether one wants to concede an *ordo naturae* in God and the possibility that the divine essence could be beheld without the Trinitarian relations. It is also highly relevant for God's relationship to the objects of his knowledge and for countless aspects of Trinitarian theology, which means that one encounters the topic in treatises *de trinitate* as well. From what has been said, it becomes clear why it was possible to declare the treatise on God's essence and attributes to be the very "source of the rest of theology."[69]

All scholastic authors share the premise already established by the medieval discussion that there is no question of a real distinction in the strong sense ("sicut res a re") in God as regards either his absolute predicates or between absolute and relative predicates because this would destroy the unity and simplicity of God. In accordance with the dogmatic axiom "In deo omnia sunt

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68   Well-known examples from the Jesuit school are the extensive works of Gaspar de Ribadeneyra or Diego Ruiz de Montoya.

69   Bernaldo de Quiros, *Selectae disputationes de deo*, tr. 2, 41: "[tractatus] est veluti frons. sive longe veriore dictione, fons reliquae theologiae."

unum, ubi non obviat relationis opposition," such a distinction can only be assumed between the relations (persons) within the Godhead. For this reason, many scholastics of the early modern period teach explicitly the multi-pliability of all transcendental predicates together with the three divine Persons (*tres res, veritates, bonitates [relativae]*, etc.).[70]

Among the special hallmarks of the Scotist school is the assumption of a 'smaller' real distinction which claims to be able to offer a foundation for the truth of our differentiating descriptions of God without thereby questioning God's unity.[71] This distinction has mostly become known under the title *distinctio formalis* but should be more accurately characterized as maintaining a *non identitas formalis* of certain contents in God. It proceeds from the assumption that conceptual distinctions which we make when describing a thing are based on an ontological differentiation within the thing itself without its unity being affected by this. What we grasp "as something" within a real entity as an aspect of its metaphysical constitution must already be something "in" the thing itself independently of our grasping it.[72] The thing itself makes a differentiated knowledge of it possible through the formal contents that it includes. Against this background, certain perfections such as knowing and willing can be ascribed formal reality even when speaking about God. Because the pure perfections of God all exist in the intrinsic mode of infiniteness (whereas in the creatures they are only present in a finite way), their formal distinction does not destroy the simplicity of God. The opponents of the formal distinction have registered their doubts regarding this point in that they have accused the Scotist model of introducing composition into God after all.

Outside the Scotist school, the distinction of absolute predicates (and also the distinguishing of essence from the relations) is regarded as being in principle one that exists for our understanding, i.e. as a *distinctio rationis*. However, since about 1500 this concept had been further differentiated in two ways.[73] A *distinctio rationis ratiocinantis* is understood as one that is grounded solely in

70 See Marschler, *Die spekulative Trinitätslehre*, 245–311.

71 See, with further examples, Mastri, *Disputationes in primum librum Sententiarum*, qu. 2, a. 2, n. 19, 17a; on his Scotist theory of metaphysical distinctions: Claus A. Andersen, *Metaphysik im Barockscotismus: Untersuchungen zum Metaphysikwerk des Bartholomaeus Mastrius* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: 2016), 723–839.

72 See Bernaldo de Quiros, *Selectae disputationes*, disp. 14, s. 1, n. 1, 65a: "separabilitas est signum distinctionis."

73 See Sven K. Knebel, "Distinctio rationis ratiocinantis: Die scholastische Unterscheidungslehre vor dem Satz 'A = A'," *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 44 (2002), 145–173; idem, "Entre logique mentaliste et métaphysique conceptualiste: La distinctio rationis ratiocinantis." *Les Études Philosophiques* 60 (2002), 145–168.

human thinking, which establishes a connection between two things that are independent of one another. If it were to be raised to the status of a paradigm for our statements about God, these would be bound to lose all reality content. Here one has rather to assume a *distinctio rationis ratiocinatae*, in which our distinctions have a foundation in the object of reference itself. When applied to God, this means that although God is in himself a single, undivided reality, the infinite sublimity of this reality renders an adequate description of it impossible for us; when we speak about God, we do this in a way analogous to our description of creaturely realities, using various predicates. The Thomist and Jesuit schools tend to speak in this context of a *distinctio virtualis* in God, thus taking up an expression already found in Thomas Aquinas and the medieval theologians following after him which speaks of a "virtual containment" (e.g. of the effect in the cause, the conclusion in the premises).[74] This means that in the proper sense "the *distinctio virtualis* is not a distinction but rather a certain enabling (*virtus*) of the distinction" or an "equivalent to the distinction."[75] In the second half of the 17th century, the virtual distinction is further differentiated[76] within the Jesuit school.[77] A weaker form, the *distinctio virtualis extrinseca*, is assumed where, when describing God's undivided reality, we use creaturely points of reference which differ really from one another but likewise point back to God as their efficient cause. This distinction is undeniably the starting point for distinguishing divine attributes; we confess, for example, that God "is" just as well as merciful, because his undivided essence is the source of his just *and* merciful acting in the world. The stronger variant, the *distinctio virtualis intrinseca*, says that God's essence in itself is equivalent to different formalities to which contradictory predicates can be assigned. For some Jesuits the concept serves as a starting point for a sympathetic interpretation of the Scotists' formal distinction, whereas others already dislike the terminological proximity to Scotus. This "metaphysics of the as-if" in order to construct logical sequences and dependencies in God's undivided essence is connected to the doctrine of *praecisiones obiectivae*.[78] The distinguishing of individual

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74 See Sven K. Knebel, "Virtualität. 1," *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* 11 (Basel: 2001), 1062–1066, here: 1062.

75 See Tirso González de Santalla SJ, *Selectae disputationes ex universa theologia*, vol. 1 (Salamanca: 1680), disp. 1, s. 2, n. 9, 3b.

76 See Agustin de Herrera SJ, *Tractatus de altissimo trinitatis mysterio* (Alcalá: 1674), qu. 2, s. 1, n. 2, 23.

77 See González de Santalla SJ, *Selectae disputationes*, disp. 1, s. 2, n. 9, 3a.

78 See the definition in Sylvester Mauro SJ, *Quaestiones theologicae de Deo trino, et uno*, lib. 2 (Rome: 1676), qu. 98, n. 24, 517: "Distinctio virtualis intrinseca est, per quam licet duo nullam habeant negabilitatem obiectivam, tamen non sunt omnino idem, sed

attributes made possible with the help of this virtual distinction and ranking them according to priority is especially significant within Trinitarian theology, which since Augustine relates the two processions within the Godhead to the spiritual enactment of *intellectio* and *volitio*.[79] A number of authors defend applying this distinction more widely so as to employ it, for example, in order to reconcile God's free decrees with his simplicity. Many others, however, restricted the intrinsic, "greater" virtual distinction – with its identification of contradictory predicates in a single reality encompassing them – strictly to the field of Trinitarian theology.[80] It has also been sharply criticised on account of the threat to basic rules of logic that it involves.[81] Reflection on "virtuality" and its relationship to "reality" in the scholastic doctrine of God can undoubtedly be regarded as significant in preparing the way for the reception of these concepts in the debates being conducted today in the communication and cultural sciences.

The concept of a *modal* distinction which is found developed in Suárez and many other Jesuit authors of the 17th century can be understood as another attempt to adopt to a limited degree the Scotist concern for a "lesser real distinction" without having to give up differentiating it from the formal distinction proper. The modal distinction is intended above all to illustrate the difference between a creaturely nature existing for itself and its subsistence. The theologians need it in order to explain how in the mystery of the Incarnation an integral human nature can be determined by another personality (that of the divine Logos) and "modified" into incommunicable subsistence. A direct transferral of this distinction into the doctrine of God is out of the question for all those authors who do not wish to be criticised for destroying the simplicity of the divine essence. Nevertheless, the influence of his teaching on modes, which strictly speaking only applies to the creaturely world, can be found,

distinguuntur ita, ut possint obiective praescindi, et possint verificari de ipsis praedicata alioquin contradictoria."

79 An example is Martin Perez ab Unanoa SJ, *De Deo ut trino* (Lyon: 1639), disp. 6, s. 1, n. 7, 44b.

80 See, for example, Arriaga, *Disputationes in primam partem*, disp. 42, s. 1, subs. 3, 466a: "... Trinitatis mysterii difficultas, quae sola ad hanc distinctionem ponendam nos cogit necessario" (Arriaga rejects a virtual distinction between the divine attributes); Martin de Esparza Artieda SJ, *Cursus theologicus*, vol. 1 (Lyon: 1666), lib. 1, qu. 4, a. 13, 16b-17a. Cf. also the warning in Felipe Aranda SJ, *In primam partem de Deo sciente, praedestinante et auxiliante: seu Schola Scientiae Mediae* (Zaragoza: 1693), lib. 1, 1, n. 73, 19a, to restrict the *conceptus virtuales* to the "munera maxime propria" of God.

81 See Knebel, "Virtualität," 1064, with reference to S. Izquierdo SJ; see also the overview in González de Santalla, *Selectae disputationes*, disp. 1, s. 2, n. 12–13, 3b-4a. Above all Vázquez and Granado are regarded as general opponents of the virtual distinction.

for example, in Suárez's Trinitarian theology inasmuch as *for us* the relations within the Godhead (presupposing their merely virtual distinguishability from the essence) appear as ultimate, (quasi-)modal determinations of the absolute essential nature.[82]

3.2   *The Question of the Metaphysical Essence of God*

A second discussion that is regularly conducted in the chapters "on the attributes in general" refers to the question of whether it is possible to name one in particular among the divine perfections that can be regarded as metaphysically constitutive of God's essence.

This question presupposes the distinction regularly made since the first half of the 17th century between a 'physical' and a 'metaphysical' essence of God. The *essentia physica* encompasses all the real properties of God, with statements about the relations within the Godhead often explicitly excluded because they refer only to the mode of divine subsistence.[83] By contrast, the *essentia metaphysica* is intended to emphasize that divine perfection which – for our understanding – primarily defines his essence and is prior to the other attributes (as their "root"). So, what we are dealing with here is once again the already mentioned question of whether one can assume that (as in the creatures) a graduated "order of predicates"[84] or an *ordo naturae* (at least when regarded virtually) exists in God as well. It is possible to distinguish three major trends among the authors in how they respond to this problem;[85] in particular the second and third of these trends can be further subdivided into individual positions. A clear assignment to individual schools hardly seems possible.[86] The classification of individual authors quite frequently varies along with the precise way in which the question is formulated, as the example of Suárez shows quite clearly.[87]

If a formal distinction between essence and attributes is just as much rejected as the possibility of singling out one of God's attributes as the root of all the others, one arrives at the first thesis, which equates the metaphysical essence with the physical. All the predicates of God (at least the absolute

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82   See Marschler, *Die spekulative Trinitätslehre*, 686.

83   See Muniessa, *De essentia et attributis Dei*, disp. 5, s. 5, n. 51–52, 85a.

84   Avendaño, *Problemata theologica*, n. 158, 83a.

85   See Frans Vanderveken [Vekenus] SJ, *Disputationes theologicae de Deo uno et trino* (Antwerp: 1655), disp. 3. c. 5, 56a.

86   See a detailed compilation of authors in Muniessa, *De essentia et attributis Dei*, disp. 5, s. 1, n. 9–11, 75a-76a.

87   See Briceño, *Prima pars celebriorum controversiarum*, vol. 1, contr. 1, a. 4, n. 11, 65a. "Franciscus Soarez in hac re anceps et varius a multis habitus est."

and necessary ones) are to be included in the formal concept of the divine essence.[88] Only in this way is the essence capable of being the source of all creaturely perfections. Because the perfections in God are really identical, no attribute can by its very nature be ranked above or below another; all attempts to do so go back to the human intellect and its orientation towards creaturely realities. The intention of rejecting all composition in God, even in the sense of a *compositio rationis*,[89] is at all events particularly pronounced among authors who can be seen as supporting the first thesis.

A second group of theologians seek the formal constitutive in one of those transcendental perfections of God which belong directly to the essence and can thus also be transferred to all the individual attributes. Most frequently mentioned in this connection is God's perfection as *ens a se*; this designates the impossibility of tracing God back to a cause outside himself. This seems to be the first and most fundamental property of God: he is pure actuality, and thus different from all creatures (without for this reason having to be called *causa sui*). It is argued in support of this that God's knowledge presupposes the essence as its first and determining object and is therefore metaphysically posterior to it. This can be illustrated with arguments advanced by the Jesuits Gil[90] or Amico.[91] Quite a number of Thomists, too, are counted as belonging to this school of thought inasmuch as they have maintained their teacher's understanding of being as *perfectio omnium perfectionum* or *actualitas omnium actualitatum* with its origin in God. Among Scotists it is disputed whether the *existentia (absoluta) Dei* or the *infinitas* as a transcendental mode represents that moment which ultimately constitutes the essence.[92]

A third route taken by way of explanation is to single out one attribute which primarily characterizes God, distinguishes him from all other beings and as such also implies the more general determinations of essence. Simply pointing to God's *esse a se* seems too vague to the proponents of this position. Analogously to defining man by maintaining that what specifically differentiates him from all other living beings is the fact that he is endowed with reason, numerous authors seek God's metaphysical constitutive in his intellectuality, that is, in the *esse intellectivum*[93] or the *intellectio actualis*.[94] Since the

88 See Recupito, *Theologia*, vol. 1, lib. 3, qu. 10, 268a-280a; Bernaldo de Quiros, *Selectae disputationes*, disp. 17, s. 6, 140a-b.

89 See Bernaldo de Quiros, *Selectae disputationes*, Index, qu. 3, a. 7, n. 53–54, 637a-b.

90 See Gil, *Commentaria theologica*, lib. 2, tr. 1, c. 3.14, 430a-434b.

91 Francisco Amico SJ, *Cursus theologicus*, vol. 1 (Douai: 1640), disp. 3, s. 4, n. 79–89, 46b-48a.

92 See Briceño, *Prima pars celebriorum controversiarum*, vol. 1, contr. 1, a. 4, n. 43–44, 74a-b, who himself advocates the first option; see contr. 5, a. 2, 260b-269b.

93 See Borrull, *De essentia*, disp. 5, s. 6, 213–218.

94 See Fasolus, *In Primam partem*, vol. 1, qu. 4, a. 2, dub. 7, 166b-168b.

distinction between *actus primus* and *secundus* (or between *intellectio radicalis* and *intellectio actualis*) is of no real significance in God and can again be expressed at best as a virtual distinction, these positions are basically identical. They regard divine knowledge as the epitome of his life and the root of all his actions. A few authors in addition expressly include God's willing in the definition of the metaphysical constitutive.[95] In historical retrospect, this third way opens up possibilities of mediating between scholasticism's metaphysical doctrine of God and the idealistic conceptions of God that played a crucial role in shaping the modern age that followed.

3.3 *Divine Omnipotence and Its Connection with the Problem of God's Relationship to Possible Creatures*

Within the limited scope of this chapter it is not possible to portray the discussion of all the individual attributes of God in early modern scholasticism. Instead, just one is to be selected as an example. We shall choose God's omnipotence because this predicate possesses an important close connection to the areas of God's knowing and willing – areas that, as we have already mentioned, were particularly intensively elaborated in the early modern period. Furthermore, divine omnipotence is among those properties that still today regularly receive attention in the philosophy of religion. We shall once again take texts from Suárez as our starting point.[96]

According to Suárez, we encounter God's omnipotence as that active potency which is the prerequisite for his works *ad extra*. The processions within the Godhead spoken of in Trinitarian doctrine are not conditioned by this potency. They are not to be understood as productions of effects by a cause. Rather they develop of a relationship between *producens* and *productum* that is peculiar to them. According to Suárez, the attribution of "omnipotence" to God follows from the statement, which is also philosophically sound, that God is the first cause of all creaturely things.[97] Based on what is for Suárez the central determination of God's essence, the concept is to be explained as far as its content is concerned as *ens infinitum*: like God's essence, the *potentia Dei*, too,

95   See the references in Bernaldo de Quiros, *Selectae disputationes*, disp. 17, s. 4, n. 32, 39b.

96   See Domenico Ferraro, "Il dibattito sulla Potentia Dei nella seconda scolastica," in *Potentia Dei: L'onnipotenza divina nel pensiero dei secoli XVI e XVII*, eds. Guido Canziani, Miguel A. Granada, and Yves Charles Zarka (Milan: 2000), 157–172; Mariano Álvarez, "La omnipotencia de Dios y el principio de contradicción en Francisco Suárez." in ibid., 173–193; Maria Socorro Fernández García, "La omnipotencia del absoluto en Suárez: La necesidad de una perfección infinita," *Revista Española de Filosofía Medieval* 18 (2011), 179–192.

97   See Francisco Suárez, *Disputationes metaphysicae*, disp. 30, s. 17, n. 2, *Op.* 26, 207a-b.

is a capacity which is of itself unlimited, indeed infinite, both intensively and extensively.

The *intensive* infiniteness of God's efficacy means that it is infinite in its perfection. This is shown in its implementation. God does not require some kind of mediating principle in order to act externally but possesses this capacity directly by virtue of his *essentia infinita*. God's omnipotence is independent of factors of any kind outside himself,[98] which for Suárez has the corollary that whatever a second cause is capable of bringing about God can realise by his own power. Furthermore, whenever he acts in creation, he acts freely, not out of necessity.

How is this intensively infinite potency also put into effect *extensively*, that is, with respect to its objects, as an infinite potency? Faced with this question, Suárez considers two answers to be unconvincing. On the one hand, the extensive infiniteness of the *potentia Dei* is not to be proved solely by arguing that God could at any time improve some quality of a thing or increase quantitative determinations. The extensive infiniteness of omnipotence is thus not guaranteed by the fact that God could always make a body faster or increase the number of stars in the heavens whenever he wanted. This would prove "too little" because both possibilities could also be realised by effective powers that are in principle limited. By contrast, it would be wanting to prove "too much" to hold that God as all-powerful must be in a position to produce a single "substance that is as such essentially infinite." For a being of this kind is to be considered self-contradictory for the creaturely sphere.[99] It would, after all, have to be omnipotent itself, which would contradict the character of its creatureliness at least to the extent that it would also imply an ability to produce itself and to detach itself from God's domain.[100] God's power *as omnipotence* cannot, however, be communicated to any creature. Suárez also sees it as an exaggerated attempt to offer proof to argue that extensively God's omnipotence must include the ability to bring about everything it is capable of *in one single act*.[101] Here, too, according to Suárez something is being stated that is impossible from the perspective of the creatures. On the contrary, God is not

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98 See Suárez, *De Deo uno*, lib. 3, c. 9, n. 3–5, *Op.* 1, 225a-b.

99 See Suárez, *De Deo uno*, lib. 3, c. 9, n. 9, *Op.* 1, 226b-227a.

100 See Suárez, *Disputationes metaphysicae*, disp. 30, s. 17, n. 18, *Op.* 26, 211b-212a. A more controversial question is whether God could bring about an "infinitum in intentione, aut magnitudine, vel multitudine"; with Aquinas, Suárez views this possibility as doubtful, without wanting to make a final decision on the controversy.

101 See Suárez, *Disputationes metaphysicae*, disp. 30, s. 17, n. 7, *Op.* 26, 208b. This problem was regularly discussed by the Jesuit authors of the time.

able to effect "everything that is creaturely possible" at once, but only individually and separately.[102] From these distinctions it follows that an adequate definition of God's power in accordance with its extensive infinity must combine with one another the elements of having both a quantitatively and a qualitatively unlimited effect: God could "infinitely produce more and more perfect kinds of things in the genus or on the [ontological] level of substances."[103] The idea can also be developed *a priori* starting from the infiniteness of the divine essence: God's essence is infinite, therefore creatures can participate in him in ever new and inexhaustible ways.[104]

If God's omnipotence is explained by citing the objects peculiar to it, it must be noted that the *potentia Dei* extends to "everything that is possible," that is, to everything that does not contain an intrinsic contradiction.[105] This logical criterion for the possible objects of God's omnipotence is at the same time a crucial metaphysical criterion. Whether something can be brought into real existence by God is determined by whether it is simply among those things that are potentially "being."[106] To this extent the question of God's omnipotence proves to be very closely connected with another basic problem of metaphysics, the question of the *ratio entis*.[107] By including a logical definition of the *possibile* in the definition of divine omnipotence Suárez attempts to avoid the problem of circularity that had already become obvious in a number of medieval theologians who had advocated a definition of *potentia Dei* and *possibile* in an interrelationship.[108]

Many of the repeatedly discussed cases in connection with the objects of God's omnipotence can already be adequately clarified on the basis of the

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102 See Suárez, *Disputationes metaphysicae*, disp. 30, s. 17, n. 16, *Op.* 26, 211a-b. A different argument is proposed by Arriaga, *In primam partem*, disp. 40, s. 2, n. 17, 430b: "Unde semper in hac materia dico, ea sola a Deo non posse simul produci, quae sunt inter se contraria, aut essentialiter successiva, quod nec per umbram habent infiniti homines aut Angeli: nullus enim alteri repugnat. Unde quotquot a Deo cognoscuntur, possunt produci simul."

103 See Suárez, *De Deo uno*, lib. 3, cap. 9, n. 9, *Op.* 1, 226b.

104 See Suárez, *De Deo uno*, lib. 3, cap. 9, n. 10–11, *Op.* 1, 227a. The case for its being possible to deduce God's omnipotence from his infinite essence is also made by Vázquez, *Commentariorum in primam partem*, disp. 104, cap. 1, I, 781b.

105 Suárez, *De Deo uno*, lib. 3, cap. 9, n.1, *Op.* 1, 224b.

106 See also Suárez, *Disputationes metaphysicae*, disp. 30, s. 17, n. 10, *Op.* 26, 209a.

107 See Schmutz, *La querelle des possibles*, I, 61.

108 This problem was already referred to by Báñez: Schmutz, *La querelle des possibles*, I, 59; later it was made a regular subject for discussion by the scholastics. See also Gian Pietro Soliani, "La connessione necessaria in Suárez tra assolutezza di Dio e assolutezza del possibile," in *Francisco Suárez, 1617–2017. Atti del convegno in occasione del IV centenario della morte*, eds Cintia Faraco and Simona Langella (Capua: 2019), 125–142.

definitions proposed by Suárez. For example, one can exclude the idea that God can make a past event not to have happened. He could only have prevented it from happening in the past. However, after it has come about, it is outside his power to control since the ontological determination of the event is essentially linked to the point of time at which it occurred and any theory to the contrary would amount to saying that something could have simultaneously been and not been. But the actions that are not possible for God comprise not only those which imply a contradiction ontologically (*in genere entis*) but also those which "contradict divine goodness," for example lying or breaking a promise that has been made.[109] For the latter would imply a self-contradiction of the divine will, which is necessarily committed to good.[110] Although seventeenth century authors do not yet deal explicitly with the question of theodicy in this context, it is nevertheless possible to recognise here the fundamental openness of their discussion of omnipotence to the inclusion of this problem.

On the other hand, Suárez expressly addresses the topic of how God's unlimited capacity to make his creation ever more 'perfect' – a faculty presupposed in the definition of omnipotence – must be understood. We have already indicated that, according to Suárez, by virtue of his omnipotence God is capable in principle of at any time producing new and better types of substances within the de facto existing universe, which was created by him as the result of his free decision. Suárez is alluding here to Aristotle's comparison of the species with the natural numbers: in both cases it would be possible to continue adding up ad infinitum[111] since in the finite there is no "supreme species" that would eminently contain all the others (this can only be stated of the infinite essence of God). The proposition already inculcated in the Middle Ages (against Wyclif among others) by the Church's Magisterium[112] that God could always create other (and better) kinds of things than he in fact has is in Suarez's opinion particularly easy to understand with respect to the created "simple substances," i.e. the angels. There is no reason why God could not at any time create an angel qualitatively superior to those that hitherto come closest to the divine essence (like Michael or Lucifer[113]) – for God's essence is at no time "exhausted" by any creature. Suárez doubts, however, whether a

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109 See Suárez, *De Deo uno*, lib. 3, cap. 9, n. 21, *Op.* 1, 229b.

110 Some Jesuits use this statement in polemics against the Thomist understanding of an all-embracing *praedefinitio* of all human acts by God; see Borrull, *De essentia*, disp. 8, s. 2, n. 13, 321.

111 See Suárez, *Disputationes metaphysicae*, disp. 30, s. 17, n. 20, *Op.* 26, 212b.

112 See Suárez, *De Deo uno*, lib. 3, cap. 9, n. 24, *Op.* 1, 230a-b. His contemporaries appeal to this, too; see Vázquez, *Commentaria in primam partem*, disp. 106, cap. 3, 1, 794b-795a.

113 See Suárez, *Disputationes metaphysicae*, disp. 30, s. 17, n. 19, *Op.* 26, 212a-b.

similar optimizability exists with respect to a composite substance like man. It becomes even more complicated if one looks at certain accidental properties of the creatures, and these difficulties are increased by theological reflections. For example, Suárez holds it to be impossible that the hypostatic union as it is realised in Christ could be replaced by a better alternative.[114] The same is true of a spiritual creature in the *visio beatifica*.[115] A further distinction that has to be made here is the question of whether the interplay between the concrete elements of creation would be optimizable through interventions at the level of individual ones. The surpassability of each individual *species rerum* does not mean that the *ordines rerum* must be capable of improvement in the same way. This applies not only to the overall cosmic order; it also refers to the division into specific classes of living things (such as the classification of beings as inanimate, as living entities that are plants, those endowed with senses and those with reason). Suárez doubts that the world is optimizable with respect to these basic structures,[116] but he does not go into this in greater detail in the present context. The significance of this aspect in the modern-day theodicy debate is well known. We can note in passing that the optimism argument possesses a long pre-history in early modern scholasticism before Leibniz.[117]

What has been discussed so far represents a series of individual speculative questions. These include, among others, the discussion of the relationship of omnipotence to the divine essence and its main powers, namely intellect and will,[118] which leads back to the topic of the distinctions in God. Of importance, too, are deliberations on how God's almighty acts relate to the second-cause actions of the creatures; they directly reflect the various theories about the *concursus divinus*. Finally, the difference between philosophical and theological epistemological orders comes up in the context of discussing whether the definition of divine omnipotence by pointing to the 'possible' can stand up in the face of the faith conviction that there are in God's actions 'supernatural'

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114   See Suárez, *Disputationes metaphysicae*, disp. 30, s. 17, n. 22, *Op.* 26, 213a-b.
115   See Suárez *De Deo uno*, lib. 3, cap. 9, n. 26, *Op.* 1, 230b-231a.
116   See Suárez, *De Deo uno*, lib. 3, cap. 9, n. 27, *Op.* 1, 231a. Similarly Vázquez, *Commentaria in primam partem*, disp. 107, c. 2–3, 1, 797a-798a.
117   See Sven K. Knebel, "Necessitas moralis ad optimum (1): Zum historischen Hintergrund der Wahl der besten aller möglichen Welten," *Studia Leibnitiana* 23 (1991), 3–24; Tilman Ramelow, *Gott, Freiheit, Weltenwahl: Der Ursprung des Begriffes der besten aller möglichen Welten in der Metaphysik der Willensfreiheit zwischen Antonio Pérez S.J. (1599–1649) und G.W. Leibniz (1646–1716)* (Leiden: 1997).
118   See an overview of the theses in Borrull, *De essentia*, disp. 8, s. 4, n. 40, 335; Muniessa, *De essentia et attributis*, disp. 9, s. 2, 178a-180b.

effects, too, i.e. ones whose intrinsic possibility *per definitionem* cannot be captured by natural reason.

The perhaps most interesting speculative debate to develop in the wake of reflecting on omnipotence concerns the metaphysical consequences of defining it by having recourse to the 'possible things,' more specifically to the resultant relationship between God and these possibles.[119] The central question is: how it is to be understood that God is evidently related from all eternity to the *possibilia*, the possible things defined by the non-repugnance of their own essential determinations, even though his omnipotence is nonetheless to be regarded as a property belonging *essentially* to him? Can any manner of being independent of God be attributed to the possibles? A look at a few of the particularly representative positions taken by theologians will reveal the relevance of this problem.[120]

Suárez denies that possibles have real being before being actualised in God's creation.[121] With this he clearly dissociates himself from a realism of ideas such as was advocated in the medieval discussion by, for example, Henry of Ghent. But nor does Suárez wish to confirm even the weakened variant as found in Scotus and the Scotists, according to which the possible things possess from all eternity a simple being, known as "objective being," in the divine intellect. This thesis would imply maintaining that God must first know the possible things before he can then will and realise them; according to Suárez, however, God's omnipotence is ontologically superordinate to the knowledge of the possible things.[122] God is not efficacious only *inasmuch as* he knows or wills something, but directly as infinite "essential" being, which is of itself capable of producing every manner of creaturely participation.[123] So, as we have already stressed, unlike the creatures, God does not require any kind of mediating power but is as himself, by virtue of his divine being, the proximate principle of all actions.[124] Knowing and willing, through which, according to our understanding, God's omnipotence is realised, are enactments that are really identical with the essence – only different from our perspective – which apply the universal efficacy lying in the infiniteness

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119 See Schmutz, *La querelle des possibles*. The following discussion has recourse throughout to the text selection and the results of this groundbreaking study.

120 A contemporary overview of the positions is provided by Borrull, *De essentia*, disp. 8, s. 5, n. 49, 339–340.

121 See Suárez, *Disputationes metaphysicae*, disp. 30, s. 2, n. 2, *Op*. 26, 229b; disp. 20, s. 1, n. 30, *Op*. 25, 753b.

122 See Suárez, *De Deo uno*, lib. 3, cap. 2, n. 11, *Op*. 1, 199a.

123 See Suárez, *Disputationes metaphysicae*, disp. 30, s. 17, n. 45, *Op*. 26, 221a.

124 See Suárez, *Disputationes metaphysicae*, disp. 30, s. 17, n. 46, *Op*. 26, 221b–222a.

of the essence to concrete objects. For his thesis Suárez appeals to Thomas Aquinas.[125]

It is difficult, though, to simply identify his position, one which was supported by a number of Jesuits, with that of the Thomists. The latter hold that God's knowledge of the possible things is the result of their being contained in the divine essence. When God, so the Thomists argue, reflects on his essence as omnipotence, as the universal ground on which the world is made possible, he at the same time recognizes the possible creatures and in recognising them produces them. This is why strict 17th-century Thomists can continue to maintain that the possibility of things is due totally to God's omnipotence; the eternal truths of things are grounded in the truth of the divine essence even though they are intellectually distinguishable from it. Suárez, on the other hand, speaks again and again of an *aptitudo ad existendum* belonging to the possible even before it is realized. At least the logical non-repugnance of the contents must be presupposed in order for the things to be knowable and "creatable" for God at all.[126] Despite all the differences from Scotus, one cannot fail to notice a similarity here between Suárez and Scotist negative determination of the possibles as formally distinct from the divine essence. To a certain extent, so Jacob Schmutz concludes, Suárez attempted to combine the established Thomist and Scotist arguments with one another without clearly aligning himself with one side or the other.[127] This mediating attitude, which one can observe in many places in Suárez's works, will undoubtedly have contributed to the enormous success of his metaphysics in early modern times far beyond the Jesuit school, but it has repeatedly raised doubts as to the convincing consistency of his approach. Other authors of the period strove for unambiguousness, doing so "in the sense of a greater affirmation of the autonomy of the possibles or, on the contrary, in the sense of a greater affirmation of the divine omnipotence or omniscience as their extrinsic foundation."[128]

The Castilian Jesuit Gabriel Vázquez (1549–1604) chose the first path. He departs more clearly than Suárez from the givens of the Augustinian-Thomist tradition when he teaches that God does not know things "in himself" insofar as he is their cause, i.e. not through cognizing his own essence. Accordingly, God's omnipotence is in no way to be regarded as the prerequisite for knowing

125 See Thomas Aquinas, *S. Th.* I, 19, 4 ad 4; I, 25, 1 ad 4.
126 See Suárez, *De Deo uno*, lib. 3, cap. 9, n.13, *Op.* 1, 227b.
127 See Schmutz, *La querelle des possibles*, I, 258–260.
128 See Schmutz, *La querelle des possibles*, I, 260: "...dans le sens d'une plus grande affirmation de l'autonomie des possibles, ou au contraire dans le sens d'une plus grande affirmation de la toute-puissance ou de la science divine comme leur fondement extrinsèque."

the possibles.[129] It does not belong to the definition of the *possibilia*. Vázquez instead reverses the relationship maintained by the Thomists: God does not know the possible things as being contained in his essence; rather his knowing is like a mirror in which the possibility of the creatures becomes visible without the act of cognition, or the divine essence that is really identical with it, being the actual constitutive reason for this being-possible.[130] Supporters of Vázquez, such as the Jesuit Cardinal Juan de Lugo (1583–1660),[131] further radicalized his statements. Naturally one can accuse this view – as its Thomist critics immediately did – of displaying a problematic dependence of God on the possible creatures. Vázquez's intention is, however, the exact opposite: when God beholds his own essence, he moves at a level of cognition that is as a matter of principle to be distinguished, even in its mere possibility, from his cognition of the creatures. Even in a world without possible creatures or with other creatures than are possible now, this self-knowledge of God would not change.[132] A transcendental relationship of God to the possibles is to be rejected.[133] This statement, which is evidently directed at Suárez, corresponds to the thesis in Vázquez's Trinitarian theology that the possible things must not be counted as belonging to the divine knowledge from which the Father begets the Son.[134] God is the one who is totally and utterly independent of the world, radically dissimilar to it, for which reason any change to it, even at the most fundamental ontological level, would not affect him.[135] In order to safeguard this, Vázquez embraces the risk of a certain autonomization of the possibles as *obiecta secundaria* of divine knowing.

Critics of this solution soon emphatically pointed out the difficulties it brought with it: does not God seem strangely passive in his knowledge of possible things, as the mirror metaphor used by Vázquez would seem to confirm? Does this not subordinate God's intellect and his omnipotence to the intelligibility of the world? Vázquez appears not to give any consistent explanation of

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129 Vázquez, *Commentaria in primam partem*, disp. 60, cap. 2, n. 7, I, 366a.

130 See Vázquez, *Commentaria in primam partem*, disp. 60, cap. 2, n. 5, I, 365b-366a; c. 3, I, 366b-367a.

131 See Schmutz, *La querelle des possibles*, I, 184–185.

132 See Vázquez, *Commentaria in primam partem*, disp. 104, cap. 6, n. 27, I, 788a: "Quare si aliqua creatura ex his, quae fieri possunt, implicaret contradictionem, imo etiamsi nulla esset possibilis, Deus in seipso esset aequalis perfectionis atque modo est."

133 See Vázquez, *Commentaria in primam partem*, disp. 104, cap. 6, I, 786a-788b.

134 See Vázquez, *Commentaria in primam partem*, disp. 143, cap. 3–5, II, 208b-212b.

135 See Vázquez, *Commentaria in primam partem*, disp. 60, cap. 2, n. 8, I, 366b: "Deus autem non continet in se formaliter rationem creaturarum: imo in se omnino dissimilis est, ergo cognitus prius non potest esse medium cognoscendi creaturas."

the metaphysical status of the possibles prior to creation.[136] Hence it is not surprising that the search for alternative solutions to the problem was continued. A thesis radically opposed to Vázquez which supports as close a connection as possible between God's essence and the possibility of things is to be found in the writings of the Jesuit Antonio Pérez (1599–1649), lauded by his contemporaries as *theologus mirabilis*.[137] In his opinion it is impossible that God is supposed to cognize the possibles directly in themselves without taking the path of self-knowledge. But Pérez, too, does not simply return to the Thomist position according to which God knows the possibles in his essence insofar as this is the universal cause of the creatures or insofar as the exemplary ideas of the creatures are virtually contained in his essence. For Pérez, God does know everything "in" his divinity, but not "out of" his divinity. A central premise in this is the complete indivisibility of divine knowledge: the Godhead is in the strict sense the sole, indistinct object of that knowledge which God accomplishes in one single undivided act. The distinction between primary and secondary objects of divine cognition is irrelevant for Pérez – without any further presuppositions, God knows everything "in his word."[138] God alone is the eternal truth, in which every other truth is seen and thus at the same time constituted in its possibility. God himself is the non-contradictoriness which releases all possible things from itself. But with this the intrinsic possibility of each and every creature in the strict sense becomes a determining moment of God himself. The Godhead is in Pérez's novel terminology *unicus rerum status quidditativus*.[139] One could say it is the whole world in the ontological status of its pure determination of essence.[140]

Pérez's teaching was considerably stimulated by the work of the Franciscan Peter Auriol (ca. 1280–1322).[141] God, so later supporters of Pérez stated, is the "possibility of the possible things, the impossibility of the impossible ones, the necessity of the necessary ones."[142] Our distinguishing the possibles from God's

136 See Schmutz, *La querelle des possibles*, I, 212–215.

137 See Soliani, *L'apparire del bene*, 194–281.

138 See Antonio Pérez SJ, *In primam partem D. Thomae tractatus quinque* (Rome: 1656), De scientia Dei, disp. 2, a. 2, cap. 3, n. 28, 151a.

139 See Pérez, *In primam partem*, De scientia Dei, disp. 2, a. 2, cap. 3, n. 50, 155b; quoted in Schmutz, *La querelle des possibles*, I, 399. See also Jacob Schmutz, "Les innovations conceptuelles de la métaphysique espagnole post-suarézienne: Les *status rerum* selon Antonio Pérez et Sebastián Izquierdo," *Quaestio* 9 (2009), 61–99; Soliani, *L'apparire del bene*, 158–177.

140 See Pérez, *In primam partem*, De scientia Dei, disp. 1, a. 1, cap. 10, n. 193, 144a.

141 See Theo Kobusch, *Die Philosophie des Hoch- und Spätmittelalters* (Munich: 2011), 406–410.

142 See Schmutz, *La querelle des possibles*, I, 441-450, including reference to, for example, Gaspar de Ribadeneyra, *De scientia Dei*, disp. 6, cap. 4, n. 30 (Alcalá: 1653), 161a: "Ergo

essence is to be ascribed solely to our reasoning, based as it is on creation (*per denominationem extrinsecam*). In truth God *is* the intrinsic possibility of every creature, including the mosquito or the grain of sand, for their being possible is directly posited with God's self-understanding; with the possibility of the least creature God's essence itself would be called into question. Faced with this concept of "connectionism," as later proponents of Pérez's approach explicitly called it, the separation between knowledge of essence and knowledge of possibles in God – as was advocated by, for example, Vázquez – is bound to appear veritably "Manichaean."[143] With this, at least at the level of reflection on essence, early modern scholastic thinking arrived at a monistic concept[144] whose radicalism already seems to contain overtones of the later teaching of Spinoza.[145]

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Deus iure summae perfectionis est possibilitas absoluta necessaria creaturarum"; n. 35, 163b: "Impossibilitas absoluta necessaria chymaerarum est Deus."

143 See Sylvester Mauro, *Quaestiones de praedicamentis*, qu. 47 (Rome: 1670), 172, quoted in Schmutz, *La querelle des possibles*, I, 365.

144 See Schmutz, "Dieu est l'idée."

145 I am indebted to Mrs Susan Johnson for translating this paper.

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