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The Weight of Love

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Elemental Motion and the Force of Union

This chapter examines more closely the corporeal language with which Bonaventure describes *synderesis*, the soul's instinct for the good, according to the physical properties of fire. Rather than treating Bonaventure's extensive use of fire imagery as an illustrative metaphor, I argue that this pervasive imagery indicates something important about the cosmic significance of the soul's natural desire for God, and reveals the corporeal dynamic at the heart of spiritual ascent. The body is exemplary of the soul's most fundamental desire—not only the glorious and wretched body of Christ as refracted through the body of Francis, but even, more fundamentally, what ancient and medieval philosophers called the simple bodies—above all, the body of fire.

Bonaventure's divergence from previous scholastic discussions of *synderesis* is perhaps most evident in the imagery he evokes to define it. In arguing for the affective nature of *synderesis*, an analogy helps to clarify the stakes: "Just as the intellect needs a light for judging, so the *affectus* needs a certain spiritual heat and weight [*calor et pondus*] for loving rightly. Therefore just as in the cognitive part of the soul there is a certain natural judge, which is conscience, so in the affective part of the soul there will be

a weight directing and inclining to the good, and this is synderesis.”¹ In the same place, as discussed in the previous chapter, he defines synderesis as the “weight of the will [*pondus voluntatis*], or the will with that weight, insofar as it inclines to the noble good [*bonum honestum*].”² Bonaventure is not the first medieval theologian to ascribe a weight to the soul, as I will discuss shortly. But with the image of a “weight and heat for loving,” he gives the concept of synderesis an entirely new cast.

By contrast, Alexander of Hales, commenting on the same section of Lombard’s *Sentences*, asks, “And in the same way as there is a material light in the senses for seeing and in the intellect for understanding truth, why would there not be in the motive force a light to the good, always turning away from evil?” Elsewhere in the same text, he writes that synderesis “lights and burns [*lucet et ardet*], and is thus always opposed to darkness, and thus to sin.”³ Alexander sets up a correspondence between material light, intellectual light, and a motive or affective light. By positing an affective light to the good, Alexander seems to be suggesting that there is some cognitive component to the affect, an idea that is not at all unprecedented in ancient and medieval theories of the soul.⁴ What is remarkable, by way of comparison, is how differently Bonaventure draws the lines. For Bonaventure, there is no “affective light”—such an image muddles the operations of the cognitive and affective parts of the soul, and confuses the affect’s movement toward the Good with the practical intellect’s illumination of that good.

Bonaventure’s dispensing with the light metaphor for synderesis also represents a departure from his other teacher and predecessor Odo of Rigaud. In answering how synderesis can be free of error, Odo considers approvingly a slightly different optic metaphor: “Otherwise we could say that conscience and synderesis differ just as light and vision, so that synderesis is, as it were, light, but conscience is the vision enabled through that light. Whence it is able to see rightly and wrongly, without there being an error in the light.”⁵ Here Odo’s analogy tightens the connection between synderesis and conscience, enlisting synderesis in the service of judgment, and binding both together in a comparison with vision.

By shifting the register of synderesis from “light” to “heat,” Bonaventure divorces the natural motion of the will from the dynamics of intellectual vision in which conscience, as natural “light,” participates. Yet insofar as light and heat refer to two properties of a single substance, fire, Bonaventure’s imagery also works to draw an even tighter connection between conscience and synderesis. In fact, the attributions of *calor* and *pondus* both refer to the analogy to fire. In 2 *Sent.* 14 he identifies three formal proper-

ties (*proprietates*) of fire: *luminositas*, *caliditas*, and *levitas*, “through which it is moved through an upward motion” (*per quam movetur motu, qui est sursum*).⁶ In fact, the comparison with fire makes for a fairly precise comparison. Synderesis and conscience are not distinct substances, but as properties or powers they are properly distinguished.⁷ If the light, heat, and weight of fire are found together in a single substance, they are not dependent upon one another. The contrast between light, heat, and weight expresses a very different relationship than that between light and vision: The properties may be concurrent without one being subordinate to another.

If synderesis does not pertain to the properties of light and the dynamics of intellectual vision, what function does it serve in the soul? Just as *levitas* is that by which the fire is moved upward, so, too, does the weight of synderesis refer to a particular way that the soul is moved. As Bonaventure clarifies later, synderesis is not essentially distinct from the concupiscible, irascible, and rational powers (the triad named in the Cistercian, pseudo-Augustinian treatise *On the Spirit and the Soul*),⁸ but differs in its mode of movement (*modus movendi*), which, invoking Jerome’s gloss, is to fly over the other powers, high above their errant motions. By identifying synderesis as a weight, Bonaventure reinforces the point that it belongs to the motive, or affective, part of the soul.

But the metaphorical investment of synderesis with the language of weight and motion yields a return. The linking of synderesis with weight not only illustrates the motive and affective nature of synderesis, but helps to clarify in turn what belongs to *affectus*. Bonaventure’s shifting of synderesis from the image of light to that of weight is significant not only for his understanding of synderesis, but also for the nature and constitution of *affectus*—of which synderesis is a crucial aspect. How, exactly, does affect move? Why does Bonaventure describe synderesis, the soul’s spark and infallible inclination to God, in the seemingly crudely physical terms of weight and heat (crude, at least, in comparison to the subtle and spiritual image of light)? And what does Bonaventure’s understanding of affective motion reveal about the role of desire in the soul’s ascent towards God? In this chapter, I argue that the association of synderesis with *pondus* is not an isolated use of an illustrative metaphor, but an instance of a crucial theme that structures Bonaventure’s understanding of *affectus* throughout later writings.

According to Bonaventure in his *Sentences* commentary (and in conjunction with his treatment of synderesis), natural *affectus* is a particular kind of motion within and beyond the soul. As I will highlight in what follows, thinking that motion in relation to the other kinds of action that the soul

is capable of proves difficult, presenting ambiguities that Bonaventure does not attempt to solve. To put these ambiguities in a clearer light, I will then look briefly at some aspects of Aristotelian motion that resonate with Bonaventure's account of the soul's natural motion, and consider two earlier Christian thinkers who draw broadly on Aristotelian physics in order to describe love as a weight of the soul moving it toward God: Augustine and the Cistercian William of St-Thierry. As I will ultimately argue in an analysis of the *Breviloquium*, Bonaventure employs this philosophical and spiritual motif as a conceptual linchpin in his understanding of both the soul's ascent and the consummation of the cosmos. The language of weight and motion are not for Bonaventure physical metaphors for an incorporeal reality, but rather describe a dynamic that is more fundamental than the distinction between soul and body and that governs them both alike. This common dynamic is more evident in the simple bodies than in the confounded and distorted human soul, so that the former become exemplary for the latter. In this way, the natural order is a means of meditating human beings' spiritual progress: The soul's ascent to God is an *imitatio* of the simple and inexorable motion of fire.

The Soul in Motion

For Bonaventure, synderesis is distinguished among the powers of the soul not as a separate faculty but as a particular capacity for motion, a capacity that he describes as the soul's "weight" (*pondus*). The existence of sin, however, demonstrates that the soul is all too capable of being moved otherwise than toward the good. To understand how the soul can be moved always to the good and yet still sin, Bonaventure relies on John of Damascus's distinction between the natural and deliberative motions of the soul. This distinction raises its own problems, however—for example, how can these two motions coexist in the soul?—and thus presses the question of what it means to say that the soul has motion at all.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the context of Bonaventure's treatment of synderesis is a commentary on a distinction in Peter Lombard's *Sentences* about the goodness and corruption of the will. The problem that Peter's text poses is how the will, as a natural good inherent in the soul, can ever be made wicked by sin.⁹ What is the relationship between the will's innate goodness and its proclivity to evil? Peter also raises a question about the will in relation to the intellect. Why is it that it is not a sin for the intellect to think some evil thing, but it is always a sin for the will to will something evil?

Because this distinction concerns the innate goodness of the will, it was routine for thirteenth-century commentators to discuss synderesis in relation to this passage (though Peter's text does not mention the concept by name). Yet though synderesis helped theologians conceptualize the will's natural goodness, the idea that synderesis moves infallibly only heightened the problem framed in the *Sentences*: What is the relation between the natural movement to the good and the deliberative movement to sin? Bonaventure considers the objection that "it is impossible, at one and the same time, for the will to be moved by contrary motions, or even disparate motions."¹⁰ In response, he acknowledges the difficulty and admits that the authorities have understood the relationship between these movements of the will in different ways. Some hold the motion of the natural and deliberative will to be indistinct, and say that a morally wicked act is simply a deformed act of willing a natural good. That is, a wicked act is a deformed and morally culpable attempt to attain the natural good of happiness.

But Bonaventure finally rejects this interpretation, wishing to uphold the moral integrity of the natural will to the good, "since, when Ambrose says that human beings naturally will the good, he does not mean only the natural good, which is indeed an act of will, but even the moral good. For human beings desire justice and hate injustice by their natural will."¹¹ The alternative, which Bonaventure endorses, is to admit two motions of the will, one "by which the will naturally desires the good, and the other by which the will deliberately desires evil."¹²

But even here opinions are divided as to whether the two motions can exist simultaneously. Some say the act of the deliberative will does not exclude the act of the natural will. Others say that, if the power of the will is simple, it cannot be moved by different or contrary motions at the same time. Those who hold this position, Bonaventure argues, claim that synderesis is "always" acting in the sense of a *habit*, rather than literally acting at all times. Thus, they can claim without contradiction that the natural will is always acting (because it is always capable of acting), and that the will moves to sin from time to time, and that there is only one motion in the will at a time. Bonaventure agrees that the natural will is not in fact continually acting: "And therefore the text should be understood thus: that the word 'always' means the continuity of the habit of willing, not the act."¹³ The substantial operation cannot be taken away, but the consequent operation can be impeded; in other words, the movement of the natural will toward the good is constant, but its realization in a concerted act of the soul is not. Nevertheless, Bonaventure explicitly leaves unresolved the more perplexing question: whether the deliberative *motus* to sin and the

natural *motus* to the good can act simultaneously. Can there be two contrary motions in the soul at the same time?

What is clear is that the natural and deliberative motions of the will *should* act together, in whatever way that might be possible. Bonaventure understands moral progress to involve the entire will, natural and deliberative. In 2 *Sent.* 39, he clarifies that the natural desire for the good does not make the will good as such. Here he takes up obliquely a question that earlier commentators on synderesis frequently discussed—whether the movement of synderesis is meritorious. Bonaventure responds: “It must be said that the goodness of the will is inchoate in the natural appetite and consummated in deliberative virtue. Nor is the will wholly (*simpliciter*) good and upright unless it is upright insofar as it is moved both deliberately and naturally.”¹⁴

Bonaventure also considers explicitly the other dilemma posed in Peter’s text: Why is the will more corrupted in its act than any other power? Why is it a sin to will evil, but it is not necessarily a sin to understand evil? Given that an act’s value depends on its object, the evil of an object of intellect should, it seems, confer evil upon the act of understanding that object. The objection recognizes a distinction between the act of willing and the act of understanding: The former involves a motion from the will to its object, whereas the latter is accomplished by the motion of the object toward the intellect. Therefore, it seems, the wicked object should pollute the intellect more than the will.

Bonaventure endorses the premise of the objection in his response: Willing does indeed involve a motion toward the object, whereas understanding involves a motion of the object toward the intellect.¹⁵ The will is that which is said properly to have motion, while the intellect remains at rest in its act. Yet for Bonaventure, this difference in orientation to objects proves that the will is more corrupted in its act than is the intellect, for to move toward the object *transforms* the will into its object, while the intellect is merely *conformed* to its object. To will an evil object is to be transformed by and into that evil. The difference between intellect and will is not, however, simply the direction of force involved in the act, but also its intensity: “This is so on account of the greater force of union which consists in love itself, just as Dionysius said: ‘We call love [*amor*] the unitive force’; moreover it is said in 1 Corinthians 6: ‘Whoever adheres to God is made one spirit.’”¹⁶ The claim that Bonaventure makes elsewhere that responsibility—the capacity for merit and blame—is based in the capacity for free choice is tied to a conception of the will as a susceptibility to

an intense force, one that binds the soul to its object for better and for worse.¹⁷ The affective part of the soul's greater capacity for corruption also accounts for its greater force of union with and transformation into God. The force of union is the force of the object acting on the soul, drawing the soul to itself; the affective part of the soul is its capacity to be *affected* by a good (or perceived good) beyond itself.

This interpretation of affective movement is reinforced in Bonaventure's discussion of *amor* in the first volume of the commentary, where he discusses the relationship between the terms *amor*, *dilectio*, and *caritas*. Though Bonaventure acknowledges shades of meaning in the different terms, he does not offer a disjunctive picture of affect as a whole. He defines *amor* as "the adhesion of an affection with respect to the one loved."¹⁸ But with this general definition of love, Bonaventure rejects the opinion that *amor* names a "libidinous affection," while *dilectio* signifies an act of a well-ordered will (*ex voluntate ordinata*). And he cites Dionysius in *Divine Names* 4 in support of this conclusion: "Theologians seem to me to signify the same thing by the words *amor* and *dilectio*," with *amor* translating the Greek *eros* and *dilectio* translating *agape*.

Nevertheless, Bonaventure does draw a distinction between the terms: To the basic definition of *amor*, the term *dilectio* adds (*addit*) the sense of election (*electio*). That is, *dilectio* is the adhesion of affection with respect to the loved object *chosen* out of a number of possible objects. This is the love spoken of in *Song of Songs* 5: "My beloved [*dilectus*], chosen out of a thousand." Finally, *caritas*, from *carus* or dear, adds to the sense of *dilectio* an appreciation for the great value of the beloved object.

This passage alerts the reader to the importance of attending to the nuance of affective terms in Bonaventure's writings. Yet it would be too simple to expect to find in the passage a legend for decoding every discussion of love in Bonaventure's corpus, or to simply equate *amor* with the will's natural motion and *dilectio* with deliberation. However, the passage demonstrates Bonaventure's concern to uphold the basic understanding of *amor* that he derives from the Dionysian authority: Love, in every case, is an affective adhesion of lover and loved, a unitive and transformative force. The definition leaves unresolved, then, the ambiguity evident both in the concept of *dilectio* and in the operation of the deliberative will: The soul's capacity for choice is simply one mode of the force by which the soul is attracted by and transformed into the object of its desire.

Aristotle and Elemental Motion

The ambiguity that I am suggesting is constitutive of Bonaventure's understanding of *affectus* is not unique to him, and can be found in a number of his philosophical and theological sources. But here I am particularly interested in exploring the way in which Bonaventure's theory of affect depends on a theory of motion. And while it would be misleading to call Bonaventure's understanding of affective motion "Aristotelian," Aristotle's theory of natural motion and its relation to the soul's movement forms part of the framework for Bonaventure's reflection on affect. It may therefore provide a helpful point of reference for thinking through aspects of Bonaventure's conception of affective motion, while also further illuminating the intractability of the ambiguity that characterizes the motion of *affectus* in its relation to the intellect and to its object of desire.

Bonaventure uses the term *motus* both of conscience and synderesis. In the discussion of whether synderesis can sin, Bonaventure says that conscience is "not moved by a simple motion alone, but by a collative one."¹⁹ Yet elsewhere he suggests that *motus* applies only analogically to the cognitive part of the soul: "Conscience is the habit perfecting our intellect insofar as it is practical, or insofar as it directs in works. And thus the intellect has in a certain way a motive cause, not because it effects movement, but because it dictates and inclines to movement."²⁰ He is even clearer on this point when, in arguing that synderesis is affective, he writes, "Therefore just as reason is not able to move without the will mediating, so neither can conscience move without synderesis mediating."²¹ In attributing motion to the practical intellect and, to a greater extent, to affect, Bonaventure follows the outlines of Aristotle's account of animal motion in *De anima* III. 10. Accordingly, he reads Aristotle's discussions of the acts of the soul through the thirteenth-century language of faculties and powers.

Aristotle had argued that both desire and practical intellect together are necessary for motion, but, strictly speaking, it is desire alone—or desire in conjunction with the object of desire—that effects motion.²² Bonaventure, like other medieval theorists of the soul, equates the motive part of the soul with the *affectus* (and the natural mode of the motive part with synderesis). But perhaps reflecting either the ambiguity in Aristotle's text or simply the conjunction of the practical intellect to affect, he also attributes motion, in a less proper sense, to *conscientia* in the cognitive part of the soul. In his discussion of synderesis and conscience, however, Bonaventure leaves unexamined the question of the agent of motion—whether the object of the *affectus* (the *bonum honestum*) is properly considered the cause of mo-

tion, or whether the cause is internal to the soul itself. Nevertheless, the question—and its attendant difficulties—may still be discerned in Bonaventure's texts. Here close attention must be paid to the analogies and the images he uses to describe the soul's natural tendency to motion—as a weight or *pondus* of the soul by which it ascends, just as fire ascends to its natural place.

Though Bonaventure does not cite Aristotle as the source for his account of elemental motion, Aristotle's comments on this point, as found in *Physica* and *De caelo*, influenced medieval cosmological and physical theories through a number of late ancient channels. The geocentric cosmology that underwrites this theory of motion is by no means unique to Aristotle, nor is the presence of such a cosmic scheme in a later author necessarily evidence of Aristotelian "influence." The philosopher's accounts of elemental motion within a geocentric cosmos, however, bring into relief a number of conceptual ambiguities that attend any such theory, and so Aristotle, though not an absolute beginning for ancient and medieval physics, is nevertheless a helpful place to start.

The equivocation in *De anima*, which appears to explain motion *both* as a function of a desire internal to the soul and as a function of the external object of desire, points to a major difficulty in Aristotle's theories of animal self-motion.²³ In an influential essay, David Furley argues that Aristotle needs both explanations of motion to be true in order to maintain a distinction between the motion of animals and the motions of inanimate beings, including the elements, which, rising or falling inexorably to their natural places, may seem to contain some inherent principle of motion themselves.²⁴ Aristotle considers this problem at greatest length in *Physics* and *On the Heavens* (*De caelo*). In the first, he states that the natural movements of animals come from themselves and that, in fact, all self-movement is natural.²⁵ This is obvious enough because in Book Two Aristotle had already defined a *physis* of a thing as a "certain principle and cause of change and stability in the thing."²⁶ Natural movement would be that movement that is due to a nature—that is, an inhering cause of motion. The soul of the animal is, by virtue of its embodiment, also susceptible to unnatural, external movements. An important link is established between interiority and self-motion, on the one hand, and exterior motion and corporeality, on the other.

More difficult is the case of simple bodies—fire, air, water, and earth—and inanimate things composed of them. The simple bodies are natural, and they have their own natural movements: Fire moves upward or toward the extremity; earth moves downward or toward the center. But they

cannot be self-movers, both because self-motion belongs only to living things, and because, if they moved themselves, they would also have the ability to stop moving. But, though lacking the ability to cause movement, the simple bodies do contain a source of movement: “it is a source which enables them to be affected.”²⁷ The problem of the natural movements of simple bodies is solved (though only partially) by positing a potentiality to particular kinds of motion in those simple bodies. So, for example, air has the natural capacity to be moved upward—to actualize its potential for rising—if a hindrance is removed.

In *De caelo*, Aristotle provides greater detail about the nature of elemental motion. Book Four presents an inquiry into the meanings of the terms “heavy” and “light,” which constitute “a proper part of the theory of movement, since we call things heavy and light because they have the power of being moved naturally in a certain way.”²⁸ He considers two previous theories of this natural motion. The first, which he identifies as coming from the *Timaeus*, holds that heaviness is a function of the quantity of identical parts of which a body is composed. If quantity were the determinant of heaviness and lightness, Aristotle counters, then a larger quantity of fire should rise more slowly than a smaller one. But the opposite is in fact the case. He then considers a second theory, which deems lightness a result of the void that is trapped in bodies, and raises a number of objections to this theory before advancing to his own.

In offering his own account, Aristotle provisionally accepts “the common statement of older writers that ‘like moves to like,’” because, he says, “the movement of each body to its own place is motion toward its own form.”²⁹ Elemental motion would then be a continual process of cosmic sorting, all bodies moving to their own kind. But this principle in itself is not sufficient to explain the determinant motions of elements to fixed positions. To advance the explanation further, Aristotle hypothesizes, “If one were to remove the earth to where the moon now is, the various fragments of earth would each move not towards it but to the place in which it now is.”³⁰ The reason for this surprising conclusion, Aristotle continues, is consistent with the principle that like seeks like, for what bodies move toward when they move toward their like is a common *form*. Thus for the earth to abandon its natural place would be to abandon its form. A thing’s natural “place” is the boundary that contains it, and this boundary is simply the thing’s form—and so, “it is to its like that a body moves when it moves to its own place.”³¹ The natural place of a simple body *is* its form; its tendency to movement toward that place is its potential for its own form; its attainment of that place is its actualization. The change that is natural

motion, then, is explicable as a species of alteration in general: “Thus to ask why fire moves upward and earth downward is the same as to ask why the healable, when moved and changed *qua* healable, attains health and not whiteness.”³² The difference with elemental motion—and what makes the elements seem to have some internal source of their motion (even though in fact they are moved by their natural place)—is that they are “closest to matter.” That is, the simple bodies appear to have some internal agent of motion because they are observed to move so determinately, so inexorably, to their place (and because there is no visible external agent of change acting upon them). Whereas according to *De anima* III.10, the soul moves itself through a complicated interplay of desired object, the faculty of desire, and the practical intellect, by contrast, the simple bodies are moved immediately by the form (that is, their place), which is external to them. The trajectory of external motion is so certain that it appears to be internally driven.

Bonaventure’s discussion of synderesis and conscience explicitly refers to Aristotle’s theory of animal motion. But his description of natural motion as a weight by which the will is drawn more closely resembles the Aristotelian explanation of bodily, elemental motion.³³ What are for Aristotle two different kinds of motion proper to two different kinds of beings—the self-motion of the soul and the external motion of bodies—are for Bonaventure two kinds of motion (natural and deliberative) *both* belonging to, though not simply internal to, the soul.

Augustine and the pondus amoris

A number of Christian theologians before Bonaventure saw in the movement of elements a fitting description of the soul’s tendency to the good. Perhaps the deepest reflection in early Christian literature of the theme of the “weight” of the soul is in the final book of Augustine’s *Confessions*. Here Augustine expands the scope of his inquiry to the whole created order:

A body inclines by its own weight towards its own place (*Corpus pondere suo nititur ad locum suum*). Weight does not always tend towards the lowest place, but to its own proper place. Fire tends upward, stones tend downward: they are both led by their weight, seeking their place (*ponderibus suis aguntur, loca sua petunt*). Oil poured into water, rises again above the water, but water poured over oil will sink beneath the oil: they are both led by their weight, seeking their place (*ponderibus suis aguntur, loca sua petunt*). When things are out of order, they are not

at rest; coming to order, they find rest. My love is my weight (*Pondus meum amor meus*). By it I am carried wherever I am carried. By your gift we are inflamed and carried upwards; we are enkindled and we set off (*imus*). In our hearts we rise as we sing a song of ascent. By your fire, your good fire, we are inflamed and we rise (*imus*) . . .³⁴

Augustine puts the movement of bodies in the passive voice: By weight all things are led (*aguntur*) to their place. *Pondus* is the capacity for being moved in a certain way, whether in the physical bodies or in the human soul. As Augustine writes just before the cited passage, “Our place is where we come to rest. Love carries us there.”³⁵ The passage hesitates between the active and passive, locating in love the point at which activity and passivity meet, where the distinction is confounded because the love felt by the soul for God is never truly its own. This is far from Aristotle’s account of motion. And yet there is an echo of the Aristotelian hesitation in *De anima* III, between desire and the object of desire, *orexis* and *orektikon*, as the agent of affective movement.

For Augustine, if *pondus* is the capacity to be moved, it is also that by which all things *loca sua petunt*—seek or strive for their place. Aristotle’s own writings about the elements in motion, though denying an internal source of change, suggest some kind of desire or longing for place. With the term *peto*, Augustine also attributes a kind of desire to material bodies. He expands on this theme in *De civitate Dei* 11: “If we were stones or waves or wind or fire, or something like these, without any sense or life, we would nevertheless not be without a certain appetite [*appetitus*] for our own place and order. For the movement produced by weight is, as it were, the body’s love [*amor*], whether it bears downward by heaviness or upward by lightness. Just as a body is carried by its weight, so is the soul carried wherever it is carried by its love.”³⁶ On one level, this passage works precisely to distinguish human beings from stones or waves because love in the human soul seeks the Creator and not simply place, or fruitfulness, or sensual goods. But what grounds the comparison of human beings to inanimate bodies is a common term, *appetitus*, which all things have in common and which functions in an analogous way in both bodies and rational souls. The force of the comparison is that the love of God is as natural to the soul as downward or upward motion is to stones and flames.

One of the most striking differences between Augustine’s description of *pondus* in the *Confessions* and Aristotle’s *baros* is Augustine’s claim that weight does not always tend toward the lowest place, that is, toward the element of earth. In *De caelo*, Aristotle argues at some length that weight

is the principle of downward motion (or—what amounts to the same in a geocentric cosmos—motion toward the center). While even air has some weight, Aristotle maintains that pure fire is absolutely light—that is, absolutely without weight. But for Augustine, *pondus* signifies a natural appointment to a proper level or place within the physical order and has no contrary.³⁷ Augustine discusses *pondus* most frequently as the last term in a triad of properties of all created things—measure, number, and weight—following Wisdom 11:21, “God ordained all things in measure, number, and weight.”³⁸ In the fourth book of *De Genesi ad litteram*, he examines the role of this triad in God’s creation: “Measure set a mode on everything, number bestows form, and weight draws everything to rest and stability. And God is all three of these things originally, truly, and uniquely, who limits all, and forms all, and orders all.”³⁹ As the means by which God ordained his creation, *mensura*, *numerus*, and *pondus* are not only properties of bodies:

Measure, number, and weight can be observed and understood not only in stones and wood and such corporeal things with mass and quantity, whether terrestrial or celestial. There is also the measure of something to be done, lest it run out of control and out of bounds; and there is the number of the affections and virtues of the soul, by which the soul is drawn away from the deformity of foolishness and drawn towards the form and splendor of wisdom; and there is the weight of the will and of love, in which appears the value of what is to be desired [*appetendo*], what is to be avoided [*fugiendo*], and what is to be given priority.⁴⁰

The weight of the soul is not a quantity or a function of mass as it is in bodies, but like the *pondus* of the body, the *pondus* of the will or love is a principle of movement—that by which the soul seeks what is good and flees what is not. In the case of both bodies and the soul, as Augustine writes, *pondus* is that which “draws each thing to repose and stability.”⁴¹ By contrast, Augustine identifies a further sense of measure, number, and weight to which the others are subordinated: “And there is a measure without measure, to which must be reckoned all that is from it, though it is not from anything else; there is a number without number, by which all things are formed, though it itself is not formed; and there is a weight without weight, to which those whose rest is pure joy find that rest, though it is still not drawn to any other.”⁴² In one sense, God can be said to have *mensura*, *numerus*, and *pondus* insofar as God is the source and destination of all created beings; but in himself, he is without measure, without number, and without weight. God is not subject to limit, to form, or to being moved.

Pondus in creatures, then, would seem to refer simply to the passivity to movement. But there is an ambiguity to Augustine's notion of weight in the soul. On analogy with the weights of material bodies, Augustine suggests that the soul has a particular weight by which it moves to its appointed place. But elsewhere, *pondus* in the soul appears less determined. If every body has a specific weight drawing it to its proper place, the weight of the soul may be a means of ascent or descent. As the passage from the *Confessions* cited previously states, by love I am carried *wherever* I am carried. If the soul can be carried aloft by the love of the Spirit, it can also descend by the *pondus cupiditatis* into the depths of sin—the depths being not a local, physical place, but the inordinate passions “which drag us downward to love of worldly concerns.”⁴³ In *De libero arbitrio*, Augustine compares the will's movement to the movement of a falling stone. While both the will's movements and the stone's are proper to them, the movements are dissimilar in that “a stone lacks the power to restrain the motion by which it is carried downward, but the soul is not moved to abandon higher things for inferior things only so long as it does not will it. Therefore the stone's motion is natural, but the soul's is voluntary.”⁴⁴ It would be beyond absurd, he continues, to attribute moral culpability to the stone for falling given that it is naturally moved downward. But when the soul descends to the depths, this is a voluntary movement in that it results from an abandonment of the love that bears the soul aloft and is a gift of the Holy Spirit.

The soul, then, is capable of a downward movement, which is to be distinguished from elemental movement by the presence of volition. Augustine is also careful to distinguish the interior downward movement of the soul from the motion of bodies. In *Confessions* 13.7, he reflects on the difficulty of speaking about the motions of the soul. The depths to which we sink are not places, he admits, but states of the soul—affections, loves, and impure spirits—and yet they are not entirely unlike places. *Quid similius, et quid disimilius?* Augustine does not answer his own question, leaving the analogy—and its attendant ambiguities—for later medieval theologians to parse.

*The Place of the Soul: William of St. Thierry's
De natura et dignitate amoris*

In the twelfth century, the Cistercian abbot William of St.-Thierry was also concerned with the applicability of *locus* to the soul and to God. His caution against the theory that the soul is localized in the body does not inhibit him from fully embracing the theme of the soul's movement to its

natural place. In the prologue to his treatise on the growth of love in the religious novice, *De natura et dignitate amoris*, William identifies love as “a force (*vis*) of the soul, carrying (*ferens*) it by a certain natural weight (*naturali quodam pondere*) to its place or destination (*locum vel finem suum*).”⁴⁵ Here the Augustinian theme of love as the weight by which the soul ascends is reprised, only with a greater emphasis on the proper *place* of the soul: “Every creature, whether spiritual or corporeal, has a fixed place [*certum locum*] to which it is naturally carried, and a certain natural weight by which it is carried. For weight, as a certain philosopher correctly teaches, does not always move downwards. Fire rises, water descends, and so on.”⁴⁶ Whatever William may understand incorporeal place to be (a question that I will revisit shortly), his statement here must be read as more than a simple metaphor: Bodies do not possess weight or a place in a truer sense than do spiritual creatures. All creatures—corporeal or spiritual—are alike in possessing *pondus* and having a proper place. Nevertheless, determining the weight and place of the elements such as fire and water, as William well observes, is a simpler thing than explaining precisely what is proper to spiritual place. And when it is a question of human beings, composed of bodies and souls, the situation becomes even more complicated:

Human beings are also moved by their weight, which carries the spirit upward, and the body downward, both toward their place or destination. What is the place of the body? Scripture replies: “You are earth and to earth you shall return.” Yet it says in the *Book of Wisdom* concerning the spirit, “and the spirit returns to God who created it.” Look at humans in their disintegration, how completely they are carried along by their own weight to their place. When things go well and according to order, the spirit returns to God who created it, and the body to earth, not only to earth but into the elements from which it was composed and formed. When earth, fire, water, and air reclaim for themselves something of it, when there is a natural disintegration of a natural composite, each part returns by its own weight to its own element. The disintegration is complete when all of them are restored to their proper place.⁴⁷

It is a poignant description of the human being, a fragile composite whose members are all out of place. The physical elements that compose the body find, without deviation, their proper place upon the corruption of the body. Here the likeness of spiritual weight to corporeal weight also breaks down: “While not one of the elements deviates from its natural course, only the miserable soul and degenerate spirit, corrupted by the vice of sin, although

by itself naturally tending to its place, does not know or learns with difficulty how to return to its origin.”⁴⁸ Why, if love is a natural force within the soul, must it be learned by the soul, when the physical elements move immediately to their places?

In the prologue, William explains that love is implanted in the soul by the “Creator of nature,” so that, barring love’s destruction by “adulterous affections,” it teaches the soul from within how to love properly. In the rest of the treatise, William describes the process of preparing oneself to receive that teaching within the structure of a monastic community. He describes the will as the *affectus* of the rational soul—that is, the soul’s capacity to be filled with good (by grace) and with evil (by its own failings). Love is kindled when, by grace, the will fixes itself to the Holy Spirit, for love is “nothing other than the will vehemently attached to something good.”⁴⁹ In the beginning stages of this love, the religious novice engages in the hard labor of self-discipline at the hand of an external authority, until, under the direction of his own reason, the external regulations he has been following impress themselves on him interiorly.

As the novice grows into spiritual maturity, his love is illumined (*illuminari*) by God. At this stage, the love that was previously guided by reason and inculcated in the performance of exterior commands begins to “pass over [*transire*] into the *affectus*.”⁵⁰ *Affectus* is an intricate and multivalent term in William’s writings.⁵¹ In the most general sense, he uses the term as the capacity of the soul to be moved, with an emphasis on the passivity of the soul to the object of its desire. Here, however, in describing the passing over of love into the *affectus*, William seems to be using the term in a more exalted sense as *charitas*. As he defines it a bit later on, “The *affectus* is that which seizes the mind by a kind of general force and perpetual virtue, firm and stable and maintained through grace.”⁵² He contrasts this with the various *affectiones* (referred to elsewhere in the work as *affectus* in the plural), which vary with time and circumstance. To be gripped by the enlightened *affectus* is to be held steady from the attacks of the *affectiones*. The enlightened *affectus*, or *charitas*, awakens the five spiritual senses in the soul, and, with its two eyes of *amor* and *ratio*, is able to see God: Reason sees God through what He is not, while love abandons itself (*deficere*) in what He is.

Upon this self-abandonment, the soul takes rest from its labors and finds repose in wisdom and the enjoyment of God. But only upon the death of the body does the spirit truly return to its place: “When all things proceed well and according to order, just as we said at the beginning, the weight

of each thing bears it to its place: the body to the earth from which it was taken, to be raised up and glorified in its time, and the spirit to God who created it.”⁵⁵ The return of the spirit to its origin in God is in accordance with nature, but it is not inevitable like the return of the physical elements to their places. Neither, however, is it a result of an effort of loving. By calling the *affectus* a natural *pondus* of the soul, William makes clear that the love of God is not an act that the soul performs. Its effort is aimed at removing the hindrances to that motion.

Bonaventure: Pondus as Ordinativa Inclinatio

As is clear, then, Bonaventure by no means invented the trope of *pondus* as the means by which the soul rises to God. What he did do, however, was elevate it from a trope to a key dynamic in his theology of creation and return. This dynamic is perhaps most evident in his *Breviloquium*, or *Brief Discourse*, written as Master of Theology around 1257. Covering the basic articles of faith, from the Triune God to the Last Things, the *Breviloquium* serves as a kind of short summa, or, to use Bonaventure’s own imagery, a map through a dense and difficult forest. It provides, by the work’s stated intention, a synoptic view from which to observe connections and patterns across different areas of Christian teaching, and the theological concepts through which those connections are forged.

The concept of *pondus* plays a surprisingly far-reaching role in these connections for Bonaventure, especially as a force accounting for the Neoplatonic hydraulics of procession and return that structure the *Breviloquium* (and which can be discerned everywhere in Bonaventure’s writing). In the *Breviloquium*, *pondus* signifies a created, intrinsic property by which all creatures, corporeal and incorporeal, are moved to their end. Bonaventure writes that “the whole structure of the world [*universitas machinae mundialis*] was brought to being in time and out of nothingness by one first, single, and highest principle, whose power, though without measure, disposed all things in a certain weight, number, and measure [*in certo pondere, numero et mensura*].”⁵⁴ As he explains, the attribution of measure, number, and weight to all creatures is a statement about their threefold cause:

The phrase “in a certain weight, number, and measure” indicates that creation is the effect of the Trinity creating through a threefold kind of causality: as efficient cause, by which there is unity, mode, and measure in creatures; as exemplary cause, by which there is truth, species, and

number in creatures; and as final cause, by which there is goodness, order, and weight in creatures. These vestiges of the Creator are found in all creatures, whether corporeal, or spiritual, or composites of both.⁵⁵

In *De Genesi ad litteram*, Augustine, too, correlates *mensura*, *numerus*, and *pondus* with *modus*, *species*, and *ordo*.⁵⁶ Bonaventure explains the relation between creator and creature by means of a threefold causality derived from the fourfold Aristotelian scheme. The properties of creatures are expressions of their relationship to God as their maker, exemplar, and end.

Later in the same chapter of the *Breviloquium*, Bonaventure repeats, almost to the word, the same formulation, but this time, instead of *numerus* he uses the term *discreta* (“distinction”) and he appends a gloss to *pondus*—“for *pondus* is an ordering inclination” (*ordinativa inclinatio*).⁵⁷ It is clear, then, that *pondus* is not primarily a physical quantity that is analogously, or metaphorically, applied to incorporeal things. Rather, in its most literal application, *pondus* is an ordering tendency directing creatures toward God as their final cause. This is true of the weight of bodies as well as the weight of souls.

Thus, the *pondus* of human beings, as body-soul composites, is complex. First of all, Bonaventure says explicitly that all creatures have measure, number and weight, whether those creatures are spiritual, material, or composite, as is human nature. Whereas for William, the weight of the human soul was to be distinguished from the weight of the human body, each going its own way upon disintegration, Bonaventure does not make this distinction. Perhaps, then, he has in mind a tighter integration of soul and body in the human being, ordained to one *pondus* or ordering inclination. Yet Bonaventure elsewhere seems to suggest that the weight of the human person is multiple, or, rather, variable. In fact, in Part 5 he suggests that the proper weight of the soul is something that must be achieved through the ordering of the soul, which occurs through grace.⁵⁸ These statements point to the complexity entailed in Bonaventure’s conception of the *pondus* of human beings in light of his statements about human dependence on grace.

This complexity is apparent throughout Part 5 of the *Breviloquium*, which treats the grace of the Holy Spirit. Grace, Bonaventure begins, is a gift infused by God, by which the soul is “perfected and made the bride of Christ, daughter of the eternal Father, and temple of the Holy Spirit.”⁵⁹ It is a gift that cleanses, enlightens, and lifts up the soul. And the lifting up of the soul is at the same time the condescension of God, not through his essence but through “an outpouring emanating from him.”⁶⁰ What is this movement of ascent that is at the same time a descent? It is not that “the

spirit is elevated above itself in place [*per situm localem*],” but rather, it takes on the form of God (*per habitum deiformem*). And this elevation, so understood, is not effected “through a habit naturally inserted, but only through an infused gift divinely given.”⁶¹ In one movement, the soul ascends to God when God condescends in grace to the soul.

In the subsequent chapters of Part 5, Bonaventure traces the operations of grace in relation to sin, virtue, and meritorious acts. Grace has three senses. In its most general sense, grace is a gift to all creatures enabling them to continue to exist. Because creatures are created from nothing, they would revert to nothing without the continual support of their Principle. Bonaventure’s term for this contingency is *vanitas*, itself a kind of weight whose motion God hinders through his presence in all things. He draws the comparison to someone holding a heavy object (*corpus ponderosum*) in mid-air. If the object is released, it will fall down.⁶² Though he does not call *vanitas* the weight of creatures, his simile makes it clear that the *pondus* of creatures, properly speaking, is itself the presence of grace, God’s action in sustaining all creatures from reverting to nothingness.⁶³

This general grace is a gift to all creatures, from stones to human beings. The other two senses of grace pertain only to the rational spirit: Grace in its special sense (sometimes called actual grace) prepares the rational spirit for receiving the third grace. This sanctifying grace makes the soul capable of attaining merit and advancing to salvation. This is the grace of which Augustine wrote, it “prevenes in the will, so that it wills, and follows the act, so that it does not want in vain.”⁶⁴ Bonaventure then examines the workings of sanctifying grace as a remedy for sin in the virtues, the gifts of the Spirit, the five spiritual senses, and other aspects of sanctification. Then he turns to examine the workings of grace in meritorious acts: belief in the articles of faith, the ordering of the affections, the performance of the divine law, and petitioning God in prayer.

It is in the context of the ordering of affections that Bonaventure discusses the *pondus* of the soul. Four things must be loved with *caritas*—God, ourselves, our neighbor, and our body. The ultimate end of loving is the ordering of oneself to the Good in which human beings find rest and enjoyment. Because of this, charity is due, first, to God, who is that Good, and secondarily to ourselves and our neighbors, who will be made capable of enjoying the Good, and finally to our bodies, which will be beatified with the spirit and will share in this enjoyment. To love these things properly, however, the soul’s affections must be brought to order, *against* their own reflexive tendency: “Love [*amor*], the weight of the soul [*mens*], and the origin of every spiritual affection [*omnis affectionis mentalis*], is brought back

toward the self with ease, extends to the neighbor with difficulty, and is raised up to God with greater difficulty.”⁶⁵ Because the soul in loving tends toward itself and its body, it needs ordering by two commandments—to love God and to love one’s neighbor.

In addition to the commandments, God has given another grace for ordering the affections: “Charity is the root, form, and end of virtue, at the same time joining everything to its final end and binding all things together in order. Thus charity is the weight of ordered inclination and the bond of perfect union.”⁶⁶ By using the term *pondus* both for the reflexive love of the soul and for the ordering grace of charity, Bonaventure casts the ordering of the affections and the sanctification of the affect as a kind of play of forces. The weight of the soul is transformed by the pull of a greater weight, which draws up the affections of the soul and binds them to God and to neighbor, and, in an extended sense, to everything in creation. For as charity orders and hierarchizes, it at the same time unifies.⁶⁷ Charity should not be understood simply as a gift to the soul or an aid in moral progress, but as the telos of creation. As Bonaventure writes in concluding this section: “With this union consummated through the bond of charity, God will be all in all in true eternity and perfect peace. Through love all things will be ordered to communion and bound in an indissoluble connection.”⁶⁸ When he asserts that all things will be in “perfect peace,” this, he later explains, is to be understood not simply as a psychological state of the human being, but rather as a perpetual state of cosmic quiescence—one in which the heavenly motions that mark time and the simple elements now in flux will all come to rest.⁶⁹

But though the final state is one of repose, the events leading up to it are anything but peaceful. At the final judgment, a fire will devour the face of the earth—though not completely:

It is said that “the form [*figura*] of this world will pass away,” not in the sense of the complete destruction of this sensible world, but that through the action of that fire inflaming all elemental things, plants and animals will be consumed, and the elements will be purified and made new, especially air and earth, and the just will be purified and the wicked will be consumed in flame. With these things accomplished, the motion of the heavens will cease, so that, with the number of the elect fulfilled, the bodies of the world will in a certain way be made new and rewarded.⁷⁰

Just as the association of the affective movement of the soul with fire evokes the ancient Stoic conception of fiery *pneuma* as the motive and animating

substance of the body and of the cosmos, so too the influence of the ancient Stoic vision of a periodic conflagration that renews the cosmos is evident in Bonaventure's depiction of the final renewal of heaven and earth through fire.⁷¹ Bonaventure's account, like the Stoic doctrine of conflagration, describes a balancing of elemental forces. At the beginning of humankind, a flood of water devoured and cleansed the earth, and so its contrary, fire, will devour and purify the earth at its end. Moreover, fire is the necessary antidote to the "cooling of charity" (*refrigerium caritatis*) that has befallen the world in its old age.

Because this cleansing is eternal, no creature could bring it about on its own, and thus a higher power must initiate the conflagration. Nevertheless, Bonaventure explains, the effect is produced by means of the natural powers of fire: "inflaming" (*inflammare*), "purging" (*purgare*), "rarefying" (*rarefacere*), and "subtilizing" (*subtiliare*). All things will be subject to this "concourse of fires"—the just will be purged by the fires of purgatory, the wicked tormented by the fires of hell, the elements refined, and the animals and plants consumed by elemental fire. The heavenly bodies will burn with an intense brightness and come to rest.

It may be tempting to parse here an analogy between the spiritual "fire," which purges the just, and the real fire, which refines and consumes the bodies of earth. However, Bonaventure explains with terrible clarity the nature of the fires of purgatory and hell. It must be held, he insists, that the fire of purgatory is a corporeal fire (*ignis corporalis*) that burns the spirit of the sins it carries and causes it to suffer.⁷² Because the soul sinned by sinking to the body, it is fitting to divine justice that the punishments of purgatory come from the body and affect the soul. Thus the spirit is burned by a material fire (*ab igne materiali*) in purgatory. The fires of hell are also corporeal, Bonaventure writes, tormenting both the bodies and souls of the damned "in a corporeal place down below" (*in loco corporali deorsum*), and the "smoke of their torments will ascend forever and ever."⁷³

These statements leave no refuge for the wicked in metaphor. For the just, however, the effect of corporeal fire on the spirit is, ultimately, good news. The soul is punished for its faults and "relieved of the burden of its guilt" (*reatuum onere alleviatam*). This occurs, Bonaventure explains, either on the basis of some God-given power in the fire, or, more likely, through the interior working of grace with the external fires assisting. He sees, however, the difficulty introduced by claiming that corporeal fire directly affects the incorporeal spirit—and yet does not wish to deny that the corporeal fire itself, in whatever way effected by grace, has a role to play in the cleansing punishment. When the purgation is complete, immediately the

purified spirits, “whom the fire of charity lifts up, and who have no impurity of the soul or any guilt to hold them back (*retardans*), necessarily fly away.”⁷⁴ The purification of the soul is, here again, understood as a contest of forces, the removal of a weight (*impuritas* or *onus reatum*) that acted as a hindrance to another, greater weight (*caritas*). And this action occurs through (at least the assistance of) corporeal fire, which will envelop the earth and inflame, subtilize, and rarefy all things—that is, will transform all things into itself. Thus the conflagration of the earth appears to achieve the goal of the ordering weight of charity: all things are set in upward motion, bound together, and ultimately brought to rest.

The connection between the affective heat of the soul and the cleansing fire of the cosmos recalls the Stoic identification of the warm *pneuma* that produces changes in bodies with the “craftsmanlike fire” that creates and recreates the cosmos.⁷⁵ The resonance here with the Stoic teaching stresses the deep continuity between the movement of souls and the movements of bodies. And just as, for the Stoic philosophers, this fire is both natural and divine, for Bonaventure, too, the affective movement of the all things to God is at the same time natural and gratuitous.⁷⁶ But Bonaventure’s vision of the final conflagration is at the same time the devastating eschatological realization of Dionysius’s erotic cosmos: “We call love the unitive force.”⁷⁷

This love, as Bonaventure makes clear, has fully cosmic dimensions, and extends to every aspect of creation. Nevertheless, the rational soul, being immortal and possessed of the image of God in memory, intellect, and will, receives this love in a distinctive and greater mode than other creatures. Bonaventure affirms the Aristotelian distinction between the motion of the soul and the motion of bodies when he argues that, in all cases of corporeal motion, there must be distinguished an agent and patient of motion, but in the case of the will, true self-motion is possible. That is, the will is both the mover and moved, whereas in cases of bodily motion, there is an external agent (whether *place*, or some efficient cause) and the thing that is moved.⁷⁸

Rather than obviating the force of Bonaventure’s corporeal analogies for the ascent of the soul toward God, this distinction between self-motion and external motion renders the analogies all the more remarkable. For though the deliberative motion of the soul is unlike the motion of bodies, the highest motion that human beings are capable of (the ascent toward and union with God) most closely resembles the most basic kind of motion in the universe—that of the elements moving toward their natural places. Bonaventure is clear that the will is not subject to coercion: “Since attain-

ing beatitude is not glorious unless it is through merit, and there is no merit in something unless it is done voluntarily and freely, it is fitting that freedom of choice [*libertatem arbitrii*] be given to the rational soul, through the removal of all coercion, for it is of the nature of the will that it in no way can be forced.”⁷⁹ But while Bonaventure maintains that even the attainment of beatitude is not the result of any coercion of the will, he does, as we have seen, embrace the language of “necessity” in describing the ascent of purified souls to God by the fire of charity—that is, when the agent of motion in the soul is the weight of charity, a gift of the Holy Spirit. It is the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit that troubles the basis of the distinction between spiritual motion and bodily motion. The deliberative motion of the will to any number of determinate ends is properly understood as self-motion, in which the agent of motion is the will itself (though this is without doubt dependent on grace in a general sense). When it is a matter of the infused grace of charity bearing the soul upwards, certainly the freedom of the will is not destroyed. Yet in this case the most fitting comparison for this motion is the movement of the elementary bodies toward their natural places. The motion of grace in the soul is, like the inexorable motion of fire to its sphere, both a divine and a natural motion.