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## The Weight of Love

Davis, Robert Glenn

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The Exemplary Bodies of the *Legenda Maior*

With the language of death in the final passage of the *Itinerarium*, Bonaventure insists that the *excessus mentis* is not simply a matter of abandoning intellectual operations in favor of affective operations. The *transitus* into God involves, after all, a *transformation* of the highest part of the *affectus*, and the drawing of that transformed affect into God. What does this transformation entail if it is not simply the death of the intellect? What must occur within the affect for the journey to reach its end? The answer to this question (insofar as an explanation is possible for what Bonaventure describes as “mystical and most secret”) gets at the heart of the ecstatic death that the *Itinerarium* depicts. It involves, I suggest, not only the abandonment of the intellect, but also, and more radically, the abandonment of what Bonaventure properly calls the will (*voluntas*).

Though the seventh chapter of the *Itinerarium* contains no detailed discussion of the nature of affect, Bonaventure’s writings on the various aspects of the soul’s affective part lay the groundwork for—and are consistent with—the transformation by fire that occurs there. Making that case will require a look at Bonaventure’s understanding of the will (*voluntas*) and how it relates to the affective part of the soul (*pars affectiva*, or simply

*affectus*) on the one hand, and his understanding of free choice (*liberum arbitrium*) on the other.<sup>1</sup> The first part of this chapter examines Bonaventure's theory of the *voluntas* and how it relates to the higher part of the *affectus*. The second part examines a very different kind of account of affective transformation—but one, I argue, that is consistent with and helps to elaborate the vision of affective abandonment witnessed in the *Itinerarium*. The *Legenda Maior*, Bonaventure's longer *vita* of Francis of Assisi, depicts in the person of Francis the abandonment of the will for which the affective part of the soul is created. It culminates in the inflaming and death of Francis's soul, transforming him into an exemplar of affective fervor that is witnessed in his wounded and dying body.

### *Nature and Necessity in the Affective Part of the Soul*

In order for the distinction between *liberum arbitrium*, the *voluntas*, and the *affectus* even to be legible in English, the misleading translation of *liberum arbitrium* as “free will” must first be abandoned.<sup>2</sup> This translation, among its other faults, obscures the painstaking distinctions by which medieval theologians sought to understand the rational capacities and limits of human beings—both intellectual and voluntary—to deliberate, judge, decide, and act.<sup>3</sup> The translations of *liberum arbitrium* as “free choice” or “free decision” avoid the confusion that the term “will” introduces and better capture the sense of *arbitrium* as an activity or capacity to act, rather than as a distinct power.

Augustine had declared that free choice refers to the soul as a whole. For Bonaventure this means that free choice spans the most basic division of the soul's powers, the cognitive and the affective.<sup>4</sup> As Bonaventure writes in the *Breviloquium*, “Freedom from compulsion is nothing else than a faculty of will and reason, which are the principal powers of the soul.”<sup>5</sup> The name itself implies this: *libertas* belongs properly to the will (*voluntas*), wherein lies the capacity for self-motion and command (*imperium*) of all the other powers; whereas *arbitrium*, which is synonymous with judgment (*iudicium*), belongs to the cognitive part, whereby the soul is able to reflect upon its own act and discern right from wrong.<sup>6</sup> To simplify a long and complex discussion, Bonaventure defines free choice as a habit or faculty belonging to reason and will (distinguished from each in some way, but without constituting an entirely separate power). By it the soul acts deliberately and free from external coercion. Free choice is begun in reason and completed in the will, and for this reason is properly said to be in the will more than it is in reason.

Even though free choice spans the entire soul, it does not, Bonaventure clarifies, encompass the whole of reason or will. After concluding that free choice comprehends the reason and will, he deals with two arguments that reason and will are each more than that which properly pertains to free choice. Bonaventure concedes the point and offers a clarification:

To the objection that free choice does not comprehend the whole of reason nor the whole of the will, it must be said that this is true. Rather, free choice comprehends the cognitive power only insofar as it is joined to the affective, and it comprehends the affective insofar as it is joined to the cognitive. Thus it can be called a “deliberative affect,” or a “voluntary deliberation.” And therefore, since “reason” refers to the cognitive power as it is ordered to the affective, and “will” refers to the affective power as it is regulated and made rational by the cognitive, thus it is better to say that free choice is a faculty of the will and reason than a faculty of the intellect and the affect.<sup>7</sup>

Free choice, then, is simply the name for what happens when the soul’s powers act in concert. But the response reveals a significant aspect of Bonaventure’s understanding of the division of the soul: the will is not coextensive with affect, just as reason is not coextensive with intellect. Bonaventure acknowledges some affective capacity that is not *voluntas*—that is, a way of looking at affect in itself and not joined to intellect. What does this encompass? The objection that occasioned the reply gives an indication: “Our will is unchangeable [*impermutable*] with respect to some things; but whatever our free choice desires, it desires changeably [*permutabiliter*].”<sup>8</sup>

As Bonaventure explains at length in the twenty-fourth distinction of the same book of his commentary, the affective part of the soul can be divided, in a sense, into two aspects or activities—one in which the soul necessarily and unchangeably desires the Good or beatitude; and one in which the will, in conjunction with reason, deliberates and chooses among different proximate goods.

It must be conceded that the natural will and the deliberative will are a single power, which is called natural or deliberative according to its mode of moving. The power by which I desire beatitude is the same as that by which I desire a virtue for doing this or that good thing ordained to beatitude. In desiring beatitude, it is called natural, since its desire is unchangeably inclined to beatitude. But as it desires to do this or that good, it is called deliberative, and according to the judgment of reason it is able to incline to the contrary.<sup>9</sup>

The idea that reason is capable of contraries was a common scholastic assumption derived from Aristotle.<sup>10</sup> For medieval theologians, “contrary” is used broadly to mean contingent existents: the soul is free to choose among things that could be otherwise. For Bonaventure here, the emphasis is on possible acts that the soul may elect to perform. By contrast, the soul is not free to choose beatitude as the object of its desire—not because it is constrained to do so, but because the Good in which beatitude consists has no contrary, evil being only a privation of the Good.<sup>11</sup> Thus the distinction of the affective part on the basis of different modes of moving is itself based on a difference in the objects of desire. The Good is not one among a number of desirable objects but the source and end of every desire.<sup>12</sup>

This same distinction appears in Bonaventure’s explanation of *synderesis* discussed in Chapter 1. Here, however, the question concerns whether the natural and deliberative wills are essentially distinct powers. And in arguing the negative position, Bonaventure encounters the difficulty of demonstrating how the will can be rational and yet incapable of contraries in its natural movement. The arguments for the affirmative state explicitly the theological risk that lurks in all of Bonaventure’s discussions of *synderesis* and the natural will: How is this innate and immutable desire for the good—the spark by which an otherwise fallen human nature remains upright—distinguishable from nonhuman varieties of desire, either simple natural attraction or brute animal instinct? If there is in the affective part of the soul both an immutable and an indeterminate will, then there must be two wills, the first irrational, the second capable of rational deliberation. The division, as the argument goes, would safeguard the rational nature of the deliberative will against the apparent irrationality of natural instinct, and, by extension, the uniquely human character of human desire: “The power that we have in common with brute animals cannot be the same as the power by which we differ from them. But we are like brute animals with regard to natural appetite, and we differ with regard to our rational appetite. For just as brute animals naturally desire the preservation of their being, so do we too desire this.”<sup>13</sup>

Though it is not named here, the question invokes something like the Stoic conception of *oikeiosis*, the natural and nonrational desire for self-preservation found in human infants and animals alike.<sup>14</sup> In response, Bonaventure distinguishes two senses of “natural.” On the one hand, there is a way of distinguishing natural and deliberative desires on the basis of different objects, “such as when one is desirable only by a rational substance, and another object is desired by an animal substance.”<sup>15</sup> But on the other hand, when it is a matter of a common object that is desired naturally or delib-

eratively, the two desires are essentially one, and differ only in their mode of desiring. In this sense, “we say that synderesis is a natural will which naturally inclines and incites us toward the honest good and murmurs against evil. And we call the deliberative appetite the will by which, after deliberation, we cling sometimes to a good, sometimes to evil.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, the natural will (which humans share in common with nonrational animals) constitutes a natural appetite directed toward a good that is desirable to a creature with or without reason.<sup>17</sup>

The mention of synderesis indicates that there is another way that desire can be natural, while also remaining essentially rational. A certain logic opposes this, too, as evidenced by the second objection: As Aristotle says, the rational powers are capable of contraries, that is, of choosing this or that object of intellection or desire. But to be moved naturally to an object is to be moved singly (*uniformiter*) and to be moved rationally is to be moved changeably (*vertibiliter*). In this way, the argument implies, a naturally moved desire is by definition not a rationally moved desire.

The force of Bonaventure’s refutation to this objection is difficult to register, but it helps to clarify the stakes of the question:

The rational will is ordained to *something* such that it in no way desires its contrary, as is clear in the ordination of our will to beatitude and felicity. And although it is determinately inclined to beatitude, this very same power of the will is nevertheless indeterminate with regard to many kinds of desirable objects, so that it is made to be moved to opposites. And for this reason the power is natural, while not ceasing to be rational and deliberative.<sup>18</sup>

The response clarifies the definition of “rational,” which means, for the present purposes, to be determined toward beatitude and free to deliberate on everything else. It is clear now that the will must be essentially one—for if it were truly divided into a natural and deliberative power, then there would be an irrationality at the center of human desire. The end for which human beings were created as rational beings would be itself irrational, the object of an irrational appetite.

This is, as Bonaventure insists, not the case: The will is wholly rational because it is capable of contraries, even if not in every case. A purely natural power is one that cannot be otherwise. Fire, to use Bonaventure’s example here, heats and illumines.<sup>19</sup> It cannot do otherwise. The will is rational because it is capable of contraries in most cases. But the surprising fact remains that the rationality of human beings’ desire comes into question precisely where the ultimate and highest end of human rationality is

concerned. If humans were to desire this ultimate end in such a way that they could not deliberate as to proximate ends—if the natural will were distinct from the deliberative will—then human desire for beatitude would be akin to the physical properties of the simple bodies.

Yet though the natural and deliberative wills are not, in fact, two powers, they are two diverse motions. The natural will is moved immutably and necessarily—rationally, yet without the deliberative and cognitive operations of reason. If *liberum arbitrium* is the operation of the will insofar as it is joined to cognition, then, it would seem to follow that the natural movement toward beatitude is not, strictly speaking, an operation of *liberum arbitrium*. The will is not coerced into desiring beatitude. But neither is the soul free to deliberate concerning the natural desire for the Good that is the end of all human activity, however much it may deliberate as to whether or not to assent to this desire.<sup>20</sup> Yet as Bonaventure insists in the *Breviloquium*, free choice and beatitude have everything to do with each other: “Attaining beatitude is not glorious unless it is through merit, and there is no merit in something unless it is done voluntarily and freely.”<sup>21</sup>

How can beatitude be the sole object about which the soul does not deliberate, and at the same time be the end and glory of the soul’s power of free choice? And what kind of moral pedagogy does such a seemingly paradoxical end require? When Bonaventure takes up these questions in the following distinction, he turns again to animals.

### *Free Choice and the Interiority of Desire*

It is telling that the first question that Bonaventure treats on the subject of *liberum arbitrium* is whether the faculty is found in non-rational animals. Augustine’s declaration that “When we speak of free choice, we are speaking not of a part of the soul, but of the whole” (a key *auctoritas* for scholastic reflection on the subject) positions free choice as the very definition of spiritual substance, in which humans and the higher intelligences participate by virtue of their rationality. So the question of free choice in brute animals is not an oblique opening. Rather, it gets to the heart of what free choice is and what it does theologically. And Bonaventure’s resolution of the question is unequivocal: “It must be said that free choice is without a doubt found in rational substances alone.”<sup>22</sup>

In his conclusion, Bonaventure explains that to affirm *liberum arbitrium* in rational creatures is to affirm two things: their special liberty and their distinctive capacity for judgment or choice. On the first count, to be “free” means, on the one hand, to be unconstrained in desiring and in fleeing

an object of the concupiscible or irascible appetite. Anything that can be desired or fled can be so on account of three types of desiderata: the delectable or pleasurable, the agreeable or convenient, and the Good itself, that is, the *bonum honestum*. While irrational animals can desire or flee an object on account of its delectability or agreeability, only rational substances are capable of desiring the Good itself—that is, the intrinsic and highest good that is the object of synderesis. The rational substance is the only one that can be said to be truly free, since it is unconstrained with respect to all three genera of desiderata. Thus, in an apparent paradox, what makes rational substances free is their necessary and natural inclination to the Good. It is not actually a paradox in Bonaventure's account, however, because the necessity of desiring the good is no restriction on the soul's liberty; it is, in fact (and following Augustine), the very condition of liberty.

At the same time, to be free means to be totally unconstrained not only with respect to the object of desire, but also with respect to the act of desire. While animals may be able (or can be trained) to restrain themselves from acting on their appetites, they cannot, Bonaventure assumes, restrain the interior act of desire itself; "And so if they love (*amant*) something, they are unable *not* to love it." What appears as self-restraint in irrational animals will always turn out to be a constraint of some feared outcome (punishment, for example): "And this is why John of Damascus says that 'they are more acted upon than acting (*magis aguntur quam agant*),' because the agent of restraint in animals is always external to them."<sup>23</sup> Rational beings, by contrast, can restrain not only the exterior act of desire, but even the interior desire. The rational will can choose to stop loving something it previously loved, without any external stimulus or threat provoking the change. That is to say, the rational will can truly restrain *itself*, and this capacity for self-reversion is crucial to the distinction between rational and irrational appetite. Bonaventure cites Anselm to the effect that the rational will is "a self-moving instrument," and maintains that even though animals seem to move from some intrinsic cause, the interior appetite arises in every case from an exterior object rather than true self-motion.<sup>24</sup>

Accordingly, both with respect to objects and acts of the appetite, a certain notion of interiority defines true voluntary liberty. With respect to the object of desire, only the rational and thus truly free creature is able to desire the intrinsic good of something, as opposed to its goodness "for me" as a source of pleasure or advantage. With respect to the act of desire, the rational will has control over its own interior impulses; no outside force need act upon the will for its movement. A similar interiority and the capacity for self-reversion also characterize the second of the two words in



free choice (*liberum arbitrium*), which, Bonaventure argues, belongs properly to rational substances alone.

Arbitration [*arbitrium*] is the same as judgment [*iudicium*], at whose command [*nutum*] the other virtues are moved and obey. And “to judge” with a complete accounting [*secundum rationem completam*] is proper to that which discerns between the just and the unjust, and between what is proper to oneself and what is proper to another. And no power knows (*novit*) what is just and unjust except the one which participates in reason and which is made to recognize (*cognoscere*) the Highest Justice, from which comes the rule of every law.<sup>25</sup>

The power that participates in reason is the mind, which is the image of God, and which alone is able to know itself and its own act: “And no power that is bound to matter ever knows itself, nor is turned back upon itself.”<sup>26</sup> Because the rational substance alone among the powers of the soul is not bound to matter, then only reason is capable of self-reversion, and is thus capable of judging what is proper to oneself and what is *alienus*.

The Quaracchi editors attribute this assertion to the *Liber de Causis*, a digest and paraphrase of Proclus’s *Elements of Theology* that was read under the authority of Aristotle in the medieval schools.<sup>27</sup> This indirect invocation of the Proclean understanding of *nous* as the self-reverting principle indicates that interiority, as a capacity for self-reversion through self-knowledge and self-motion, is central to the conception of rationality and of the *voluntas* as the rational appetite. In this sense, a natural motion of the will is not contrary to reason, insofar as the inclination to the good, while not itself subject to deliberation or error, is innate to the soul, fully intrinsic to the will that desires it. The self-determining character of the will is thus reconciled to the necessary movement toward the good, insofar as the object of desire is not external to the soul itself.

This “Neoplatonic” or “Augustinian” gesture is not a departure from Aristotle. Even leaving aside the question of Proclus’s own “Aristotelianism,” as well as the Aristotelian attribution under which Proclus’s words circulated, Bonaventure is careful to uphold the Aristotelian dictum that rationality is capable of contraries. The second argument for attributing free choice to animals observes that “a free power is one that is capable of opposites, and in brute animals there is a power to do opposing things, since sometimes they show kindness, sometimes ferocity; sometimes they are willful, and sometimes they respond and come.”<sup>28</sup> To this Bonaventure responds that animals clearly are not able to be moved to all opposites, “but only those which are below the dignity of free choice.” Free choice

properly respects the *bonum honestum*, the same good that is also the proper object of synderesis.

However, although they have the same object, free choice and synderesis (or the natural will to the good) are not identical. The natural and the deliberative wills, after all, are not distinguished according to their objects, but by their mode of moving toward that object. This is how the honest Good can here be classed as an *oppositum*. It is not that the Good itself has a contrary, but rather that the free soul may choose whether or not to pursue a particular act toward that Good. The desire for this Good is always present, yet the merit of attaining beatitude consists in choosing the acts and the objects that will lead the soul to the Good it seeks. The will wills rightly when it consents to its own most fundamental desire.

The paradox, the point at which opposites coincide, is this desire—as desire for God’s presence is never, as the *Itinerarium* makes clear, simply one’s own. The will’s self-consent (so to speak)—the fulfillment of the soul’s capacity for free choice and reversion of the rational will to itself—is a state of being moved wholly by the soul’s natural desire for the Good.<sup>29</sup> And to desire the Good, as the whole of the *Itinerarium* attests, is a movement within and ultimately above oneself, an ascent of the mind toward its own *excessus*. In this ecstasy, deliberations cease. Thus, the will’s self-control comes to resemble nothing so much as the complete abandonment of that self-control to the Good, the object of the soul’s most intimate and most excessive longing.<sup>30</sup>

If the distinction between rational will and irrational appetite is measured in the distance from an interior impulse to an external attraction, then the ecstatic character of the soul’s desire—a desire which is both internal to the soul and which lifts the soul out of itself—cannot be understood in any straightforward way as rational. Animal affections are “more acted upon than acting.” Divine desire, at the same time complete interiority and complete exteriority, would seem for Bonaventure to be a state in which being acted upon and acting are the same movement.<sup>31</sup>

### *Carried by Desire: Francis and the Legenda Maior*

In the previous chapter, I suggested that because of the analogical structure of creation and the ecstatic character of desire, the transformation of affect that occurs in the *excessus mentis* is always already underway from the very beginning of ascent. That is, the soul, insofar as it is constituted by the desire for the good into which it is ultimately consumed, exceeds itself even as it remains possessed of its powers. If so, then according to

the Seraphic movement of the *Itinerarium*, the transformation of the *affectus* that occurs in ecstatic union is already begun *in statu viatoris*. And the will's self-motion, ordained naturally and determinately to beatitude, is always also a kind of being moved. Given the prevalence of this theme in Bonaventure's exposition of Francis's Seraphic vision in the *Itinerarium*, it is not surprising that this dynamic also appears in his account of Francis's life, the *Legenda Maior*.

The remainder of this chapter examines Bonaventure's depiction of Francis in the *Legenda*. Generically, Bonaventure's hagiography is far removed from his early scholastic speculations on free choice and the will. But I examine these two disparate sources together in order to demonstrate their affinities on a theological level. In both accounts, what Bonaventure reveals is the paradoxical coincidence of activity and passivity, the surprising but not inexplicable torsion of inner and outer effected by the divine origin and goal of human beings' natural capacities. Nature, in Bonaventure's metaphysics, is after all divine, and the identity of these two poles keeps in motion the hierarchies that the distinction between nature and grace underwrites. As I suggested earlier, in Bonaventure's accounts of free choice and the will, the ecstatic nature of desire upsets the distinction between interior self-motion and external, corporeal motion, such that the consummation of self-motion is its becoming external motion. If this is so, then the progressive perfecting of the soul should manifest itself in some way, should become, in other words, external. This is precisely what takes place, I will argue, in Bonaventure's depiction of Francis's life—his effusive compassion, his attachment to nonrational animals, and his long, spectacular death, his ardent desire literally transforming him into a corpse, a martyr whose lifeless form witnesses the progressive perfection and manifestation—the embodiment—of his love.

By the end of Bonaventure's *Legenda*, it is clear that he has positioned the work as a kind of companion or hagiographical counterpart to the *Itinerarium*, echoing its seven-stage structure, whereby "through six stages you were led to the seventh in which at last you have rest."<sup>32</sup> Though the stages described in Francis's life do not correspond one-to-one to the stages of the soul's ascent in the *Itinerarium*, the seventh stage in which the affections are inflamed and transformed finds a clear resonance with Francis's seventh stage. This is the ecstatic Seraphic vision that leaves his body marked with the death he undergoes in taking on Christ's passion.<sup>33</sup> Both the parallels in Bonaventure's own text and the exemplary nature of Francis's life and spiritual death invite the reader to examine how the desire that transforms the soul is manifested in Francis's disposition and

actions. In other words, Bonaventure frames the *Legenda Maior* as a model of what a soul carried along by desire toward God looks like.

For this reason, the *Legenda* deserves attention alongside Bonaventure's other works outlining the dynamics of the soul's natural affection for God.<sup>34</sup> The *Legenda*, however, is more complicated as a source for Bonaventure's thought. Bonaventure was the third biographer of Francis, after the two *vitae* of Thomas of Celano and the *vita* of Julian of Speyer. And Bonaventure relied heavily on these previous accounts for his own, in many cases simply reproducing entire passages. Thus the question of Bonaventure's authorial voice in the *Legenda* is a complicated one<sup>35</sup>—and rendered all the more complicated by the circumstances surrounding Bonaventure's compilation of the work (which included heightening divisions within the order regarding Francis's intentions for the friars minor).<sup>36</sup> These authorial questions, however, do not discount the *Legenda* as a source for Bonaventure's thought, but rather make particularly visible the imbricated and situational nature of authority in all medieval theological works. Generic conventions, institutional exigencies, and the presence of other authorial voices in the text are constitutive of all of Bonaventure's writings. Reading them well is not a matter of discerning his authentic voice behind these circumstances, nor it is simply a task of explaining every assertion as a function of those authorial voices.

Rather than searching for the authentically Bonaventurian thought in his compilation of Francis's life, I suggest that the text as a whole be read for the ways in which it complicates and amplifies the ideas I have been tracing in Bonaventure's other works thus far. This involves, then, an exploration of how Francis's desire for God and his will to the good appear in the text. In this view, the generic differences between the *Legenda* on the one hand and the *Itinerarium* and Bonaventure's university texts on the other are paramount. In the *vita*, the pedagogical medium is neither the scholastic *quaestio* nor the mnemonic six-winged figure of the Seraph, but the embodied actions and appearance of a holy man. This is not a claim for the text's greater realism or relative lack of allegorization, but rather for a different form of theological expression. Because the subject is the person of Francis, desire in the *vita* can only appear in and through the human body. Perhaps one of the most remarkable aspects of the *Legenda* is its exploration of the ways in which the body *bears* the affections of desire and compassion. Francis's body is not only the sign of his ecstatic love—in the form of the stigmata of Christ's passion—but the site upon which it is enacted.

In the prologue, Bonaventure gestures to the end of Francis's life, in which he was “given an angelic office, and was totally inflamed with a

Seraphic fire. Like a hierarchic man, he was carried up [*sursum vectus*] in a fiery chariot.<sup>37</sup> Through the invocation of the Seraph and the description of Francis as a *vir hierarchicus* (a man whose soul has been made hierarchical through the threefold operation of purgation, illumination, and perfection), Bonaventure frames Francis's life in terms of the Dionysian ascent in the celestial hierarchy. In this way, he immediately establishes a link to the threefold Dionysian framework of his other writings, including not only the *Itinerarum*, but also *De Triplici Via* and the later *Collationes in Hexaemeron*.

Francis's angelic nature is not realized only at his stigmatization and death, however.<sup>38</sup> As the prologue goes on to explain, "while living among human beings he imitated angelic purity, by which he was made an example for perfect followers of Christ."<sup>39</sup> And though the story Bonaventure relates of Francis's life is one of progressive transformation, he establishes at the beginning of the narrative that the qualities that ordained Francis to an angelic office toward the end of his life were present from an early age.

In the first chapter, Bonaventure writes that even as a young man, Francis's heart was filled with a "generous compassion [*miseratio liberalis*] for the poor," such that when, on one occasion, after ignoring a beggar, he realized what he had done and ran to the man. Francis then resolved never to refuse a beggar again, and especially if that beggar appealed to divine love. He kept this promise and "merited a great increase of love and grace in God."<sup>40</sup> Here the interplay between Francis's inborn affective disposition and his great merit in doing good is established early in his life, and at the very beginning of Bonaventure's account. This disposition is moved not only by the sight of poverty but also at the sound of God's name: "Later, when he had perfectly put on Christ, he would say that even while remaining in his worldly habit, he was almost never able to hear someone mention divine love without being changed in his heart [*sine cordis immutatione*]."

As described here, Francis's compassion for the poor and his special affection for the love of God are rooted in a single inborn disposition. In striking terms Bonaventure states that this disposition was natural to Francis, present in him before his perfection by grace: "He possessed an inborn sympathy, which was doubled by the infused holiness of Christ. Therefore his soul melted [*liquescebat*] for the poor and infirm, and he extended his affection [*affectum*] even for those to whom he was not able to extend his hand."<sup>41</sup> Here Bonaventure clearly distinguishes a natural affective tendency from the superadded (*superinfusa*) love, which intensifies and perfects Francis's innate compassion, extending the reach of his affection.

That Francis's life bears witness to the unity of love of God and compassion for God's creation is a hallmark of devotion to Francis, both medieval and modern. But reading the *Legenda* alongside Bonaventure's other writings about the *affectus*, it becomes clear just how deep that connection runs in Bonaventure's understanding of creation and the nature of the soul. As he writes, "True holiness, which according to the Apostle is good for all things, so filled Francis's heart and penetrated his flesh [*viscera*] that it seemed to have claimed [*vindicasse*] the man of God totally to its rule. This is what drew [*agebat*] him to God through devotion, transformed him into Christ through compassion, inclined [*inclinabat*] him to his neighbor through lowering himself, and refashioned him to a state of innocence through the universal reconciliation of every creature."<sup>42</sup> The same spirit that carried Francis to God and inclined him to his neighbor also restored in him the original rectitude of creation. All of the language here is reminiscent of Bonaventure's descriptions of the movement of synderesis—a movement that lifts the soul to God and inclines it to every Good as such (the *bonum honestum*), and is that by which human beings remain upright as they were before sin. Bonaventure presents Francis as one whose natural affect was so strong, or whose will was so bent back upon his inborn love for God, that he seemed to be driven entirely by this natural affective spark. Not incidentally, it is this same Francis who is depicted earlier as praying incessantly with the "unutterable groanings" of the spirit—groans which Bonaventure in his *Sentences* commentary attributes to synderesis.

For all of the displays of virtue and good works that appear in the *Legenda*, the picture that emerges of Francis is of one who "is more acted upon than acting," with passive verb forms repeatedly used to underscore the ease with which Francis is moved by his desire for God and for the poor. As I suggested in the beginning of this chapter, free choice, a capacity whose hallmark is the uniquely rational ability to restrain interior impulses, is paradoxically perfected in the inability to restrain the soul's most deeply rooted affective impulse. In the *Legenda*, likewise, the question of Francis's restraint is raised on several occasions. In the first chapter Francis is praying alone when Jesus appears to him on the cross. At the sight (*conspetum*) of this, Francis's soul melts, and "the memory of Christ's passion was so impressed into the marrow of the flesh of his heart (*visceribus cordis medullitus*), that from that moment whenever Christ on the cross came to mind, he could scarcely (*vix*) restrain his outward tears and sighs."<sup>43</sup> The interior affections, spurred by the sight of Christ crucified before his mind, are so overwhelming that he is almost—though not quite—completely

overtaken by them to the point of tears. Tears are a common sight for those in the presence of Francis, so much so that they eventually cause a disease in his eyes. When his doctor warns him to hold back his tears in order to preserve his vision, Francis replies that celestial vision is to be preferred over “the light which we have in common with flies.”<sup>44</sup> In this way, Bonaventure explains, Francis prefers to go blind from tears, “by which the interior eye is purified so that it may see God,” than to impede the spirit by repressing his fervor.<sup>45</sup> Here it appears that Francis is to be revered for his decision not to restrain his affect as it manifests itself in excessive tears. Could he? In this instance, Francis chooses to give free rein to the impulses of desire that threaten to overwhelm him. His exercise of choice—and thus his virtue—lies in surrendering to an affective devotion in both its inward and outward manifestations.

This is not the first instance of Francis’s body being afflicted with devotion. While he is still involved with the affairs of his father’s business and has “not yet learned to contemplate heavenly things and had not acquired a taste for divine things,” God afflicts his body with a long illness, in order to prepare his soul for being anointed by the Holy Spirit.<sup>46</sup> The bodily illness wears off eventually, but the interior change it effects is terminal. Upon recovering his strength, he sees a poor and ragged knight in the street. Moved (the word is *affectu*) to compassion over the man’s poverty, Francis immediately removes his clothes and gives them to the man.<sup>47</sup> This foreshadows Francis’s more dramatic disrobing in the presence of his father later on. But the episode on its own also dramatically illustrates the way in which God’s compassion is conducted, in a sense, through and in the body of Francis. The compassion of God first appears as physical illness, then moves to effect an interior awakening of compassion. Finally, when Francis is moved by the sight of suffering, it manifests itself again outwardly in the nakedness of Francis’s body.

The *Legenda*’s concern for visibility is surely in part a function of the forensic demands that such a text must satisfy. This is true, of course, of hagiographical writing in general. But it is especially the case in Francis’s *vita*, which, Bonaventure writes, he was commissioned to produce by the General Chapter of Norbonne in 1260 (only a year after the date he gives for the inspiration of the *Itinerarium*, indicating that the two texts are very closely contemporary). Bonaventure’s *vita* was to be the authoritative account of Francis’s life, a unifying document meant to set to rest the divisions within the order about the true nature of Francis’s life and the community of his followers. As Bonaventure writes in the prologue, “In order to establish with greater clarity and certainty the true facts of his

life to hand down to posterity, I have visited his place of birth, the places in which he lived, and the site of the death [*transitus*] of this blessed man and have had thorough conversations with those still living who were close to him, and especially with those who were most familiar with his holiness and were its closest followers.”<sup>48</sup> As in the visit to La Verna, which Bonaventure relates in his prologue to the *Itinerarium*, Bonaventure again puts himself in Francis’s place—as the locus of true authority about Francis’s life and death and also as witness to Francis’s holiness in Bonaventure’s own body. He relates that when he was a child, he “was saved from the jaws of death through the invocation of Francis and his merits.”<sup>49</sup> Thus, in gratitude he seeks to gather the true accounts of Francis’s life, for, he writes, “I recognize that I have experienced his power in my very self.”<sup>50</sup> Francis’s spiritual power inhabits Bonaventure, and Bonaventure inhabits the text that follows, either as eyewitness to the site or as recipient of the report of Francis’s holiness, compassion, and spiritual fervor.

The physicality of Francis’s concourse with God is stressed even in the absence of witnesses, as in the pivotal vision in the Church of San Damiano.<sup>51</sup> Francis is praying with his head inclined toward a crucifix, his eyes characteristically filled with tears, when he hears “with his bodily ears” a voice coming from the cross, telling him to restore the Lord’s house. He eventually sets about restoring the church building, only later realizing the spiritual meaning of Christ’s command. But immediately upon hearing that voice—and before he acts—he begins to tremble. Receiving the power of divine speech in his heart, he is “carried out of himself in an ecstasy of mind [*mentis alienatur excessu*].”<sup>52</sup> The entire scene is structured on the dialectic of body and spirit. Francis is made to tremble as the words that strike his ears are commuted to divine power in his heart, so that he loses his bodily senses. And from mental ecstasy he returns to act, first building a physical structure that itself signifies the spiritual renewal to come.

The authenticity of this story derives not from an external witness to the event, but from Francis’s own report to his followers later in life. Had there been a witness, how would Francis’s ecstasy have appeared? Bonaventure affirms that there is a sensible effect of the *excessus mentis* when he describes Francis’s follower Giles of Assisi as being frequently “rapt in God in ecstasies, as I myself have truly observed as an eyewitness [*ego ipse oculata fide conspexi*].”<sup>53</sup> Only later episodes from Francis’s life give an indication of what it was like to see him in the full ecstasy of love. His body weakened by age and the rigors of his devotion, Bonaventure reports that “he was often suspended in such an excess of contemplation that, rapt above himself and feeling [*sentiens*] something beyond human understanding [*ultra humanum*



*sensum*], he was unaware of what was going on around him.”<sup>54</sup> On one occasion, as he was riding on a donkey through the busy town of Borgo Santo Sepolcro, he was thronged by devoted followers: “He was pulled and held back by them, and pushed here and there and touched many times, but he seemed unaware of all of it, and paid attention to nothing, just as if he were a dead corpse.”<sup>55</sup> And in an unusually cinematic scene, Bonaventure depicts Francis praying alone at night in the woods, beating his chest, groaning, and “watering the place with his tears.”<sup>56</sup> Onlookers glimpse him “with his hands extended in the shape of a cross, his entire body raised up from the ground and a cloud shining around him.”<sup>57</sup> The outward light exhibits the illumination of his soul, but his posture is that of a man crucified. As in the scene at Santo Sepolcro, the physical presence of Francis in ecstasy of mind is a body of death—insensate and inanimate.

The figure of death gestures forward to the climactic episode on Mount La Verna, in which Francis’s vision of the cruciform Seraph leaves him branded with the wounds of Christ’s passion. Around two years before his death, Bonaventure writes, Francis asked a friend to open the book of the Gospels three times. Each time, the book opened to reveal the account of the crucifixion. Francis then became filled with a desire for martyrdom, as “the unquenchable fire of his love for the good Jesus had risen up in him into such a torch of flames that many waters could not quench such a strong love.”<sup>58</sup> This love, described in language from the *Song of Songs*, will be the instrument of Francis’s spiritual martyrdom, the flame that consumes his soul. But the vision of the Seraph itself elicits more than simple *caritas* in Francis: “By the Seraphic ardor of his desires he was being raised above [*ageretur*] into God, and by sweet compassion he was being transformed into him who chose to be crucified on account of his excessive love [*ex caritate nimia*].”<sup>59</sup> The vision of the Seraph is glorious, but the vision of the crucifix is pitiable: “Seeing it, he was powerfully overcome, and a mix of joy and grief flooded his heart. He rejoiced in the gracious expression with which Christ, in the form of the Seraph, looked at him, but that he was affixed to a cross pierced Francis’s soul with a sword of compassionate sorrow.”<sup>60</sup> Affective death *in excessus mentis* is at once greatest joy and greatest pain, a violent overthrow of human understanding and an elevation to the place of Christ himself.<sup>61</sup>

The sublime ambivalence that consumes Francis’s soul and leaves his heart ablaze at the same time pierces and tears his body as well. The wounds left by his vision are referred to as “stigmata,” but they are more than signifying marks. The wounds he sustains transform his body, rendering him a living corpse: A wound in his side bleeds continuously, with blood real

enough to wet and stain his clothes. On his hands and feet are not only wounds but miraculous nails protruding from his flesh so that he can no longer walk for himself. Thus, in the last years of his life, in the glory of his martyrdom, Francis's dying body (*corpus emortuum*) must be carried by his friends through the streets, exhibited like a corpse while still living.

In this way, Francis's body is a martyr to his inflamed soul.<sup>62</sup> But to what perfection does his dying, nearly immobile body witness? Francis himself provides an interpretation of this sign earlier in the *Legenda* in a discussion of obedience. Here, the *exanime corpus* with which I opened this book appears, foreshadowing Francis's own later martyrdom:

Once when he was asked who should be judged truly obedient, he gave as an example [*pro exemplo*] the image of a dead body. "Take a corpse, [*exanime corpus*]" he said, "and place it where you like! You will see that it puts up no resistance to motion (*non repugnare motum*), nor does it grumble about its position, or complain when it is put aside. If it is propped up on a throne, it does not raise its head up, but rather looks down. If it is clothed in purple, it will look twice as pale. This," Francis said, "is the truly obedient one, who does not judge [*diiudicat*] why he is moved, and does not care where he is placed. He does not demand to be transferred. If he is appointed to an office, he retains his usual humility. The more he is honored, the more he counts himself unworthy."<sup>63</sup>

There are many reasons to wonder at this passage. Most simply, the example is a graphic illustration of the virtue of humility. At the same time, the darkly comic image of a corpse slumped on a throne, neck slack and draped in purple, mocks the pretensions of worldly glory. Yet the power of the image itself is heightened by the rhetorical context in which it appears. Francis presents this image in response to a group of his followers seeking an example, a model of perfect obedience to be imitated. And in this way, as the exemplar of true obedience, he offers an example of obedience that reflects a pale light back onto himself. His life is a movement toward perfection in death, a gradual transformation into the macabre image he presents here. At the same time, the corpse offers a proleptic glimpse of Francis's own living yet martyred body—a body that is always also the appearance of Christ's crucified body. Francis is offering himself as the example of perfect obedience, while at the same time offering a lens through which to understand his virtue.

In what does this virtue consist? The lifeless body, or, literally, the body without a soul (*exanime corpus*), not only does not judge (*diiudicat*) where it is moved, but even has no will of its own with which to move itself.

The body as *speculum* and *exemplum* reflects Francis as one who has surrendered the will entirely, or, in view of Francis's ecstatic "conflagration," one whose will has been wholly consumed by desire. Francis's dying body makes visible the consummation of love. No less than three times in the ninth chapter (which recounts the saint's fervent love for Christ), Francis is described as being "carried" (*ferebatur*)—by *affectus*, by *devotio caritatis*, and by *desiderio*.<sup>64</sup> His soul puts up no resistance. It is moved like a body, an example of perfect obedience and consummate desire.<sup>65</sup>

### *To Take Place: Francis Among the Animals*

Bonaventure's account of Francis does more than simply render desire visible. In the *Itinerarium*, Bonaventure writes that Francis's *transitus* made him the example of perfect contemplation—such that all spiritual persons are invited not simply to imitate Francis's *transitus*, but to pass over themselves *through* Francis. The soul passes *with* and *through* Francis into spiritual ecstasy and the conflagration of the soul. Francis is the example of this passing over; and for Bonaventure, an exemplar is much more than a didactic convenience for the cultivation of virtue. As he writes in the prologue to the *Breviloquium* (describing scripture's *modus tractandi*), "the affect is moved to examples more than to arguments, to promised rewards more than to ratiocination, and through devotion more than through definitions."<sup>66</sup> An *exemplum* is not simply that which instructs the soul in how to act, but is also that which moves and draws the soul affectively to itself. Francis's desire makes him the exemplary subject of the soul's desire for God, and in turn transforms him into its object as well. In his trip through Borgo Santo Sepolcro, when Francis is perched like an inanimate body on his donkey, lost in ecstasy and pushed and pulled by the townspeople, he is not the only figure in the scene drawn by love: "The crowds rushed toward him out of devotion," the account reads.<sup>67</sup> But the multiple vectors of love ultimately miss each other in this scene. The crowds are drawn toward Francis even as he is drawn up in love and contemplation to God—the present and absent object of their devotion, unaware of his surroundings and yet entirely acquiescent to their physical demands: a body abandoned to the desires of the crowd.

Francis's powers of attraction are nowhere more evident than in the celebrated stories of his interactions with animals, both in the *vitae* and the *fioretti*.<sup>68</sup> They present Francis as a figure of exceptional compassion and gentleness. In Bonaventure's renditions, the stories of Francis ministering to animals reflect also Francis's understanding of the structure of vestige,

image, and likeness whereby all creation testifies to God as its cause: "When he considered the primal origin of all things, he was filled with even greater piety, calling all creatures, however small, 'brother' and 'sister,' for he knew that they had the same principle as he himself did."<sup>69</sup> In addition, Bonaventure adds another interpretive gloss on these stories, supplementing his source material with two additional anecdotes concerning lambs, because "he embraced more warmly [*viscerosius*] and sweetly those creatures that present a natural likeness of Christ's gentle mercy and represent him in scriptural signification."<sup>70</sup> The animal in question is not a mere brute beast, but an allegorical stand-in for Christ.

In addition, the story of a falcon waking Francis for divine office signifies, in Bonaventure's account, the saint's eventual elevation in contemplation and Seraphic vision. But even so, Bonaventure includes more in these stories than an affirmation of God's universal causality and Francis's allegorical imagination. The falcon, for example, remains with Francis because he is attached to him in friendship (*magno se illi amicitiae foedere copulavit*). Birds, hares, and even a fish are drawn powerfully to Francis's presence. He is also given a pheasant who "clung to him with such affection that it would in no way suffer to be separated from him."<sup>71</sup> Whenever the pheasant was placed outside, it returned immediately to Francis. And when it was given away, it refused food until it was returned to Francis, upon which it recovered its joy and its appetite.

These miracle stories illustrate Francis's extraordinary holiness and compassion, rather than the extraordinary virtue of the animals. The animals do not cling to Francis by a resolve of their will, but by a natural filial attraction to his love. And so in their response to Francis's affective fervor, they also reflect it back upon him, just as the pliable corpse reflects Francis's obedience and humility. They are more acted upon than acting. But in the devotion of the birds and hares and fish, the purity of Francis's own affection for Christ is manifest, and the animals themselves, through Francis's exemplary love, become examples of devotion. Francis becomes the figure and presence of Christ among the lower creatures. In a dynamic that could rightly be called analogical, Francis takes the place of Christ in these stories, as the animals take the place of Francis.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, for Bonaventure, analogy is a dynamic relationship that draws each stage of creation to its own excess. Thus, Francis does not simply represent Christ; he takes the place of, or *becomes* Christ through the force of his love. And the reader, for whom Francis appears as the desirous and desirable object of the *Legenda Maior*, is moved and transformed into Francis. Analogy is not simply a representational

strategy, but a devotional technique ordered by affect. As the motive principle of the rational and irrational soul alike, the affect moves the soul to that which it loves. As the unitive principle, affect is that by which the lover and the beloved are joined as one, and that which transforms the lover into its beloved. The movement of exemplarity is the affective movement to the place of the exemplar.

In the displacement that occurs, subject becomes object, lover becomes beloved, the moved becomes the mover. For Francis to follow the example of Christ means to take the place of Christ by being drawn into and transformed into him through affection—and as exemplar Francis functions in the same role for “all spiritual persons.” For Bonaventure, exemplarism names both the metaphysical relationship of all things to their source, and the devotional technique by which the reader is transformed through love. The animals only gesture toward the outer limits of exemplarity’s reach. The love that draws Francis to Christ and the love that draws the animals to Francis is not irrational any more than it is an act of human reason. All things are drawn back to their source by the moving and unifying force of desire—exemplified in and transferred through the body of Francis—powerful as fire and inexorable as death. Ascent to God by way of Francis is the becoming-body of the soul.