In this chapter, we turn to the details of Bonaventure’s understanding of sensible creatures: how they are composed of forms and how each composite is individuated. In other words, my purpose in this chapter is to tie up those loose ends we have left with regard to sensible creatures considered in and of themselves, most of which pertain to what Bonaventure would call not metaphysics precisely but, rather, physics.

The first topic which we will examine is Bonaventure’s understanding of individuation, where Bonaventure argues against both positions: (1) that individuation arises from the matter and (2) that individuation arises from the form. His own option is that it is the actual coming together of both the form and the matter which results in an individual. In the previous chapter, I pointed out the similarity between Bonaventure’s structure of a universal form in relation to a particularized/singular form and Scotus’ structure of a common nature related to an individual form. One could have imagined that Bonaventure, like Scotus, would in turn use the particularized form as his principle of individuation. However, Bonaventure rather argues against a view that individuation arises, not only from a form, but precisely from an individual form. Indeed, while anticipating Scotus’ individual form, Bonaventure also anticipates the worries which arise from designating it as a principle of individuation and, accordingly, dismisses this as an option.

In the following section, we will address the question of how creatures are composed of forms. In this discussion, we turn to the famous (or infamous) doctrine of a plurality of substantial forms in Bonaventure’s thought. Here I defend the position that such a doctrine is indeed present in Bonaventure’s texts – contrary to some contemporary scholars, e.g., Quinn, who maintains that there is in Bonaventure’s hylomorphic theory only one substantial form, as Aquinas maintains. Indeed, the majority of scholars disagree with Quinn, as do I. However, I add nuance to Bonaventure’s doctrine of a plurality of substantial forms by showing precisely which forms Bonaventure considers to be substantial and which ones he does not – a distinction which is often skimmed over in secondary literature. Particularly important in this section is the question of the form of light, insofar as Bonaventure’s discussion of light as a (substantial) form most strongly implies that he considers there to be more than one substantial form. Here, I argue primarily against Quinn who maintains that Bonaventure considers light to be the substantial form only of...
celestial bodies – and secondarily against other scholars who, although (correctly) maintaining that Bonaventure considers light to be a substantial form, nonetheless often confound it with the (many) other uses of “light” found throughout Bonaventure’s corpus. I first of all highlight the distinction between two different senses in which Bonaventure uses the term light: (1) to mean a substantial form (i.e. the form common to all bodies) and (2) to mean an accidental form which is possessed only by celestial bodies (i.e. light-giving or luminous). This distinction clarifies precisely what Bonaventure means by attributing light to all bodies and, moreover, helps us to avoid not only confounding these two senses of light, but also confusing the form of light with the illuminative light of Bonaventure’s epistemology – as scholars often merge this light together the light of Bonaventure’s physics. Contrary to the more common view that Bonaventure’s “metaphysics of light” brings a kind of poetical mysticism to his hylomorphism, I argue that the form of light in Bonaventure’s metaphysics is nothing more than the form which makes a body be a body, i.e. the general form of corporeity.

Our penultimate topic will be causation among sensible things. Here, we will examine forms not as the definitions of things but as rules operative in nature. In this discussion, we will address the compatibility of Bonaventure’s account with modern evolutionary theory. We will then apply Bonaventure’s understanding of how universal rules exist in nature to, what one might call, his philosophy of science.

For our final point of discussion, we will turn to the question of the sense in which evil is caused by/participatory in God. On this point, Bonaventure synthesizes Dionysius and Aristotle, to the effect of maintaining Dionysius’ position but developing and clarifying it with the help of Aristotle. From Dionysius, he takes the position that it is precisely the composition of evil in a creature which is caused by God; from Aristotle, he takes over a more precise understanding of the ontological status of evil as being a quality “said of” composite substances, while not a substance unto itself.

1. **Individuation**

Before addressing how and why Bonaventure considers individuation to occur, we should first address what the nature of matter is. For Bonaventure, put simply, matter is potency. Nevertheless, as potency, it is not excluded from being an effect of God, “for matter is not pure privation, rather it has, by the reason of its essence, something from beauty and something from light.”\footnote{Indeed, scholars also often confound these two types of light with what Bonaventure calls lumen, a further concept which we will discuss in the second section as well. Simply put, lumen is the radius of light not the light itself.} Matter, although pure potenti-ality with respect to any form, is not pure privation – it has in itself something of the

\footnote{In Sent. II, d. 1, p. 1, a. 1, q. 1, p.17b. “Nam materia non est privatio pura, immo ratione suae essentiae habet aliquid de pulchritudine et aliquid de luce.”}
form of *Lux*, which, as we will show momentarily, is the form common to all bodies.  

Bonaventure’s reasoning here is that matter, although not itself a body, insofar as it necessary for all bodies, it is said to participate, albeit minimally, in the form which is common to all bodies. Bonaventure quotes Augustine, making a similar point: “Augustine says that [matter] has mode, species, and order, although imperfectly.”

Of all of God’s effects, then, matter is the lowest – but still it is one of God’s effects. Moreover, insofar as matter is caused by God, it is good. Recalling somewhat Proclus’ claim that matter is a kind of lowest form, Bonaventure writes: “But this does not necessitate that God creates everything in equal similitude to himself, but according to grades.”

He then addresses the question of what is the principle of individuation. Bonaventure first entertains two options: (1) that matter is the sole cause of individuation and (2) that forms are the sole cause of individuation. The position that matter is the sole cause of individuation is a fairly straightforward one, based on the claim that “the individual does not add anything to the species except the matter.” This is a reference to the *Categories*, and it is word for word a position which Bonaventure repeats a number of times, notably in the question on seminal reasons, where he develops the distinction between the seminal reasons and the universal forms. He agrees in that question with the position, namely, that the only thing which distinguishes the individual composite from the form itself is that the composite has matter. However, what Bonaventure disagrees with is taking this position as a premise from which one concludes that matter is sole cause of individuation. (Naturally, this reasoning should remind us of Aquinas.) Bonaventure indicates otherwise: just because the difference between the composite and the form is that one is dependent on matter and one is not, this does not necessarily mean that matter is sole principle of individuation.

The second option is that a form is the cause of individuation. While Bonaventure is taking this position from Averroes’ *Commentary on the Metaphysics*, it also interestingly anticipates the position of Duns Scotus. Bonaventure gives a prelimi-
nary summary of this position: “[I]ndividuation is from the form, and they say that beyond the form of most specific species, there is the individual form.” Bonaventure gives the reasoning for this position:

And what moves them to posit this is that they understand order in forms according and according to nature to occur in the same way, through which it is ordered in genera, that the form of the most general genus comes forth first in matter; and so descending all the way to the species. And so far this form does not constitute the individual, since it is not in any way in act, but beyond this form, follows the individual [one] which is entirely in act, just as matter is entirely in potency.

This position maintains that one form (i.e. the individual form) makes the composite exist actually as one individual – this form alone (i.e. not the species and/or genus) being in act and matter being in potency.

Bonaventure then turns to what he considers to be the failings of these two positions. Addressing the first position, he targets as his point of critique that matter is the same in all material things, and thus it seems impossible that matter would make sensible things really different from one another. He writes: “For how matter, which is common to all, may be the first principle (principale principium) and cause of distinction, is rather difficult to see.” Indeed, matter is capable of making things different from one another with regard to their materiality. However, if matter is the only cause of individuation, this still means that sensible things of the same kind would be identical with regard to their intelligible content – e.g., if I have two horses, individuated solely by their matter, they should be identical with regard to their intelligible content, but they are not: Rye’s horse-ness is different from Alejandro’s horse-ness. Matter does not seem to be the only thing which distinguishes the one from the other.

Addressing the second position, Bonaventure writes: “Conversely, how the form may be the total and peculiar cause of numerical distinction is rather difficult to understand, given that all created form, insofar as it is from its own nature is born to have similitude to another, just as the Philosopher himself says, as is the case regarding the sun and in the moon.” This is to say, forms are always universals – an individual form is not really a form (a familiar theme in Bonaventure).

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502 *In Sent. II, d. 3. p. 1, a. 2, q. 3, p. 109b.* “Aliis vero aliter visum est, scilicet quod individuatio esset a forma, et dixerunt, quod ultra formam speciei specialissimae est forma individualis.”

503 *In Sent. II, d. 3. p. 1, a. 2, q. 3, p. 109b.* “Et quod movit hoc ponere illud fuit, quod intellexerunt, ordinem in formis secundum generationem et naturam esse per eundem modum, per quem ordinatur in genere, ita quod forma generis generalissimi primo adventit materiae; et sic descendendo usque ad speciem. Et adhuc forma illa non constituit individuum, quia non est omnino in actu, sed ultra hanc formam individualis subsequitur, quae est omnino in actu, sicut materia fuit omnino in potentia.”

504 It is indeed interesting here to point out that the term *forma individualis* is Scotus’ alternative term for haecceity.

505 *In Sent. II, d. 3. p. 1, a. 2, q. 3, p. 109b.* “Quomodo enim materia, quae omnibus est communis, erit principale principium et causa distinctionis, valde difficile est videre.”

506 *In Sent. II, d. 3. p. 1, a. 2, q. 3, p. 109b.* “Rursus, quomodo forma sit tota et praecipua causa numeralis distinctionis, valde difficile est capere, cum omnis forma creat, quantum est de sui natura, nata sit habere aliam similem, sicut et ipse Philosophus dicit etiam in sole et luna esse.”
The real thrust of this argument comes from the above slightly obscure and easily skimmmed over reference to Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. In the passage Bonaventure is referencing, Aristotle is in the midst of highlighting the many absurd implications of the Platonic Ideas. Here Aristotle targets the position that each form is an individual in the way that a particular instance of a universal is (e.g., this man, Cleon). If Ideas, for Aristotle, are individual, they are impossible to define. Aristotle begins by saying that substance is of two kinds — “the concrete thing and the formula (logos)” — and then clarifies, “I mean that one kind of substance is the formula in combination with the matter, and the other is the formula in its full sense.” Substance in the former sense (i.e. the concrete thing) “admits of destruction, for they also admit of generation.” However, substance in the latter sense (i.e. the formula in its full sense) “does not admit of any destruction in the sense of it ever being destroyed, since neither does it so admit of generation (for the essence of house is not generated, but only the essence of this house).” Of particular sensible substances, Aristotle concludes, “there is no definition or demonstration ... because they contain matter whose nature is such that it can both exist and not exist. Hence all the individual instances of them are perishable.” Accordingly, sensible individuals are always changing, but “demonstration and definition cannot vary.” Thus, in holding with those many citations we saw Bonaventure give of Aristotle two chapters ago, the individual is not intelligible – only that which is common to the many is intelligible.

The impossibility of defining individuals is brought out by the example of defining “eternal entities, especially in the case of such as are unique, e.g. the sun and the moon.” People think that they are defining the sun by including things in a definition such as “that which goes around the earth,” or “night-hidden,” but if these were removed, the sun would still be the sun. More importantly, they attempt to define the sun incorrectly by saying things of it which either do apply or may apply to something else, e.g., “if another thing with those attributes comes into being, clearly it will be a sun.” This highlights the impossibility of defining individuals: if I try to define the sun as “eternal light giving body,” even though there is only one individual to which I can apply the definition, the definition is nevertheless applicable to other things, i.e. it is a universal – it just happens to be the case that there are no other things to which we can apply it. This is very similar to the argument presented

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507 The Quaracchi edition gives the reference as *Meta.* VI.15, which must be a typo (insofar as this does not exist). The correct citation is VII.15. They are however right to cross-reference *De Cael.* I.9, a chapter which Bonaventure cites very frequently.

508 *Meta.* VII.15 1039b20-23.


512 *Meta.* VII.15 1039b39-1040a1.


514 *Meta.* VII.15 1040a30-32.

in *De Caelo* I.9, where Aristotle makes a distinction between “this universe” and “universe” – the former is matter and form, and the latter is form alone, and thus it is possible that “universe” be applicable to another universe, even though Aristotle argues that there is in fact only one.\footnote{Of course, Aristotle’s reason that there could not be another universe is not based on the fact that the form could not be applied to another universe (because it could be), but because there would be no matter left over, i.e. a universe has to encompass all the matter in order to be a universe, and therefore there could not be another.}

The point of this discussion is to say that if something is an individual, it cannot be defined – the formula (i.e. the definition) is universal. And so, even if I apply the correct definition to the sun or the moon and these happen to be the only sun and moon which exist, my definition is still universal not individual. This is precisely Bonaventure’s issue with saying that there is an individual form that possesses the same rank as the non-individual forms – indeed, an issue which he brings out in this shorthand way by referencing “the sun and the moon.” Certainly, as we have seen, Bonaventure maintains a form which is particularized in the individual, i.e. the seminal reason or natural form, but this form is emphatically not knowable or able to be defined insofar as under this consideration, it is itself individual. This is to say, “the form is not an individual except according to its conjunction in matter”\footnote{In *Sent.* II, d. 3. p. 1, a. 2, q. 3. p. 110b. “Quod obiicitur ad oppositum, quod non possit essa a forma, sed a materia; dicendum, quod rationes illae probant, ut patet, quod non totaliter est a forma, quia forma nulla est individua, nisi propter coniunctionem sui cum materia. Et universalia similiter, quia dicunt formas, non concernunt materiam nisi ratione suorum individuorum, pro quibus supponunt, quando definiuntur vel subiiciuntur.”} – in which case it is no longer a universal and thus not really a form in the proper sense, but a seminal reason. Moreover, the seminal reason is not complete and in act as the universal forms are. Thus, the position that this individual form would itself be a form, properly said, in act, and responsible for the individuation of a substance seems to Bonaventure simply to be a contradiction in terms: an individual form is not really a form at all.

It is interesting here to point out that the position which Bonaventure is arguing against is quite similar to that of Duns Scotus. Timothy Noone considers that Bonaventure rejects the position that a form can be the principle of individuation simply because Bonaventure does not have a distinction between an individual and universal form.\footnote{See Timothy Noone, “Universals and Individuation,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003), 122. Boehner likewise misses the fact that the thrust of Bonaventure’s argument is directed against precisely an individual form. Boehner rather summarizes the argument as: “it is ... difficult to see, how a form which by its very nature is able to have other similar forms, should be the principle of difference.” This is not quite the same point, insofar as it misses the emphasis on the contradiction in terms posed by an “individual form.” It is not that the form cannot be a principle of individuation because it by its nature is similar to many things, but because if a form were to be a principle of individuation, it would have to be an individual form – and, for Bonaventure, this is absurd insofar as “individual form” is a contradiction in terms. Philotheus Boehner, *History of the Franciscan School: Saint Bonaventure* (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1941), 70.} Quite clearly, this is not the case – first of all, because in entertain-
ing this opposing position, Bonaventure even uses the same term Scotus does for his individual form, \textit{forma individualis}, which indicates that he is aware he is not dealing with a universal form. Secondly, and more importantly, Bonaventure, very much like Scotus, has in his own thought a notion of a particularized/singular form, i.e. the seminal reason/natural form—granted, he does not call his particularized form a “haecceity” or an “individual form,” but it nonetheless functions in a similar manner to Scotus’ individual form/haecceity, as we saw in chapter 5.

However, while Bonaventure has his own particularized form as an option on the table, he quite clearly does not want to designate it as a principle of individuation. Why? As we saw above, Bonaventure, unlike Scotus, is emphatic that although this particularized form may loosely be called a form, properly speaking it is \textit{not} a form. The particularized form, for Bonaventure, is rather something which \textit{results} from individuation – indeed, it cannot be the cause of individuation because, like the individual, it is posterior, not only to its parts (i.e. form and matter), but to the very process of individuation. For Bonaventure, to say that the particularized form is the principle of individuation would not be much more helpful than saying that the individual is the principle of individuation. The fact that Bonaventure does not attribute the principle of individuation to his particularized form moreover helps him to avoid the most obvious critique of Scotus’ position: that if the individual form is still a form, then why is Socrates’ humanity not included in the universal definition of humanity? Or as Bonaventure puts the absurd result of claiming that an individual form has the same status as a universal form: in such a case, “two fires differ formally from one other,” i.e. insofar as the individual forms of the two respective fires would provide two different definitions.

A similar argument is found in Ockham’s critique of Scotus’ position, and among his arguments against Scotus, we find essentially the same argument made by Bonaventure, as above: that it is impossible, if not a plain contradiction, to claim that a nature is both universal and singular. As Ockham writes, sounding very much in accordance with Bonaventure

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{519} As we can recall from chapter 5, Bonaventure calls the particular form alternatively: seminal reason, singular form, and natural form. It is unclear why he prefers the term “singular” to “individual” form.

\footnotetext{520} \textit{In Sent.} II, d. 3, p. 1, a. 2, q. 3, p. 109b. “Vel quomodo dicemus, duos ignes differre formaliter, vel etiam alia, quae plurificantur et numero distinguuntur ex sola divisione continui, ubi nullius est novae formae inductio?”

\footnotetext{521} This contradiction between claiming that the nature is both universal and singular is indeed the point of departure for most of Ockham’s arguments against Scotus. Naturally, Ockham goes into greater detail than Bonaventure in showing the absurdities of saying that a nature is both universal and singular, but the basic idea is shared by the two. King gives a good summary of these arguments in Ockham, as well as an attempt to resolve them: Peter King, “Duns Scotus on the Common Nature,” \textit{Philosophical Topics} 20 (1992): 50–76. Ockham makes seven arguments against Scotus’ account of individuation, which are to be found in \textit{Ordinatio} I, d. 3, q.6, pp. 101-126.
\end{footnotes}
on this point: “No nature that is really individual is really universal; therefore if that nature is really the individual, it will not be really universal.”\textsuperscript{522}

It is also interesting to add that the idea of the \textit{forma individualis} as the principle of individuation was around in Bonaventure’s time, as it is found in the thought of Bonaventure’s contemporary, John Peckham. Peckham, like Scotus, identifies this \textit{forma individualis} as that which contracts the universal into the individual – here anticipating also the notion of contraction taken up by Scotus.\textsuperscript{523} One final point of interest: while Peckham makes a notion of contraction central to his understanding of individuation, Bonaventure himself uses the term – sparingly – but does use it. He mentions it, however, not in the discussion of individuation, but in a comparison between God’s simplicity and the simplicity of creatures, saying that it is due to the contraction of species and genus into sensible things that they are composites, i.e. composites of act and potency.\textsuperscript{524} However, the fact that Bonaventure does not bring contraction into play in his discussion of individuation indicates that he does not consider it to account for individuation but rather to be the result of individuation, just as the singular form does not account for individuation but is rather the result of it.

Bonaventure then presents a third option which “is more satisfactory, that individuation arises from the actual conjunction of matter with form....”\textsuperscript{525} He continues on to provide an analogy, which happens to be from Aristotle, although taken in a slightly unexpected direction: \textsuperscript{526} “[J]ust as it is clear that while there may be the impression or expression of many sigils in wax, which at first was one, neither the sigil may be made many without the wax, nor may the wax be numbered unless there are different sigils in it.”\textsuperscript{527} Indeed, it is because Bonaventure has developed a distinction between the universal form and the (particularized) seminal reason that he can make this third option work: the universal is the sigil, the wax is the matter, the marking of the sigil in the wax is the seminal reason, while the marked

\textsuperscript{522} \textit{Ordinatio} I, d. 3, q.6, p. 160.

\textsuperscript{523} Again, an overlooked facet of Peckham’s thought – and interestingly one which marks him in distinction to Bonaventure. \textit{Summa de Esse et Essentia} VI-VII, in \textit{An Introduction to the Metaphysics of John Peckham} (Marquette, WI: Marquette Univ. Press, 2022), 105–108.

\textsuperscript{524} \textit{In Sent.} I, d. 8, p. II, art. unicus, q. 11. p. 168b. “Creaturae autem compositae sunt nec vere simplices, quia habent esse mixtum ex actu et potentia, et ita in genere et specie per additionem contractum, quia habent esse aliiune datum, quia habent esse post Deum unum, a quo deficiunt; et ita cadunt in compositionem.”

\textsuperscript{525} \textit{In Sent.} II, d. 3. p. 1, a. 2, q. 3, p. 109b. “Ideo est tertia positio satis plator, quod individuatio consurgit ex actu coniunctione materiae cum forma....”

\textsuperscript{526} A reference is not provided here by the Quaracchi editors – it is a clear reference to Aristotle \textit{De An.} II.1. The seal in wax analogy is also discussed in Neoplatonic texts, none of which Bonaventure would have had access to. For example, Proclus discusses its use by the Middle Platonists (among their other two preferred analogies: reflection in water, and the statue) and follows the position of Syrianus that all three are useful but ultimately inadequate analogies. \textit{In Parm.} 847.30ff.

\textsuperscript{527} \textit{In Sent.} II, d. 3. p. 1, a. 2, q. 3, p. 109b. “Ideo est tertia positio satis plator, quod individuatio consurgit ex actu coniunctione materiae cum forma sicut patet, cum impressio vel expressio fit multorum sigillorum in cera, quae prius erat una, nec sigilla plurificari possunt sine cera, nec cera numeratur nisi quia fiunt in ea diversa sigilla.”
wax itself is the composite. Bonaventure then specifies precisely what comes from each of these two principles (i.e. matter and form), which are responsible for individuation. Our individual is a *hoc aliquid*. It has its *hoc* from the matter, which posits the form in a specific place and time. From the form it has its *aliquid*, what it is. For example, Rye, analogous to the marked wax, has his own equinity, analogous to the mark of the sigil in the wax – the mark of the sigil being dependent on both the wax and the sigil itself. Indeed, then, Rye’s equinity, or this mark of the sigil in this wax, is one individual in contrast to Alejandro’s equinity, or that mark of the sigil in that wax – just as Rye, or this marked wax, and Alejandro, that marked wax, are distinct. Thus, they are distinct not only materially, but also have two distinct essences which are peculiar to themselves. Naturally this is also to say, as we saw in our previous chapter on forms, that the individual has from the matter *existere* and from the form *esse*. That which really exists in the composite is simply the form which is always and everywhere – but the fact that the form happens to be here and now, which is not really *esse*, but only exists (*existere*), is thanks to the matter.

2. **Light and the Question of a Plurality of Substantial Forms**

The question still remains as to which forms are necessary in this coming together of the individual composite – or, put another way, which forms are substantial. Gilson introduces this topic of the composition of creatures with the remark that “we are encountering for the first time this doctrine of a plurality of forms which so strongly embarrasses [Bonaventure’s] interpreters....” Aside from the question of the influence of Aristotle on Bonaventure, Bonaventure’s doctrine of the plurality of forms is one of the few aspects of his hylomorphic theory that has been a topic of debate among scholars. While it is almost unanimously accepted that Bonaventure did in fact maintain a “plurality of substantial forms,” as it has come to be known in secondary scholarship, John Francis Quinn was indeed so embarrassed by this doctrine that he denied its presence altogether in Bonaventure’s thought. While few scholars have accepted Quinn’s thesis that Bonaventure, in agreement with Aquinas, considered there to be only one substantial form, Quinn’s claim that there is not much evidence in Bonaventure’s thought for this position is not entirely without merit. Bonaventure himself never uses the term “plurality of substantial forms,” nor does he ever address or explicitly defend the position. On the other hand, much like Aristotle, he also never makes it entirely apparent that there is only one “substantial form” – as Aquinas so clearly does. Additionally, as I noted in chapter 4, Bonaventure rarely refers to forms as substances – he rather only says

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528 Etienne Gilson, *La Philosophie de Saint Bonaventure* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1924), 266. “... nous rencontrons pour la première fois cette doctrine de la pluralité des formes qui embarrasse si fort ses interprètes....”
that they are substantial or give substantial being. However, it is important here to emphasize that while this notion of a plurality of substantial forms was found to be “embarrassing” by modern scholars, i.e. relative to the unicity doctrine in Aquinas, a plurality of substantial forms was in fact the standard position in the time of Bonaventure and Aquinas. Indeed, in the thirteenth century, Aquinas’ would have been the odd position.

Nevertheless, it could very well be that, while a plurality of substantial forms was standard, it was also not a very philosophically sound position, and thereby Aquinas may have been right to turn to the unicity doctrine. Accordingly, if such a doctrine of a plurality of substantial forms is a poor one, Quinn’s reluctance to say that Bonaventure considers there to be many substantial forms is somewhat understandable. Attributing this position to Bonaventure is particularly worrying if we forget that Bonaventure’s forms are not like Aquinas’ forms. If Aquinas were to maintain a plurality of substantial forms, he would have many substances in one, since each time a form is put in matter, a sensible substance results – but for Bonaventure, the notion of form and individuation is much different: a particular sensible substance only results if we have a certain series of forms combined with matter. This is to say that if one approaches Bonaventure’s notion of a plurality of forms with Aquinas’ “form + matter = substance” equation, it would obviously seem absurd.

Still another worry with the doctrine of a plurality of substantial forms is that it seems to indicate an equal ontological standing of these forms with relation to the composite, a position which one might take for granted as a detriment to the plurality doctrine, but is not in fact present in Bonaventure’s thought – for such is (again) a plainly absurd position. For Bonaventure, the forms are not muddled together in each composite, but are ordered hierarchically according to species and genus. Thus, the forms do not bear an equal standing either when their relation to the composite is considered, or with respect to our knowledge of them. Some forms are more immediately knowable/perceivable or operative, while others are more remote – e.g., horse-ness is both more operative in the horse and more knowable than animality is.

Yet, again, there might be the worry that a doctrine of a plurality of substantial forms would imply that all of the forms a composite has are substantial, and there would be no accidental forms – e.g. a horse is substantially brown. For Bonaven-

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529 See pages 127–8.
530 For a summary of the debate, see Robert Pasnau, “Form and Matter,” in The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2014), 635–646. For the discussion of the thinkers who held the pluralist position, see esp. 644–646.
531 However, most other scholars of Bonaventure’s thought consider that he does indeed maintain a plurality of forms: e.g., Richard Dales, The Problem of the Rational Soul in the Thirteenth Century (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 99–107; Philotheus Boehner, The History of the Franciscan School: John of Rupella and Saint Bonaventure (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1943), 68–69.
ture, this is not the case. “Substantial forms” only refer to a certain set of forms: species and genus. The rest of the forms which a composite has are accidental. All forms, whether substantial or accidental, of course, have an equal ontological status with relation to themselves, i.e. each has being (esse). However, with relation to the composite it would seem absurd to say that there is no primacy of substantial over accidental forms. This claim would seem to render perception and knowledge of the sensible composite either impossible or occurring in an absurd manner, i.e. that when I approach Rye the Horse, I know him as substantially Furry just as I know him as substantially Horse – or, to put this another way, I would predicate the definition of Furriness of him just as I would the definition of Horse.

Let us now turn to how Bonaventure develops his understanding of these substantial forms. In chapter 5, we saw that forms act like the components of sensible things and that sensible things are simply the compositions of these forms. Now we need to ask: How does this coming together of the forms occur? Bonaventure writes: “[T]wofold is the formation of corporeal creatures, some general [form], and some specific [form] – general by the form common to all corporeal things, and this is the form of Lux; specific by other forms....”

This sentence has received much attention in secondary literature. Here, it is important to clarify that in this context, I wish to show that Bonaventure considers light, in this sense, to refer to (and only to) the first substantial form in all bodies. However, there are other senses in which Bonaventure uses the term light (e.g., in his epistemology). In the following discussion it is, then, key to separate out these senses of “light,” which have perhaps at most an analogical relationship.

Returning to our quotation, we can see that Quinn would naturally find this worrying since it seems to imply at least two forms at work in forming a sensible thing. Indeed, Quinn gives an interesting and creative spin on the above line: he translates informatio not as “formation” but as the English (false) cognate “information.” According to this translation, Quinn goes on to interpret Lux as a means of information, in the sense of an “extrinsic influencing” rather than the (correct) “forming in.” This gives him leeway to claim that Lux is not itself the first substantial form of all creatures, but rather the substantial form of only some creatures (i.e. celestial bodies). He then interprets Bonaventure to mean that “earthly bodies are

532 It would also be interesting to ask whether Bonaventure thinks qualities such as “big” and “small” are forms. Given his apparent fondness for Aristotle’s Categories, I think he would say that they are not. In chapter 5, the stress was that forms are universals, either as species or genus – or perhaps also as properties that can be predicated of many. But when I say, e.g., small of a cat and small of a mountain, or “the horse is close to the barn” and “the man is close to the mountain,” there is no universal property common between them – rather, these terms are relational. This, however, is a topic which should be further investigated elsewhere.

533 In Sent. II, d. 13, divisio text., t. 2, p. 310a. “Et quoniam duplex est informatio materiae corporalis, quaedam generalis, quaedam specialis – generalis per formam communem omnibus corporalibus, et haec est forma lucis; specialis vero per alias formas, sive elementares sive mixtionis – ideo Magister primo agit de formatione sive productione lucis, in hac scilicet distinctione.”
influenced by light, whereas heavenly bodies are formed by light.”

This means, according to Quinn, that only heavenly bodies have the substantial form of light, whereas all other bodies receive light from them:

Since terrestrial bodies are illuminated by the celestial bodies, and since the proper action of light is illumination, therefore, as a substantial form, light gives an intrinsic efficacy of acting to a celestial body, or luminary, and this body, by its proper act, transmits light to a terrestrial body, which has a proper act from its own specific form and nature. Hence, it is not necessary to conclude from this part of Bonaventure’s text that, in saying when light is posited with another form in the same body, he posits a substantial form of light in every inanimate body. It is not certain that he posits such a form in terrestrial bodies, since they are not formed by light, because they are not lighted bodies. They are bodies undergoing an extrinsic illumination, for they receive the transmission of light from celestial bodies....

Quinn’s position, explained in a lengthy twenty pages, can be reduced to the following: Bonaventure does not say explicitly that Lux is the first substantial form of all creatures, thus we can assume that it is only common to all creatures in the sense of being an extrinsic illumination, and so one can safely say that Bonaventure may hold that Lux is the first, and only, substantial form of celestial bodies, but not of all bodies. Lux is the general information of all creatures only in that terrestrial bodies receive the light of the celestial bodies which is external to the terrestrial bodies.

This is an odd position for a number of reasons. The most obvious is that it seems to attribute to celestial bodies the unique ability to produce an extrinsic illumination with regard to our ability to know sensible things, i.e. they illumine sublunary substances – which is absurd because it ignores the existence of other sources of light, such as fire or, in contemporary life, a light bulb. Even more problematic with this reading is that Bonaventure explicitly denies that the light of heavenly bodies can be conceived of (in any sense) as a defluxus, insofar as this would effectively hypostasize them. Another point which renders Quinn’s position impossible is that Bonaventure attributes light even to the lowest of bodily creatures, matter: “For matter is not pure privation, rather it has, by reason of its essence, something

535 Ibid., 244.
536 Quinn is missing that Bonaventure actually does say precisely that light is a substantial form in all bodies, but elsewhere in the Commentary on the Sentences. In Sent. II, d. 13, a. 2, q. 2, p. 321a. “Verum est enim, quod lux, cum sit forma nobilissima inter corporalia, sicut dicunt philosophi et sancti, secundum cuius participationem maiorem et minorem sunt corpora magis et minus entia, est substantialis forma.”
537 Indeed, when speaking about light (lux) which we would attribute to celestial bodies, Bonaventure is careful to attribute it not only to celestial bodies but to all luminous bodies.
538 This is just a general point about the nature of light: the object illumined by the light does not depend upon the light itself for its own potency to be visible, but only for the fact that it is now visible. Any body has the potency to be visible, regardless of whether or not the light is there, but is only visible when there is a physical light. The causal relationship of dependence is accidental. In Sent. II, d. 13, a. 3, q. 1, pp. 324-326. cf. De An. II.7. [418b13-16].
from beauty and something from light.” If these points were not sufficient, we need only point out Quinn’s error in saying that “light,” taken in the common sense, is a substantial form at all. As we will discuss in detail momentarily, Bonaventure explicitly denies that light taken in the common sense, i.e. something “being a light” meaning that it is “light giving,” is ever a substantial form – not even of celestial bodies as Quinn asserts. As we will see Bonaventure make clear, Lux is the most general substantial form of all bodies, and “light-giving” is simply an accidental form of, e.g., celestial bodies (but also of anything luminous). It is apparent that Quinn is missing the distinction between these two uses of lux/Lux – one being Lux in this technical sense, being the most general (substantial) form of bodies, and the other being lux as simply “light-giving.”

For clarity, then, I am using Lux for the general form and lux for the accidental.

Before I outline the details of these distinctions in Bonaventure’s texts, I would also like to point out that Quinn’s reading of this passage acts as a kind of red herring. Quinn wants to deny that Bonaventure maintains a plurality of substantial forms, and so, confounding the two different meanings of light, he claims that, for Bonaventure, lux/Lux is not a substantial form in all physical creatures. At the end of the twenty pages of discussion of this single point, even if the reader concedes and agrees that, for Bonaventure, lux/Lux is not a substantial form for anything except celestial bodies and instead has this strange illuminative power for terrestrial bodies, this does not mean that there is no doctrine of a plurality of substantial forms in Bonaventure’s thought, as Quinn wishes to assert. It only means that lux/Lux is not one of them. But what of those alias formas?

To address (finally) the question of what Lux is for Bonaventure, it is clear that it is a substantial form which gives existence to everything – not only celestial bodies. This is apparent when we look at the earlier quote in its full context:

Above, the Master considers the production of nature with regard to its material principle; but in this part he intends to consider its completion or formation according to its formal principle. And since the formation (informatio) of corporeal matter is two-fold, general and specific – general

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539 We will come back to this notion in our discussion of evil later in this chapter. In Sent. II, d. 1, p. 1, a. 1, q. 1, p. 17b. “Nam materia non est privatio pura, immo ratione suae essentiae habet aliquid de pulchritudine et aliquid de luce.”

540 Gilson alone notes this distinction between light taken as a substantial form and light taken as an accidental form. Gilson, La Philosophie de Saint Bonaventure (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1924), 265.

541 It is plainly odd to say that the form of the sun is “light” since I do not predicate the definition of “light” of the sun. Quinn tries to get around this by saying that the form of light is analogically not univocally predicated, but this helps very little insofar as the ontology which Quinn has set up does not ground an analogical predication. If light is a substantial form, the definition has to be predicated univocally. In this discussion Quinn also takes the position that the form of Light is caused by seminal reasons, which again is plainly an odd position. Quinn, The Historical Constitution of St. Bonaventure’s Philosophy (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1973), 317.
Designating the form of light as common to all bodies indicates its presence in all bodies, not only celestial bodies. Finally the “further corporeal forms” indicates Lux as being simply one of the corporeal forms, albeit the most important. The consideration that light from the celestial bodies has some external epistemic effect on sensible things (apart from the obvious giving of light) is notably absent from this passage – as well as from the rest of Bonaventure’s corpus.

Moreover, we see Bonaventure quite clearly indicate that it is the form of Lux which is responsible for making things into “beings.” Here, he addresses the question of whether lux/Lux is a substantial or accidental form. If Quinn’s interpretation were correct, we would expect Bonaventure to say that light is the substantial form only for celestial bodies. But he does not. He rather says:

Because light is the most noble form among bodies, just as the philosophers and the saints say, according to more or less participation in it, bodies are more are less beings (entia), it is substantial form. For it is true that light, because it is sensible and is an instrument of operation ..., it has the nature of an accidental form.543

This is quite the opposite of Quinn’s position. Light, taken to mean Lux, is the form which makes bodies be – it is the widest genus of bodies, i.e. the most general formation – and in this sense it is a substantial form. When light, lux, on the other hand, indicates a sensible quality in luminous bodies – qua the sensible luminosity, i.e. the fact that they give off light – it is accidental.544

This is moreover consistent with the account of celestial bodies given in the Collationes. Bonaventure quite clearly does not call them light (or lights), but luminaries – and thereby equates them not with the light of the phrase fiat lux, but with God creating the firmament. See: Hex. XXI.1, and Hex. III.25-30. Likewise in the Breviloquium does Bonaventure make clear that the celestial bodies are luminous, not light: Brevil. p. II. c. 2.
I do look at the sun and say “that is a body” – and in this sense I am referring to Lux which is substantial, i.e. insofar as it is the general form of bodies.

Bettoni, like Boehner and Gilson, gives a reading similar to mine on this point – i.e. that Lux is the form which makes bodies be bodies and thereby “prepares” the body to receive more specific forms. As Bettoni writes: “Light, in other words, is a form which acts as a fundamental and preliminary form of bodies.” With this I am in perfect agreement. However, Bettoni goes on to deny that Lux is a genus: “[I]t is not a form like the others, and nor is it a form which is generic and susceptible to specification...” This latter point is contradicted by Bonaventure’s above cited text, where in saying that Lux is common to all bodies, Bonaventure indicates just that: that light is the most general form of bodies. Moreover, if Lux is a form, it has to be either a species or a genus (or an accident). It is unclear, then, precisely what this form of Lux, which is neither specific nor general, would be on Bettoni’s reading. Bettoni is right, however, to assert that Lux is not an accidental form, but he fails to note that there is an accidental form of light, i.e. more properly said “light-giving.” Thus, it is unclear in Bettoni’s interpretation whether this form of Lux is light taken in the general use of the word (i.e. light-giving) or something else.

Thus, we find in the secondary literature a confounding not only of the two different senses of light (i.e. Lux, the form common to all bodies, vs. lux, light-giving), but also that of the illuminative light of knowledge and the form of Lux itself. For further clarification of these two different senses of light, which should eliminate all confusion about precisely what this form of Lux is, we can turn to Bonaventure’s discussion of lumen. Lumen is the effect of Lux. It is the radius of the light which is emitted not only from luminous bodies but from any visible body – i.e. any

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545 Gilson is wrong, however, to attribute to this form of light an analogical relationship to God – there is no evidence for that in the texts. He simply cites Bonaventure calling it the most noble form; see: Etienne Gilson, La Philosophie de Saint Bonaventure (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1924), 264. Gilson also does somewhat confound the notions of Lux and lumen (the latter of which we will discuss momentarily). For example, Gilson writes that the form of light is not a body – which, of course, is just obvious from the fact that it is a form. However, the point in Bonaventure which Gilson is referring about light not being a body applies to lumen, which is properly a radius of light. La Philosophie de Saint Bonaventure (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1924), 264. I say only “somewhat” confounds, because later, he separates out the two terms, lumen and Lux. Gilson, La Philosophie de Saint Bonaventure (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1924), 270–272.


548 Boehner and Gilson, as I do, consider Lux to be precisely a generic form. See: Philotheus Boehner, The History of the Franciscan School: Saint Bonaventure (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1941), 64–66. See the above referenced texts for Gilson’s position.
body. Lumen, properly speaking, is itself not a body – it is not perceivable. Quoting Aristotle, Bonaventure writes: “Lumen is neither body nor an emanation from a body.”

Rather, lumen – insofar as it is attributed, first of all, to luminous bodies, i.e. celestial bodies (or any body which by nature emits light, e.g., fire) – indicates a “substantial active power,” because these bodies are luminous by nature, and they produce an active power to illuminate other things. The sun, for example, generates light which illumines the sublunar world – and it always does this because to be a sun is to give forth light. The power, then, is substantial, while the form “luminous” or “light-giving,” as we saw above, is merely accidental.

However, secondly, with regard to bodies in general, lumen indicates an accidental power, i.e. to be visible: “But not only does lumen indicate that active power, which is not perceived by the senses, but also that sensible quality...and this is an accidental quality....” This power simply to be visible, unlike the lumen which Bonaventure only attributes to luminous bodies, is an accidental power because a body is not, and does not need to be, always visible, as the sun is always light-giving – e.g., it might be night and so a certain body is no longer visible. This power to be visible applies not only to sublunar bodies but to all bodies including luminous bodies as well. If the sun stops being visible (accidental power), e.g., when it is nighttime, it does not cease to be a sun. If the sun, however, stops emitting light (substantial power), it does cease to be a sun. For clarity, we can summarize the different ways of discussing lux/Lux and lumen in the following chart:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Power</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lux 1: general (substantial) form in all bodies</td>
<td>lumen 1: substantial power (only for luminous bodies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>definition of body is predicated of bodies</td>
<td>the power to give light</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lumen 2: accidental power (for all bodies)</td>
<td>the power to be visible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lux 2: accidental form (only in luminous bodies)</td>
<td>the attribute, light giving, or luminous, is predicated of celestial bodies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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549 This is to say, non-luminous bodies emit a light, i.e. simply in the fact that they are visible to us. They do not, however, generate their own light the way a sun does.


551 In Sent. II, d. 13, a. 3, q. 2, p. 328b. “Non solem autem lumen dicit illam vim activam, quam non percipit sensus, sed etiam quandam qualitatem sensibilem, qua sensus visus efficitur sentiens in actu; et illa est qualitas accidentalis in tertia specie qualitatis.”
The above discussion shows that Bonaventure clearly distinguishes between *Lux*, which is a substantial form common to all bodies, and *lux*, or light-giving, which is merely an accident which we say of bodies, along with *lumen*, which is a (substantial or accidental) power, not a form. Indeed, one has to be careful not to confound these different uses, e.g., to confound the substantial power of lumen (which indicates merely an accidental form, light-giving) with the substantial form *Lux* – a confusion which would result in a position similar to Quinn’s – or, again, to confound the accidental power of sensible things with the substantial form of *Lux*. Quite clearly, the context is of key importance: Is Bonaventure speaking about the most general form of bodies, *Lux*, or is he speaking merely of the accidental form, light-giving, or is he speaking not about forms, but about powers?

Moreover, from the preceding discussion, we can also see that attributing *Lux* to all bodies is not as implausible of a position as it appeared to be to modern scholars. *Lux* is simply the first and most general form which is the widest genus of natural bodies, and following the form of *Lux*, the composite then receives less general, more specific forms – forms which make it what it is. Indeed, at first glance this notion of *Lux* in Bonaventure might have appeared to be a kind of mystical thing, but this is not so. Bonaventure treats it in a fairly cursory manner in the *Commentary on the Sentences* since describing it as the most general form is fairly self-explanatory. It is only the fact that Bonaventure attributes this role of first form to *Lux* that perhaps seems somewhat odd. Yet, it seems quite understandable given the fact that *Lux* has a Biblical connotation, i.e. God creating light first among his creatures: *fiat lux*. Thus, it makes sense that *Lux* would be the first and most general of forms and would be attributed to all corporeal things.

If *Lux* then is the first form, i.e. “the general formation of bodies,” what of these other forms that constitute the specific formation of bodies? Boehner writes in regard to our original passage about the twofold formation of corporeal things: “For all bodies have at least two forms: the general form of *Lux* and their specific form.” Boehner’s interpretation points out that there is an ambiguity in the text: Bonaventure does not write that the *informatio* is specific *per aliam formam* (through another form, meaning a single secondary form); instead, he writes *per alias formas* – through other forms, using the plural. Here, he may be referring to the entire possible set *alia rerum* from which a single form may be selected to fulfill this second place, as Boehner thinks is an option. However, it seems more

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552 Here one should also note that this idea is coming most certainly from Robert Grosseteste. Grosseteste applies the form of *Lux*, however, not to developing a notion of particular hylomorphic composites, but to understanding the order in which God created (i.e. what God created on each day of creation). Nevertheless, like Bonaventure, *Lux*, for Grosseteste, is the first corporeal form. For a summary of Grosseteste’s position, see: Francesco Agnoli, *Roberto Grosseteste: La filosofia della luce* (Bologna: Edizioni Studio Domenicano, 2007), 44–56.

likely that by using the plural, Bonaventure is referring to the set of specific forms which are contained in a hylomorphic composite, a (necessary) plurality within the second component of the *informatio*. When Bonaventure says that the *informatio* is twofold, he does not mean that the division is: (1) general form of *Lux,* (2) specific form, as Boehner thinks could be the bare minimum.554 Rather, the twofold nature of the *informatio* is (1) the general form *Lux,* (2) a plurality of specific forms (*alias formas*). Indeed, it seems unlikely that there is in existence something that has the form *Lux* and only one other form, because this second facet of the formation of sensible things is only *more* specific than the form of *Lux,* i.e. the first form beyond *Lux* would only still be a genus – yet nothing exists which would not fall under a species below a genus, particularly a genus as wide as *Lux.* There is no animal which is not a cat or a horse, nor is there a celestial body which is not a sun or a moon. Thus, it seems that for the specific formation, we need – in addition to light – more than one other form, i.e. not only a genus but also a species.

Let us now turn to the question of how these forms come together with matter to create a sensible composite. As we saw in a preliminary way above, it is the form of *Lux* which is the first form in all sensible things as the most general genus – it makes bodies be bodies and, in this sense, makes them be. We saw this echoed again in Bonaventure’s claim that even matter has goodness and beauty insofar as it has *Lux* – albeit minimally. *Lux,* then, acting as the first form orders other forms within the sensible composite insofar as it dictates the possible differentia, i.e. it begins the hierarchy of forms within any particular sensible thing – thus, we have the “twofold formation” of corporeal matter. Moreover, it is the nature of the form of *Lux,* i.e. as the widest genus which encompasses all of these forms by hierarchizing them, which gives order to the forms in sensible things.555

With respect to the hierarchy of forms within corporeal things, while Bonaventure does not give us a treatise on the categories of substance and accident, we can see implied in his texts that there is a division between substantial forms and accidental forms – precisely insofar as we find him asserting that certain attributes are accidental while other are substantial, as we have seen him do throughout the discussion of *Lux,* even though he never defines the standard for these distinctions. As he writes: “Nor can it be true, that the distinction of the individual is from the accidents when individuals differ according to substance, not only according

554 I think, however, Boehner would be right if he were referring to the empyrean which is itself just light. But this is an exception among corporeal things, and Boehner does not explicitly mention the empyrean in this context.

555 It also should be noted that while *Lux* plays this hierarchizing role in corporeal things, it does not play this role in incorporeal things, as we have already mentioned. Indeed, such a hierarchizing principle would not be necessary insofar as soul (angelic or human) is simply one substantial form, i.e. the form of the soul, united with (spiritual) matter.
to accidents.”

Thus, it seems fair to conclude that only those qualities which are necessary to the sensible composite and whose definition is said of the composite (e.g., animality or equinity) are substantial forms – i.e. anything which we would call a secondary substance in the *Categories*.

Here, we can see that a doctrine of a plurality of substantial forms within Bonaventure’s thought does not give equal weight to all forms with regard to their relation to the composite – because forms are ordered within a composite first of all by *Lux* into a hierarchy of genus/species when they are within a composite. For example, the sun first of all has the form of *Lux*, and as a subgenus, celestial body, and again its species, sun – then we have a stark divide, and I can then attribute to the sun accidental properties, such as “moves around the earth” or “night-hidden.”

The fact that these are hierarchized in such a way makes it possible that when I look at the sun, I don’t think that this bright yellow thing is “night hiddenness.” Nevertheless because “night-hidden” is an accidental property, I can still attribute it to the sun, though in the category of an accident – not as a substantial form.

We can also highlight the fact that a doctrine of a plurality of substantial forms is something assumed by Bonaventure rather than explicitly spelt out – indeed, in a manner similar to Aristotle, who likewise does not identify one form as being the substantial form. Indeed, as in Aristotle, this “doctrine” of a plurality of substantial forms in Bonaventure is precisely (and only) the absence of asserting that it is one form which, when compounded with matter, results in a substance. Bonaventure, again like Aristotle, considers a form to be substantial when it indicates the substance, or the essence, of something: white does not do this, humanity and animality do – i.e. there is no particular thing of which I predicate the definition of white, but there are things of which I predicate the definition of both animality and humanity. It is this division between things which are predicated in the manner of, e.g., humanity and animality, and things predicated in the manner of, e.g., whiteness or brownness, which Bonaventure’s account of the forms is seeking to maintain – and, indeed, a division which it simply would not occur to him to

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556 *In Sent. II, d. 3, p. 1, a. 2, q. 2, p. 106a.* “Nec potest habere veritatem, quod distinctio individualis sit ab accidentibus cum individua different secundum substantiam, non solum secundum accidentem.” Here, Bonaventure is arguing against an “accidentalist” theory of individuation, in which an individual would be an individual in virtue of the set of accidents it has. John Peckham similarly argues against this position, *Summa de Esse et Essentia 7.* For more on this position generally in the Middle Ages, see: J.J.E. Gracia, *Introduction to the Problem of Individuation in the Early Middle Ages* (Munich: Philosophia-Verlag, 1988), 36–45, esp. 40–42.

557 This is why, for example, Bonaventure called light an accident of celestial bodies – we do not predicate the definition of light or the power to give light to the substance.

558 Then, of course, we can also attribute powers to the substance, such as the power to give light or the power to be visible.

559 Here, I do not mean to say that Aristotle necessarily would agree with Bonaventure’s position, but rather that a unicity doctrine is something which secondary scholarship has had to pull out of Aristotle, not something which is explicit in his texts.
re-conceive. Aquinas’ account of composites, on the other hand, relinquishes this quite Aristotelian division by giving to “humanity” alone the title of “substantial.” Indeed, Aquinas’ standard for what is and what is not a substantial form is quite innovative, insofar as, for Aquinas, whether a form is substantial or not is tied not to how we know or predicate the form of the substance, as Bonaventure derives it from Aristotle – rather, it is tied to his own claim that it is one form which when combined with matter results in one particular substance, and whichever form that is, is the substantial one.

3. Causation

We now must address how causation works among composites, causation which is secondary in relation to God’s causation, e.g., men being generated from other men. We discussed this notion of secondary causation briefly in the previous chapter, but only insofar as it related to God’s causal efficacy. There, we addressed causal reasons of the uncreated kind, so let us now turn to causal reasons which are rather created, i.e. the third column of our chart of causes and reasons from chapter 6:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>reason</th>
<th>God</th>
<th>universal form</th>
<th>seminal reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cause</td>
<td>universal form</td>
<td>seminal reason (i.e. particularized form)</td>
<td>semen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>effect</td>
<td>the particular (form/composite)</td>
<td>particular man</td>
<td>particular man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>more particular</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Naturally, there are things which are caused simply by chance. Barring this, however, Bonaventure, taking his cue from Aristotle, considers that something is always caused for some purpose, and this purpose is designated either by nature or by a will. Accordingly, we can divide created causes into two: (1) causation occurring according to nature and (2) causation occurring according to a will, i.e. caused by an intellect. The causal efficacy of an intellect is fairly self-explanatory and so Bonaventure does not provide much discussion of it in this context and instead moves on to the other type of causation which occurs naturally.

560 Here, one might wonder about God’s causality with relation to composition. If we say that God causes the forms, one might wonder if God does not cause the composition qua composition, i.e. if he causes not only the parts (i.e. the forms) but also the parts being in a certain thing in a certain order. The generation of the particular we will address momentarily, but from the preceding discussion we can see that if it is the form of Lux which begins the hierarchization of the forms within the composite and God causes forms (including Lux), then we have our answer, i.e. in causing Lux, God also causes the organization of the composite. And thus, “all composition, according to that composition, is from God.” In Sent. II, d. 37, a. 1, q. 3, p. 867b. “Omnis compositio, secundum quod compositio, est a Deo.”


562 We will come back to a discussion of the will when we look at the notion of evil.
Bonaventure then distinguishes more precisely things occurring by nature into causation according to (1) seminal reasons and (2) natural reasons – two terms which Bonaventure until now has more or less run together. The relationship between seminal and natural reasons is analogous to the relationship (in God) between primordial and causal reasons.\(^{563}\) In themselves, seminal and natural reasons are the same thing (i.e. the particularized natural form), but we can distinguish them conceptually. As Bonaventure writes: “For, since the semen indicates that out of which (ex quo), and nature indicates that by which (a quo), the seminal reason, insofar as it gives direction to the power of nature, is directed so that out of it something occurs; the natural reason, however, is that from which something occurs.”\(^{564}\) This distinction can be put in another way: “The seminal reason regards inchoate and intrinsic power, which moves and operates towards the production of an effect; but the natural reason concerns the assimilation of production towards what is produced and a habitual way of acting.”\(^{565}\)

It is good to remember that Bonaventure has made a distinction between the universal form, which is complete and in act, and the particularized form, which is the universal form considered insofar as it bears a relation to a composition and thereby is in potency and not complete. When we consider this particularized form, we can think of its causal efficacy in two ways: it is both the beginning, ex quo, and the agency, a quo. A foal, for example, has the seminal reason of horse-ness but it is incomplete, i.e. not in act, but in potency. Our foal then grows up to be a horse because it had that potency to be a horse (i.e. the seminal reason), and what it aims at being is precisely to be a horse (i.e. the natural reason). The seminal reason then is the natural form considered as that power from which an effect comes to be, while the natural reason is the natural form considered as that towards which an effect is directed. However, this is simply two ways of looking at the same thing – ontologically, they are both that particularized potency – while the universal, by contrast, is the form in act. Of course, absolutely speaking, the form in act is also the cause of sensible things insofar as it is the actuality towards which generation occurs and has as its goal – but proximately speaking, the potency is the cause, insofar as no generation can occur without the potency for it occurring. Here, we can see quite clearly that this potency is at once both the seminal reason and the natural reason, insofar as this potency may considered in two ways, i.e. conceptually: in one way the potency, as a seminal reason, indicates simply the fact that something has the power

\(^{563}\) As we discussed in chapter 5.

\(^{564}\) In Sent. II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 2, p. 436b. “Quia enim semen dicit ut ex quo, et natura dicit a quo, ratio seminalis attenditur, in quantum dirigat potentiam naturae, ut ex aliquo fiat aliquid; naturalis vero, ut ab aliquo fiat aliquid.”

\(^{565}\) In Sent. II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 2, p. 436b. “Vel ratio seminalis respicit inchoationem et intrinsecam virtutem, quae movet et operatur ad effectus productionem; naturalis vero concernit producentis ad productum assimilationem et modi agendi assuetudinem.”
to become something else; but considered in another way, this potency is precisely a potency to *some end* and the end that the potency has in view is the natural reason.

Here, we can again bring back the worry of calling anything which has the potency to become something else a seminal reason, e.g., bread having the potency to become man. Bonaventure clarifies that the seminal reason is only a seminal reason if it is *propinqua et sufficiens*, e.g., as semen is with regard to the generation of a human body.\(^{566}\) Thus, we say that the semen has in it the seminal reason of a man. In other instances, however, the potency is *remota et insufficiens*, e.g., “in bread or food, so that from it is made a man.”\(^{567}\) The latter (e.g., bread) is not a seminal reason for man, because there is a series of intermediary causes which must enter into play in order for the bread or food to become a man: it must first “be eaten and digested and converted into humors, and then in the genitals converted into semen, and then into a man.”\(^{568}\) It is thereby absurd to say in bread or food, there is a seminal reason for being a man. We can see this even more plainly now that we have seen the equation of seminal reasons and natural reasons – there is indeed nothing in bread that directs it towards the end of being the body of a man. If Bonaventure had not made that equation of natural reasons and seminal reasons, a doctrine of seminal reasons could potentially be quite a slippery slope: if we say in semen is the seminal reason of a man, why not in bread the seminal reason of man, or further in wheat, or in dirt? By restricting the potency of a seminal reason to a natural reason, the seminal reason can operate only according to nature, e.g., a rib cannot generate a woman by nature and therefore it does not.

Moreover, we see here how Bonaventure has given an Aristotelian spin on this Augustinian notion of secondary causation, insofar as he is quite insistent that these seminal reasons are simply natural forms, i.e. potencies in sensible things – a point on which Augustine was not so clear.\(^{569}\) Nonetheless, Bonaventure sees himself not as abandoning Augustine’s account altogether, but using Aristotle to expand upon Augustine’s basic notion of seminal reasons in order to make the account more coherent. He says as much himself in a different question where he has likewise spelled out this notion of seminal reasons: “This position is more rational

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\(^{566}\) *In Sent.* II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 2, p. 435a. “Sed attendendum est, quod illa potentia naturae ad effectus istos aut est propinqua et sufficiens, sicut est in semine deciso a lumbis ad generationem humani corporis; et sic dicitur proprie habere se rationem seminalem; aut est remota et insufficiens, sicut est in pane vel alimento, ut ex eo fiat homo; et sic minus minus proprie dicitur esse ratio seminalis respectu hominis producendi, nisi vale accipiatur.”

\(^{567}\) *In Sent.* II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 2, p. 435a. “… sicut est in pane vel in alimento, ut ex eo fiat homo….”

\(^{568}\) *In Sent.* II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 2, p. 435a. “Quod autem sic est in remota dispositione respectu effectus, aut perductur ad illum effectum mediantis illius, ad quae habebat ordinem immediatum, aut immediate. Si mediente, tunc potest dici, quod effectus ille sit secundum rationem seminalem, utpote si panis comedatur et digeratur et convertatur in humorem, et postmodum in lumbis convertatur in semen, deinde in hominem.”

\(^{569}\) As we saw in Chapter 5, vis-à-vis the issue with Eve and the rib of Adam.
and firm, because Augustine and Aristotle equally agree upon it.” He then quotes Augustine *ad Orosium*: “Just as the seed of any tree has a certain power, that, while it may be corrupted into earth, it rises up, and produces branches ... so it is in the body...” Aristotle communicates something similar in *Generation of Animals*, which Bonaventure summarizes: “[V]egetative and sensible things are first in seeds in potency, then they are led forth into being....”

There is a further concern in Bonaventure’s mind to which he sees seminal reasons as a solution. If one is to deny a doctrine of seminal reasons, one comes very close to the position that secondary agents themselves produce new forms. In such a case, only the first set of forms would be caused by God and all other forms would be caused by secondary agents. Aquinas, for example, sees no need to posit seminal reasons and instead asserts that a secondary cause (i.e. a creature) can bring forth a *likeness* of itself in a begotten creature, i.e. it can pass on a duplicate of the form it possesses and thereby produce an identical but nevertheless new and distinct form. For Aquinas, God, as cause, certainly concurs with his creation (i.e. is causally present throughout the temporal existence of the created order), with regard to creation’s being, beauty, goodness. However, with regard to the formal content of creation we perhaps have an issue: that Aquinas is asserting that God causes forms and then a likeness is passed on from creature to creature. It seems then we would have a set of forms put in nature at the moment of creation and then the forms duplicate their own likenesses until nature comes to an end. God is present as cause always, yet only insofar as he conserves the being, beauty, goodness, etc. of his creation.

For Bonaventure, however, God concurs with his creation *fundamentally* via its formal content – since all that exists and all that God causes are the forms. Accordingly, his notion of how generation occurs via seminal reasons explains how the *presence* of the form itself can be transferred from one creature to the next, without a new form having to be generated in every new composite. When a man generates another man, it is not that the form of humanity is being remade in the second man, but only that a seminal reason is being made – which is itself only a particu-

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570 *In Sent.* II, d. 15, a. 1, q. 1. p. 374a. “Haec autem positio rationabilior est et firmior, quia concordant in hoc tam Augustinus quam Philosophus.”

571 *In Sent.* II, d. 15, a. 1, q. 1. p. 374a. “Sicut semen cuiuslibet arboris habet quandam vim, ut, cum corruptum fuerit in terra, oriatur, et virgultum producatur, deinde ramis nihilominus constripata diletetur et frondibus, deinde eisdem floribus decorata fructificet; ita est in corpore, ut ita dicam quoddam seminarium, unde suo tempore, curante providentia Dei, aliqua genera animalium oriantur.”

572 *In Sent.* II, d. 15, a. 1, q. 1. p. 374a. “Hoc etiam vult Philosophus in decimo sexto Animalium [c. 3 seqq.; cf. ibid. libro III, c. 11], ubi ostendit, quod vegetabilis et sensibilis prius sunt in semine in potentia, quam educantur in esse; et ibi videtur innuere, quod illud format membra, non est aliiu quam ipsa anima; et illam animam vocat potentiam activam, intrinsecam ipsi semini, quae, cum corpus ex semine productum est et organizatum, ut possit ab eadem perfici, prodit in actum et efficitur perfectio corporis physici organicī.”

573 Thomas Aquinas, *ST*, q. 45, a. 5.
larization of a universal form, the universal form itself remaining independent of this process.\footnote{As we saw in the previous chapter, the semen which actually generates the second man is a \textit{further particularization} of the seminal reason and thereby acts in accordance with the seminal reason.} Moreover, if we recall from the preceding chapter how all of these causes/reasons function relatively to one another, we see that these processes, just as generation, occur, first of all, proximately, according to the seminal reason, and then, absolutely, according to the universal reason (i.e. the form) – and ultimately, according to the exemplar reason (i.e. God himself). Thus, when we see what appears to be one composite transferring a form to another, all that is really occurring is that the same form, caused by God, is appearing as a particularized potency, i.e. as a seminal reason, in another composite. While we see these particularizations appearing and disappearing, there is nothing at work here but the one universal form – i.e. as it appears in different spatial-temporal locations.

There are two comments I would like to make regarding Bonaventure’s notion of causation among sensible things. The first is somewhat of an interesting side point (or, rather, a digression) regarding how Bonaventure’s notion is more consistent with modern evolutionary biology than Aquinas’ is. Since, in Bonaventure’s account, there was not one set of forms stamped in matter at the beginning of creation, there is nothing to prevent new forms from appearing in compositions – the forms always were/are (\textit{esse}) but simply had not yet appeared (\textit{existere}) or appeared as they truly are (\textit{esse}). Or, as Bonaventure writes, “while all things were created at once, nevertheless they were not all made at once.”\footnote{\textit{In Sent.} II, d. 12, a. 1, q. 2, p. \textit{297b}. “Omnes igitur Sancti in hoc concordant, quod omnia sunt simul producta in materia; et ideo concedunt omnia simul esse creatae, sed tamen non simul facta.”} Indeed, the incompatibility with evolutionary theory has long been a criticism of Aquinas’ notion of forms, and one which Bonaventure’s alternative quite neatly avoids. Bonaventure’s forms, since they themselves are what exist, can be arranged and rearranged at no harm to themselves.

Of course, there have been many attempts at synthesizing Aquinas’ account of natural species with Darwin’s, such as found in the Neothomist, Jacques Maritain.\footnote{Jacques Maritain, “Vers une idée thomiste de l’évolution,” in \textit{Approches sans entraves} (Paris: Fayard, 1973), 106–162.} However, Maritain’s idea of evolution is emphatically \textit{thomiste} and not explicitly found in Aquinas himself, as Maurer rightly notes.\footnote{For an analysis of Maritain’s (heavily interpretive) reading of Aquinas regarding evolution in contrast with Aquinas himself (as well as with Suarez), see: Armand Maurer, “Darwin, Thomists, and Secondary Causality,” \textit{The Review of Metaphysics} 57, no.3 (Mar. 2004): 491–514.} This issue of the apparent incompatibility of Aquinas’ philosophy with evolution also preoccupied Gilson for much of his later career, resulting in the work \textit{From Aristotle to Darwin and Back Again: A Journey in Final Causality}.\footnote{Etienne Gilson, \textit{From Aristotle to Darwin and Back Again: A Journey in Final Causality}, trans. John Lyon (Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1984).} The problem of evolution is very clearly one which worried Gilson, a worry which certainly was exacerbated by Teilhard de
Chardin’s *Le phénomène humain*, published in 1955. Gilson’s ultimate position on the issue ends up being notably unclear: neither wishing to deny evolution entirely, nor to affirm it. Vernon J. Bourke summarizes Gilson’s position, speaking positively of it, although apparently unaware of the how problematic this position is: “If Etienne Gilson is right (and I think he is), then the whole notion of the evolution of biological species is utter nonsense. He claims in this book that there are no real species to evolve. Individual living things really exist, and some such individuals resemble each other more than they do other things – and thus they form a conventional class.”579 There we have it: Gilson’s solution regarding evolution is that universal species and genus are simply *conventional* or, may I say, nominal.

For Bonaventure, quite clearly, there is no need to take such a route. While Aquinas’ forms only attain an existence when they are in sensible things and thereafter never change, Bonaventure’s forms exist regardless of their instantiation; thus, while they never change, they may nonetheless appear and disappear from their spatio-temporal instantiations – and appear to us in differently ways, as though species were evolving. For Gilson’s interpretation of Aquinas, the best we can do when faced with the question of evolution is either deny evolution or highlight the nominalist tendency in Aquinas’ thought when it comes to the universality of species – neither of which, I think it is fair to say, are desirable positions for a realist. We can also note that the issue of evolution is also important for scholarship on Aristotle’s physics/metaphysics.580 Accordingly, an added benefit of Bonaventure’s interpretation of Aristotle is that it would rescue Aristotle from criticisms based on modern evolution.

The second point is that Bonaventure’s schematic of how causation occurs among creatures ends up being more Aristotelian than Aquinas’. In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle makes clear that he wishes his account of the forms to do what Plato’s did not: to explain existence, motion, and change among sensible things. Aquinas’ forms do not do this – the forms in themselves don’t explain the existence of anything; God explains the existence of everything. Aquinas’ forms exist, and exist actually, and are final causes of things – but not in the sense that they are for Bonaventure, insofar as for Aquinas the forms themselves depend ontologically on the composite. Thus, the sense in which they are said to be causes, is rather more in the sense of calling them explanations. God, for Aquinas, is the only ontologically prior principle of the sensible world, not the forms.581

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581 The primacy of God as effectively the *only* being, goodness, and final cause which exists in itself is a notion which we certainly do not find in Aristotle.
Moreover, Bonaventure’s account of the objects of our knowledge very much sets the foundation for scientific inquiry. While we would think perhaps at first glance that Aquinas is the more empirically minded of the two, this is not so. For Aquinas, if we want to know what things are (i.e. a universal definition), we arrive at – as we have shown via Bonaventure’s arguments in chapter 4 – a conceptualism or a nominalism, where the object of our inquiry is not something which grounds the existence of the natural substance, but rather something which exists only in the mind. Then again, if we inquire why something occurs, e.g., why does a man generate another man, again our answer – the universal reason for this occurring – is the concept of humanity which exists only in the mind. We only arrive at a real cause which is anything more than a name, or a concept, attributed to nature by the mind when we ask: Why does this man exist? Yet, here the cause is not to be found in nature, but outside of the natural order: God. This is to say, in the philosophy of Aquinas, there is an inevitable gap between our sense knowledge of particular things and our attainment of the real knowledge of universals, both universal rules and forms. In the course of a scientific inquiry, it is unclear how one moves from the sensible knowledge of the particular, which does not and cannot provide knowledge of a universal, to knowledge of the universal itself if this universal does not exist extra-mentally and ontologically prior to the contingent existence of sensible particulars. Thus, scientific inquiry is stripped of its attachment to an extra-mental reality, and only theology can claim a real knowledge of a cause of natural phenomena (i.e. God).

For Bonaventure, such is not the case – precisely because Bonaventure has posited the objects of scientific inquiry, i.e. universal forms (natural rules or reasons), existing extra-mentally as the components of sensible phenomena. Because nature consists of these universals, we can get at a coherent account of natural phenomena just from nature itself. We neither have need of universal concepts which derive their existence purely from the human mind (in the manner of the conceptualist, or even Kant), nor of God to explain the immediate existence of and reasons for natural phenomena. The forms do this already in Bonaventure’s system – and nature exists unto itself as a coherent whole which can be the object of scientific inquiry. This is to say, in Bonaventure’s ontology, I can understand why and how physical and temporal things exist by looking only to the forms. They exist outside of my mind and ground the natural phenomena themselves just as much as they ground my knowledge of these phenomena. God’s causal efficacy then is only relevant when we ask the cause of the forms – or, as we saw in the previous chapter, when one wants to know not the reason for a particular phenomenon, e.g., a man generating a man, but the reason for this universal rule, e.g., why do men generate men?

Indeed, this account of scientific inquiry within the parameters of the natural order established by Bonaventure sounds entirely compatible with the scientific method of Aristotle – that is, the focus on the movement from sensible particulars
to underlying universals which are alone the objects of knowledge and scientific inquiry. As Aristotle writes of this movement: “If, however, by observing repeated instances we had succeeded in grasping the universal, we should have our proof; because it is from the repetition of particular experiences that we obtain our view of the universal. The value of the universal is that it exhibits its cause.”\textsuperscript{582} Moreover, quite clearly expressing the way in which scientific inquiry finds its object in nature, Aristotle begins the \textit{Physics} with the remark: “Hence, in advancing to that which is intrinsically more luminous and by its nature accessible to deeper knowledge, we must start from what is more immediately within our cognition, through its own nature less fully accessible to understanding” – these immediate things being “concrete and particular” and the object of inquiry being “abstract and general.”\textsuperscript{583} Accordingly, we have attained knowledge of a natural phenomenon only, as Aristotle writes, “when we are acquainted with its ultimate causes and first principles, and have got down to its elements.”\textsuperscript{584} For Bonaventure, the forms – considered both as the objects of knowledge qua definitions, and as operative principles in natural phenomenon qua universal reasons – are precisely these elements towards which scientific inquiry aims.

4. Evil

Insofar as we have now addressed the way in which composites are ordered and individuated, as well as how they interact causally, we seem to have one final aspect of the composition of creatures to address. Among composite things we find something which we do not find among the forms: evil. As we saw in the previous chapter, Bonaventure’s notion of a God beyond being is derived from Dionysius. Accordingly, Bonaventure has set up the same metaphysical point of departure as Dionysius, who in good Neoplatonic fashion understands evil, or non-being, as also caused by God, i.e. insofar as God himself is beyond being he can account for the “existence” of non-being among his creation. However, in Dionysius, this amounts to a very general claim about how evil may be caused by God insofar as it does not address the ontological status of evil in itself precisely as a component. Here, Bonaventure spells out more explicitly the details of this ontological status of evil in the physical world, i.e. what evil is and how it exists in composites, as well as how we can understand a principle of goodness to be the cause of it – drawing on positions of Aristotle to do so.

Bonaventure’s discussion of evil is situated within a series of questions concerning sin, and so it is good to keep in mind that he is primarily speaking about evil acts which human beings perform or evil which can be attributed to a human soul,

\textsuperscript{582} \textit{Post. An.} I.31 88a3–7.
\textsuperscript{583} \textit{Phys.} I.1. 184a17–22.
\textsuperscript{584} \textit{Phys.} I.1 184a13–15.
i.e. evil actions and evil people. Nevertheless, the notion of evil which Bonaventure develops—since indeed he defines its ontological status—would be applicable to all other types of evils as well, e.g., sickness or misfortune. Bonaventure does also mention these types of evils, too, but they are not treated as a topic unto itself.

To give a bit of context to what Bonaventure will develop regarding the question of evil in composite things: the standard Augustinian position, of course, is that evil is the privation of being, since “being” and “goodness” are convertible terms. Thus, God does not cause evil because evil does not exist. However, this account of evil being a privation of being or goodness, does not explain the fact that often it is the privation itself which renders a substance to be viewed as good or desirable. Oddly, this is something that Augustine explains from a psychological perspective, e.g., the well-known story of Augustine stealing the pears precisely because it was a bad thing to do. This seems, however, not quite to line up with the ontology which he develops. If things are desirable because they are good, how can the evil aspect of something, if it does not even exist, be in anyway responsible for rendering the composite itself desirable? This inconsistency seems to be what Bonaventure targets in his account of evil, which we can boil down to the following: while the evil component itself is not caused by God, the manner in which it is composed, or present, in the composite—in such manner which renders the composite good and desirable—is caused by God.

Turning now to the texts, Bonaventure begins his discussion of evil by introducing a nuance, which should strike one as surprising coming from a predominantly Augustinian context: “[E]vil or sin may be understood in two ways: one way in the abstract, and one way in the concrete.”

Evil considered only in abstraction “is not something, but nothing, because it is neither a being nor a good, but the privation of good.” This is to say, when I hold any evil as the object of my mind, what I am considering is a privation, e.g., injustice in a soul is precisely not having justice. Considered in concreto, however, evil is something: “But according to evil which is said in the concrete, so does it concern that which de-forms some action or some substance, and so evil is said to be an evil thing, hence evil action or evil soul.” He concludes: “And in this way, evil is said to be an evil thing and to have esse naturae.” Indeed, one would have expected Bonaventure to say the reverse: that

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585 In Sent. II, d. 34, a. 2, q. 3, p. 815a. “Dicendum, quod malum sive peccatum dupliciter potest accipi: uno modo abstractive, alio modo concretive.”

586 In Sent. II, d. 34, a. 2, q. 3, p. 815a. “Contingit iterum loqui de malo sive de peccato abstractive; et hoc modo malum sive peccatum in recto sive praedicatione formali, non est aliquid, sed nihil, quia non est ens nec bonum, sed privatio boni.”

587 In Sent. II, d. 34, a. 2, q. 3, p. 815a. “Secundum autem quod malum dicitur concretive, sic consequit illud quod deformat, vel actionem, vel aliquam substantiam; et sic dicitur malum res mala, utpote actio mala, vel anima mala.”

588 In Sent. II, d. 34, a. 2, q. 3, p. 815a. “Et hoc modo malum aliquid est et habet esse naturae.”
Forms in the Natural World

considered in abstraction, evil can be considered as something, but in the concrete, it is nothing. Yet, he rather says that evil has a kind of being.

Bonaventure clarifies this position by recalling his distinction between 

esse

and 

bene esse.

Attributing 

bene esse

to forms designates them as 

esse ordinatum,

i.e. that they order creatures to their ends. He continues on to say that when “this evil or sinful thing is said to be nothing, this is said with regard to it having 

bene esse,

which is 

esse ordinatum”589 – i.e. the privation is not of 

esse

but of 

bene esse.

What Bonaventure is getting at here is that it is somewhat absurd to say that evil does not have some kind of existence, e.g., if a soul is evil there is an actual thing existing out there, e.g., the soul, and it has a real attribute, “being evil.” However, the “presence” of evil in, e.g., a soul, indicates a privation not of being altogether, but of 

bene esse

– i.e. the evil is said with regard to the final cause of the soul. Saying, e.g., “this is a good horse” or “this is a bad horse,” simply means one horse is doing a better job of attaining its end than the other. Something can have the 

esse

of the form, e.g., the form of the soul or of horse, without having 

bene esse.

Although the form is 

esse

and 

bene esse

in itself, the composite can fulfill the latter, i.e. achieve its end, to a greater or lesser degree.

Bonaventure then brings in a quote from Aristotle which clarifies the way in which evil exists: “[A]s the Philosopher says, ‘some things are 

beings,

and some are of beings.”590 An evil in a soul is of the soul, and in this sense, i.e. insofar as the soul exists, so then does the evil. Evil indeed is not a being in itself – there is no thing which simply is evil. As Bonaventure says, “although privations may be said of beings, [the privations] nevertheless are not called beings.”591 Evil is not a species or genus, but it is something which we attribute to things, very much in the way which we attribute goodness to things.592 When we say something is good, we refer to the quality of a particular substance; we are not making a statement about the existence of the substance (except in the very general sense that it has to exist for one to predicate goodness of it). Likewise do we attribute evil to things: only as a quality. If we look at the above reference to Aristotle in its full context, we see even

589 In Sent. II, d. 34, a. 2, q. 3, p. 815a. “Si autem aliquando dicatur ipsa res mala sive peccator nihil esse, hoc dicitur quantum ad bene esse, quod quidem est esse ordinatum.”

590 In Sent. II, d. 34, a. 2, q. 3, p. 815b. “Ad illus quod obiicitur, quod malum est in aliquo, ergo est; dicendum, quod illud non sequitur; nam, sicut dicit Philosophus, ‘quaedam sunt entia, quaedam sunt entium; et quamvis privationes possint dici entium, non tamen dicuntur entia.’” Meta. VII.1.

591 In Sent. II, d. 34, a. 2, q. 3, p. 815b. “… et quamvis privationes possint dici entium, non tamen dicuntur entia.”

592 Although Bonaventure does not reference the discussion of evils in the Categories, it would seem to fit in well with his idea of good and evil being predicated of things – and indeed of every being insofar as everything can be described as either good or evil (or perhaps both in different respects). Aristotle compares different types of contraries, stating that contraries like white and black are in the same genus (i.e. color), while other contraries, like justice and injustice are in opposing genera (i.e. virtue and vice, respectively), but good and bad are in no genus – themselves being the genera of particular things. Cat. II.3 14a15-25.
more clearly this idea of evil being designated of things as a quality: “[W]hen we describe the quality of a particular thing we say that it is ‘good or bad’....”

Here, Bonaventure is redefining the Augustinian notion that evil is a privation of being. Properly speaking, saying that a composite possesses an evil is not to say that something is missing from the composite’s being – because the composite still exists and still has the natural form – but only that something is missing from the composite’s bene esse. In Bonaventure’s account, one would not say a horse is less of a horse, or exists less, because it is, e.g., deaf, but only that it is not as “good” a horse as the horse which is not deaf – this is a question of the quality which we attribute, or do not attribute, to the horse, rather than a question of the horse’s existence.

Bonaventure gives an illustration of the above understanding of how evil exists insofar as it is of beings in a question concerning the fall of angels. He first makes a distinction between a natural love and an elected love. The former is what a creature should fulfill by its nature, e.g., angels have a natural love for whatever is their final cause and therefore they should fulfill it. Designating precisely what it means for an angel to fulfill its end is perhaps too difficult of a task, so we can instead apply this notion of natural love, as Bonaventure does, to animals. Animals have a natural love directed towards whatever is necessary to fulfill their proper end, e.g., a horse loves to canter or it loves its foals. If these things are not fulfilled, it lacks bene esse – e.g., it becomes sick and cannot canter, it has no foals, etc. These are all evils which prevent it from fulfilling what it is to be a horse. The latter type of love (i.e. elected love) occurs only in creatures which have an intellect and can freely choose what to love. Thus, while all horses love their foals and love to canter, angels – or human beings – can actively choose to act against their nature and pursue something else.

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593 Meta. VII.1 1028a15-17.
594 The main point is that Augustine does not have a distinction between the potency to be a man, which is necessary for an individual man to exist, and fulfilling this potency, i.e. achieving one’s final end. Thereby, Augustine cannot say that something fails to fulfill its final end without also saying that it exists less.
595 Aquinas expresses both a position similar to Augustine’s and to Bonaventure’s. He does state, unlike Bonaventure who puts a caveat on this position, that evil is a privation: “Evil is distant both from simple being and from simple ‘not-being,’ because it is neither a habit nor a pure negation, but a privation.” However, he then expresses a position similar to Bonaventure, likewise using Aristotle: “As the Philosopher says (Metaph. v, text 14), being is twofold. In one way it is considered as signifying the entity of a thing, as divisible by the ten ‘predicaments; and in that sense it is convertible with thing, and thus no privation is a being, and neither therefore is evil a being.” ST I q. 48, a. 2.
596 In Sent. II, d. 6, a. 1, q. 2, p. 163b.
597 Indeed, the main topic of discussion which interests Bonaventure is evil which is chosen. However, this seems to leave out evils which occur in nature, e.g., sickness. On this point, Bonaventure takes the position that in nature there is also a will, but unlike the human will, the will in nature never fails to choose what is best: “nature is a determined agent, whence it always intends what is best, it operates according to laws inherent in itself from God. When, if something occurs in nature which is evil, this is according to intention; but it is not from a deliberative will; for this [i.e. the deliberative will] does not always desire what is best.” In Sent. II, d. 34, a.2, q. 1, p. 809. This is to say that what appears to us as evils caused by nature are really always done for the best of the whole of nature.
Bonaventure – perhaps surprisingly for a discussion of angels – has been drawing this notion of elected/natural love from a passage in Aristotle’s *Poetics*, where Aristotle discusses the type of action in which a character should engage in order to make the tragedy most effective. Aristotle rejects the idea that this action may occur between enemies or neutrals, because there is nothing “terrible or pitiable” about that – e.g., if someone kills their enemy, this is understandable. The actions that are terrible or pitiable are ones that occur between familial relations. These are relations between people which *naturally* are supposed to be of love, such as a mother towards her children, or to use the example which Bonaventure takes from Aristotle: Medea. Medea, in choosing to kill her children does not exist less, but fails to fulfill what it is to be a good human being – she has *esse*, insofar as she still has the form of humanity, but not *bene esse*, insofar as she is not a good human.

Now to turn to the question of how God can be understood to cause evil: prima facie, if God is himself good, it seems absurd to say that he can cause evil in any way, since the opposite of good is evil. Bonaventure again makes a distinction. He first of all affirms that good and evil are opposites, but clarifies that the sense in which good is said to be an opposite of evil is only with reference to goods which are good by participation in a particular form. Here we should recall our discussion in chapter 4, where Bonaventure asserted that forms are each good, and by participation in the forms, sensible things are good – but with the caveat that the forms, of course, are not goodness itself: God is goodness itself. He draws on that same distinction here. When evil is opposed to good, the “good” means *goods*, i.e. things which are good, things which have the *quality* of being good, which is only said with reference to the kind of things that they are. “Good horse” is opposed to “bad horse”; “good soul” is opposed to “evil soul” – this is all said with reference to what they are, i.e. their participation in their form. Goodness itself, however, has no opposite: “[B]ut when we are talking about the highest good, it is understood to be good as good *per essentiam*, which alone is the highest good and has nothing opposite to it.” If we are talking about good things, i.e. things which have the quality of being good, they admit of opposites – but if we are talking about the good in itself, which does not have goodness as a quality but as its essence, evil is not opposed to it.

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599 In Sent. II, d. 34, a.2, q. 1, p. 809a. Bonaventure’s examples are aiming at the ends of enjoying luxury to excess or vainglory. However, even in choosing a love which is contrary to nature, a free agent nevertheless always chooses an object of love which is good – i.e. the agent intends some end, although the wrong one. Medea chooses the pleasure she finds in revenge over her love of her children. Echoing the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bonaventure writes: “nothing is desired by the will unless it is understood as good *simplicher* or good in itself.” “…nihil appetitur a voluntate nisi sub ratione boni simpliciter vel boni sibi.”
600 In Sent. II, d. 34, a. 2, q. 1, p. 811b. “… cum vero infertur de summo bono, accipitur ibi bonum pro bono per essentiam, quod solum est summe bonum, et illi nihil opponitur.”
601 This sounds very similar to Dionysius insofar as Dionysius’ God is designated precisely as a good beyond being – categories of being then would not apply to him. Augustine, however, avoids this
cannot even really say that “God is good” because we would have to ask, a good what? – since good is only of something. God is not a good “something,” of which a bad “something” is its opposite. God is simply goodness.602

Here, Bonaventure is asserting that all composition is caused by God, i.e. not only the composition of forms, but also the presence of evil within things: “It is to be conceded simpliciter, that all composition is from God inasmuch as it is a composition, just as all action and conservation [comes from him].”603 Moreover, one could easily remark how different of a solution this is to Augustine’s. For Augustine, God is a principle of being/goodness and thereby causes being and goodness – and does not cause evil insofar as evil does not exist. For Bonaventure, however, the forms take over this role of causing being and goodness in sensible things, while God (as in Dionysius), who is himself above the forms, is free to cause the “being” of evil, insofar as evil’s “being” is nothing more than its “being in” a composite.

To illustrate the above notion concerning the way in which evil exists in composites, Bonaventure addresses an example from the Bible: an idol. Bonaventure provides two positions in opposition to his own: the first position is that of Richard of St. Victor, which without qualification asserts that the entire composite is from God. This position implies, due to its lack of nuance, that not only is the ordering of the evil component in the composite from God, but the evil component itself, i.e. to state so simply, as Richard does, that the composite is caused by God would mean that the evil component itself is caused by God, just as any other component (e.g., form and matter) is caused by God. Richard, of course, would certainly not want to endorse such a result – but here Bonaventure is targeting Richard’s account as being overly simplistic and thereby leading to this absurd position.

To introduce a second position, Bonaventure brings in a passage from First Corinthians, in which Paul writes that “we know that idols are nothing.”604 Bonaventure then quotes the Glossa, summarizing Augustine, who writes: “An idol also was not made by the Word;— it has indeed a sort of human form, but man himself was made by the Word;— for the form of man in an idol was not made by the Word, and it is written, ‘We know that an idol is nothing.’”605 This is easy for Augustine to assert since he considers evil to be nothing. The idol is evil, and so it is nothing, and God

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602 This is a fairly standard position. Moreover, as Bonaventure mentions, this position is necessary to argue against the Manicheans, i.e. because while there is a good in itself, there is no evil in itself.

603 In Sent. II, d. 37, a. 1, q. 3, p. 867b. “… concedendum est simpliciter, quod omnis compositio sit a Deo, secundum quod compositio, sicut et omnis actio et conservatio.” All action is attributed to God: In Sent. II, d. 37, a. 1, q. 1, pp. 862-3. All things are conserved by God: In Sent. II, d. 37, a. 1, q. 1, pp. 865-66.

604 In Sent. II, d. 37, a. 1, q. 3, p. 867a. “Scimus, quia idolum nihil est; Glossa: ‘Materiam idoli Deus formavit, sed stultitia hominem formam dedit.’ Et post: ‘Quaecumque sunt in creaturis, facta sunt per Verbum; sed forma hominis in idolo non est facta per Verbum, sicut peccatum non est factum per Verbum.’”

605 Tr. in Ioann. tr. 1, n. 3. Augustine quotes the same line from Corinthians.
did not cause it. Bonaventure summarizes Augustine’s position: “It seems then that the composition of such forms with such matter is not from God.”

According to Bonaventure, these two positions paint the picture as being too black and white: Augustine in the sense that evil is not in any way caused by God and Richard in the sense that (he at least implies) evil itself is caused God. Bonaventure rather takes the subtler route in saying that the evil as an entium (albeit not an ens) is caused by God. Bonaventure first of all clarifies: the idol “names some artifact containing in itself some God or divinity.” This is to say, there is a form attributed to the idol of some god. He then makes a distinction: “[A]nd according to this, its composition can be understood in two ways, that is (1) the form of the art to the matter and (2) the divinity to the art.” In the first way “the composition is on the part of the thing, but the second is only according to a value attributed to it by the idolator.” With regard to the second composition, i.e. while the idolator attributes to the statue of, e.g., Athena, the presence of Athena, in reality, Athena is not there. With regard to the first composition, e.g., the form of Athena in the bronze, however, it is absurd to assert that the idol itself is nothing: “[W]ith regard to the first composition, the composition of the idol is something.” Moreover, Bonaventure considers, “it must be conceded that the conjunction of such a form (i.e. of the divinity) with such matter, since it is a real thing, is from God.

The value then attributed to the idol, i.e. the presence of the divinity (such as Athena), considered in itself, is not from God because it is nothing but “a defect of cognition and of faith” – this defect does not come from God but from the human being who says that Athena is in the statue. Nevertheless, “this does not deny that the composition of this form (i.e. of the divinity) with this matter absolutely is from God.”

God does not cause the false belief in the false god being in the statue, but

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606 In Sent. II, d. 37, a. 1, q. 3, p. 867a. “Videtur ergo, quod compositio talis formae cum tali materia non sit a Deo.”
607 In Sent. II, d. 37, a. 1, q. 3, p. 867. “… dicendum, quod idolum, secundum quod huiusmodi, nominat aliquod artificiatum, continens in se aliquid numinis vel divinitatis….”
608 In Sent. II, d. 37, a. 1, q. 3, p. 868b. “… et secundum hoc duplicitur intelligibitur ibi compositio, videlicet formae artis ad materiam, et divinitatis ad artificium….”
609 In Sent. II, d. 37, a. 1, q. 3, p. 868b. [continued from previous note] “… et prima quidem compositio est ex parte rei, secunda vero est solummodo secundum aestimationem idolatrae.”
610 In Sent. II, d. 37, a. 1, q. 3, p. 868b. [continued from previous note] “Quantum ad primam compositionem idolum aliquid est….”
611 In Sent. II, d. 37, a. 1, q. 3, p. 868b. “Concedo ergo, quod conjunctio talis formae cum hac materia, cum sit realiter ens, quod a Deo est.” Moreover, Bonaventure says that even if we consider the situation from the position of the idolator, the value that the idolator places on the idol, i.e. the form of the divinity, is itself good in a certain sense, i.e. insofar as it is an instance of the soul in act.
612 In Sent. II, d. 37, a. 1, q. 3, p. 868b. “Similiter ordinatio illius formae artificialis ad continentiam divinitatis, illa quidem potius est deordinatio quam aliqua positio; et haec quidem a Deo non est, sed a defectu cognitionis et fidei.”
613 In Sent. II, d. 37, a. 1, q. 3, p. 868a. “Cum ergo dicitur, quod forma idioli in tali materia non sit a Deo, non negatur compositio huius formae cum hac materia absolute esse a Deo.”
he causes the statue to have the form of the god, i.e. he causes the composition of the form of Athena in the statue.

Similar to how Bonaventure used Medea to illustrate his notion of elected love, we can illustrate the above point with another example from theater: Verdi’s *Don Carlo* — a choice of which both Bonaventure and Aristotle should approve since, like *Medea*, it concerns familial relations. Philip and his son, Carlo, are mutually jealous of each other and at the end of the opera Philip decides to kill Carlo. This objectively is a bad thing to do, and it constitutes an evil “component” of Philip, i.e. in this respect, we can call him evil. Were we to analyze the character of Philip on a purely Augustinian account of evil, it would be difficult to see how his character would be effective dramatically — or how theater at all would be effective. First of all, as with the case of the idol, the audience would (or should) see any flawed character as simply lacking something, i.e. being “nothing” as Augustine says the idol is nothing — we should just be repulsed by the flaw which is itself a lack of being. Then again, if we applied Richard’s account to the character (or, at least, the implications of it brought out by Bonaventure), it would make the evil qua evil in Philip that which moves the audience. Yet this is not quite right, either, because the audience knows this is a failing — they are responding to, care about, and sympathize with the character, not his flaw qua flaw. In both accounts, there is no emphasis on the manner in which the evil is composed in the composite. This theater example illustrates that it is the composition of the evil in the whole which is key. For the actor (or for the playwright or composer), the challenge is to compose the evil within the character in such a way as to make the character sympathetic — just as for God, the task is to compose evils within his creation to render his creation good.\(^{614}\)

This is evidenced by the fact that an audience is quite capable of discerning one actor performing a part better than another. For example, a common way of portraying Philip is as a character who is somewhat pathetic and externally pressured by other characters into his evil feelings and actions — e.g., when the Grand Inquisitor threatens Philip, this Philip’s response is to cower and say fearfully and resentfully, “so the crown has to bow to the altar.” This portrayal, however, ultimately never works, and the “famous” Philips in history (e.g., Nicolai Ghiaurov) have always been ones which have portrayed Philip as strong, contemplative, and, to a certain extent proud, thereby not excusing him, but rendering him all the more responsible for his own evil — e.g., when the Grand Inquisitor threatens Philip, this Philip remains standing upright and says the same lines in defiance. Despite this Philip being to a great extent more responsible for his own evil, this is simply the composition of the evil in the whole which works, and which moves the audience. Indeed, on both Richard’s and Augustine’s accounts, it would be difficult to see how an audience

\(^{614}\) Perhaps Bonaventure’s account would relieve some of Augustine’s anxiety about enjoying poetry and theater, e.g., sympathizing with Dido. *Conf.* I.xi (17), Vi.vii (11-12), *Civ.* IX.4.
would be able to discern these differences. On Augustine’s account, the audience should be repulsed by any actor playing any evil character; on Richard’s account, since the flaw portrayed would be the same, yet again, the actor would not matter. Yet while neither Richard’s nor Augustine’s accounts explain how we experience the character, Bonaventure’s, in stressing the composition being key, does just this. Bonaventure’s understanding of evil explains why two actors can portray the same character, who has the same flaw, and in one case the character is sympathetic and in the other he isn’t. It is clear, the effectiveness of the actor hinges upon the way in which he orders the evil within the character – namely, the composition as a whole.

5. Conclusion

My aim in this chapter was to address Bonaventure’s understanding of physical composites, which entailed targeting four key problems: individuation of sensible things, composition of sensible things, causation among sensible things, and evil among sensible things. Now, we can take a step back and see the advantages of Bonaventure’s solutions to each of these problems. For the problem of evil, we have a neat synthesis of Dionysius and Aristotle to the effect that Bonaventure explains not only the ontological status of evil, and where it comes from, but also how we psychologically experience evils among composite things. For the question of causation among sensible things, we see again Bonaventure’s Aristotelianism, but here used in such a way as to anticipate, somewhat more clearly than Aristotle does, modern theories of evolution. For the topic of the composition of sensible things, we see Bonaventure provide an account of a plurality of substantial forms which, as I have shown, is far from being an embarrassing position (as it is often held to be), precisely because it necessarily results from his understanding of forms as universal definitions and his broader realism. With respect to Bonaventure’s understanding of the form of light, as the substantial form of all bodies, we also found in place of what is often taken as a poetic mysticism a detailed and complex physics of light – his interest extending to considerations not only of corporeity but also of luminosity and visibility. Finally, with respect to the question of individuation, we very clearly saw Bonaventure respond not only to the account of individuation given by Aquinas, but also to have anticipated the position of Duns Scotus – in turn, anticipating criticisms of Scotus’ position which Ockham similarly makes. Indeed, the overarching observation one should make with regard to Bonaventure’s solutions here – and indeed this is something which we have seen in the previous chapters as well – is his ability both to take from past philosophers, whether this be Aristotle or the Neoplatonists, as well as to anticipate future solutions and objections, particularly of later Franciscans, and to incorporate all of these considerations into his own thought.