Aristotle and the Ontology of St. Bonaventure

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Chapter 3

The Controversy: Bonaventure and Aristotle

1. History of Scholarship on Bonaventure

Before I begin to examine Bonaventure’s texts, I would like to make a few preliminary remarks about the ways in which scholars have tried to characterize Bonaventure’s thought, particularly with regard to the question, which we saw come up in the previous chapter, about the relationship between Augustinianism and Aristotelianism. While we saw in Aquinas a good amount of Neoplatonic influence, notably in the relationship between God and creatures via the transcendentals, he is nevertheless accepted at least in some respect as being an Aristotelian – he embraces hylomorphism, Aristotelian causation, act and potency, etc.

The question of Bonaventure’s relationship to Aristotle and the traditional Augustinian sources, however, is far from clear cut. Throughout the 1940s to the 1970s, there was a flurry of scholarship around the question of whether or not Bonaventure’s thought should be characterized as Aristotelian or Augustinian. 217 Earlier than this, from the later 1800s moving forwards, the consensus was that Bonaventure, and to an even greater extent his student, John Peckham, were anti-Aristotelian – despite the fact that many of these claims were made either before or just as the critical editions of Bonaventure’s opera were becoming available, and there were no critical editions of John Peckham’s work at all. 218

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217 For a very good summary of the history of scholarship on medieval scholasticism, specifically on the relationship between Bonaventure and Aquinas, as well as Gilson’s role in shaping the narrative, see: John Inglis, Spheres of Philosophical Inquiry and the Historiography of Medieval Philosophy (Leiden: Brill 1998). See especially his chapter on Gilson, 193–214.


Also to note, the second book of Peckham’s Commentary on the Sentences is missing, so Ehrle would not have had that either to consult. It is to be noted that the two opposing groups, in Ehrle’s view, are neither strictly Augustinian nor Aristotelian, respectively. For Ehrle, the Augustinians do appropriate some concepts which resemble those of Aristotle, but Aristotle’s influence is minor, and they ultimately reject Aristotle’s philosophy. Crowley rightly points out that Ehrle’s division is an oversimplification. Crowley summarizes the commonly held position, evident in Ehrle’s writings, that Aquinas’ interpretation of Aristotle is more accurate than that of the “Augustinians”: “the [Aristotelian school] had the
What is also interesting is that this anti-Aristotelian claim, particularly against Peckham, seems to have resulted primarily from a historical account of a dispute between Peckham and Thomas Aquinas regarding the eternity of the world, in which Peckham takes the (supposedly) anti-Aristotelian position that the temporal beginning of the cosmos can be demonstrated. The content of Peckham's arguments is more or less the same as Bonaventure's well-known arguments against this “Aristotelian” position, e.g., the impossibility of traversing and ordering the infinite. Because this issue about the eternity of the world was taken to be so central, the conclusion was that if Bonaventure and Peckham argue against this Aristotelian position, they must to a certain extent be opposed to the philosophy of Aristotle generally speaking. To be sure, Bonaventure, however, is often treated with more kindness and less negativity than Peckham is – as Callus puts it, while “St. Thomas has been characterized as the architect of one of the most perfect philosophical synthesizes,” Bonaventure is “one of the most lovable figures in the whole history of mediaeval thought.”

However, of course, basing this conclusion that Bonaventure and Peckham are anti-Aristotelian on their arguments against the eternity of the world seems unsatisfactory insofar as this dispute concerns only one topic, and still more so insofar as this conclusion was based in historical accounts of events and not texts. Indeed, when one examines the texts, as we will in this chapter, one finds that Bonaventure’s arguments against the eternity of the world are, in fact, derived from Aristotle’s own texts – particularly De Caelo and the Metaphysics – and he explicitly states that he thinks Aristotle would more likely agree with him than not on this question.


219 I think the correct phrase with which to characterize Callus’ account is “damning with faint praise.” Daniel Callus, “The Philosophy of St. Bonaventure and of St. Thomas,” New Blackfriars 21, no. 240 (March 1940): 151. “Lovable” is indeed an interesting word to use of someone who most likely died from having been poisoned due to his unpopular political positions, as is maintained by Bonaventure’s secretary, Peregrinus of Bologna.

220 Evidence of how understudied Peckham’s works are is that in scholarship on Peckham’s opera there is no discussion of a curious manuscript attributed to Peckham: a full-length commentary on Aristotle’s Ethics (Firenze, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Conv. Soppr. G.IV.853). The manuscript is very clearly listed under Peckham’s name in the indices at Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale Firenze, as well as in modern reconstructions of the Santa Croce library, and is included as contesté in Palémon
available. Thus, in the early twentieth century, we have a number of scholars who made the first attempts at opening up Bonaventure’s thought to a more textually engaged study. What one would hope to find is a moderation of the older view of Bonaventure, but instead we find a strengthening of it, most particularly in Etienne Gilson. To his credit, Gilson is careful not to thomisticize Bonaventure as was the trend among some later scholars, such as John Francis Quinn, who deny Bonaventure’s more un-Thomistic positions (e.g., plurality of substantial forms) in order to bring harmony between Bonaventure and Aquinas. Gilson does not concern himself with harmony. Amidst sly remarks about Bonaventure’s convoluted method of argumentation, Gilson paints a picture in which Bonaventure was more or less opposed, not only to Aristotle but to pagan philosophy in general. But especially to Aristotle. According to Gilson, while Aquinas saw the wisdom of eating Aristotle and “digesting” him, Bonaventure did not deign to partake of this meal.

The basis for Gilson’s position is that he considers Bonaventure, unlike Aquinas, to reject not only Aristotle but the entire project of philosophy as separate from theology. Therefore, Bonaventure, according to Gilson, cannot admit of any non-Christian philosophers – hence, his philosophy must be Augustinian at its foundation. While it is true that Bonaventure does not separate theology from philosophy, Gilson’s conclusion does not necessarily follow. In fact, one could take the opposite position: while Bonaventure does not separate the two, he also does not make one subordinate to, or the “handmaiden” of the other, as Aquinas does.

Glorieux, *Repertoire des maîtres en théologie de Paris* (Paris: Libraire Philosophique J. Vrin, 1933), 88. The manuscript is also listed in the reconstructions of the original convent libraries completed under the direction of Guido Biagi, as having been housed in the Santa Croce library. The reconstruction tells us that Peckham’s commentary on the *Ethics* was kept alongside of Aristotle’s collected works until the convent libraries were closed in the nineteenth century. *Rivista delle biblioteche e degli Archivi* (Venice-Florence: Libreria antiquaria editrice Leo. S. Olschki, 1985), Vols. VIII-X.

In fact, much of Quinn’s book is devoted to comparing Bonaventure and Aquinas, where he often reaches the conclusion that their positions are similar. To very un-Thomistic positions, such as the seminal reasons, he devotes only sporadic comments, amounting, in the case of seminal reasons, to a full two pages.

An example: “There, where the reader expects syllogisms and formal demonstrations, Saint Bonaventure does not offer anything but correspondences, analogies, and conveniences, which hardly satisfy, and which seem on the contrary however to satisfy him entirely. Images clutter together in his thought and rise up one after the other indefinitely, evoked by an inspiration whose logic escapes us, to such a point that Neo-scholastic philosophers and theologians nowadays leave him quite happily to return to the succinct and clear expositions of Saint Thomas” (my translation). “À là où le lecteur attend des syllogismes et des démonstrations en forme, saint Bonaventure ne lui offre le plus souvent que des correspondances, des analogies, des convenances dont on a peine à se satisfaire, et qui semblent au contraire les satisfaire profondément. Les images se pressent dans sa pensée, se succitent indéfiniment les unes les autres, évocées par une inspiration dont la logique nous échappe, à tel point que même les philosophes néo-scolastiques et les théologiens d’aujourd’hui quittent volontiers la partie pour revenir aux exposés dépouillés et lucides de Saint Thomas.” See: Étienne Gilson, *La Philosophie de Saint Bonaventure* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1924), 196.

“… but it is true that [Aquinas] has, so to speak, absorbed Aristotelianism, then digested it and finally assimilated its substance within its own personal thought.” Etienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1952), 70.
As van Steenberghen writes, addressing Gilson: “St. Bonaventure never condemned philosophy nor did he affirm that human reason without faith was destined to err in all domains. On the contrary, he always recognized and emphasized the value of the usefulness of philosophy.”

Nevertheless, for Gilson, if we are to identify Bonaventure with one of the pagan schools of thought, it is the Platonists whom Bonaventure is happy to incorporate into his thought, however, of course, by way of Augustine. Gilson, accordingly, reduces Bonaventure’s notion of forms to being analogous to Platonic ideas (a position which Bonaventure explicitly rejects in the *Commentary*). Accordingly, Bonaventure, on Gilson’s reading, approves of the Neoplatonists, insofar as they are “the philosophers who discovered exemplarism....”

Here, it is good to mention, as van Steenberghen points out, that effectively all of Gilson’s textual evidence for this claim that Bonaventure is anti-Aristotelian is derived from the *Collationes* – “his university sermons preached from 1267 to 1273, at the most disturbed period of doctrinal struggle.” These sermons were written during a period in which the use of Aristotle’s texts was coming into question, i.e. a time when anyone at the University of Paris would have presented themselves as lukewarm towards Aristotle – particularly someone with the political savvy of Bonaventure. However, as we discussed in the introduction (and will discuss further in this chapter), the supposed “critiques” of Aristotle are not really of Aristotle himself, but either of certain interpreters of Aristotle (as is the case for the eternity of the world and the unity of the intellect), or of a very specific facet of Aristotle’s thought. The supposed critique of Aristotle’s rejection of Platonic forms is not really targeting the fact that Aristotle rejects Platonic forms, but that he rejects the transcendent forms of virtues, which Bonaventure considers need to exist in God himself. This is to say, when one looks more closely, Bonaventure indeed places cautions on his assessments of Aristotle to exclude Aristotle himself. The Bonaventure whom we encounter in the *Collationes* is not, as – for example – Gilson presents

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226 *In Sent.* II, d. 1, p. 1, a. 1, q. 1, pp. 17b-18a.
227 Etienne Gilson, *La Philosophie de Saint Bonaventure* (Paris, J. Vrin, 1924), 100. “... les philosophes qui ont découvert l’exemplarisme et affirmé la réalité des idées étaient des illuminés.”
229 *Hex.* VI.2-7. Indeed, Aristotle is not his opponent regarding the question of the eternity of the world, and that he is right to deny Platonic forms. In the *Commentary*, Bonaventure moreover notes that Augustine thinks that Platonic forms are like divine ideas, but Bonaventure himself does not think so. *In Sent.* II, d. 1, p. 1, a. 1, q. 1, p. 17b.
it, someone who is hostile towards Aristotle, but only someone who is not overtly enthusiastic about defending Aristotle.\textsuperscript{230}

Van Steenbergen’s own view towards the relationship between Bonaventure and Aristotle was, to the horror of Gilson,\textsuperscript{231} that Bonaventure’s philosophy (not his theology, obviously) is at its base Aristotelian, not Augustinian. For van Steenbergen, Bonaventure’s philosophy is not even – as some have maintained (and asserted against van Steenbergen) – a benign synthesis of Neoplatonism and Aristotelianism (which ultimately ends up being more or less an Augustinianism). To pacify his opponents, van Steenbergen concedes that at most one can call Bonaventure’s philosophy “Augustinian Aristotelianism” or “Neoplatonic Aristotelianism” – yet, the emphasis is clearly on Aristotelianism.

There were a number of different reactions to these highly polarized positions of van Steenbergen on the one side and Gilson on the other, all of which attempted to moderate these extremes. In Robert, Roch, Bougerol, and Quinn,\textsuperscript{232} we find a middle ground which leans towards Gilson, i.e. the willingness to concede that Bonaventure uses some Aristotle and has no real antagonism towards Aristotle, but that Aristotelianism is not the real foundation of his thought. In Boehner and Cullen,\textsuperscript{233} we find the position which leans rather slightly more towards van Steenbergen, i.e. that Bonaventure sees himself, particularly with reference to the nature of the forms, as synthesizing Platonism, or Neoplatonism, with Aristotle – of course, by way of Augustine.

Another category are those who maintained, against van Steenbergen, that even if we grant that Bonaventure is influenced by Aristotle, the “spirit” of Bonaventure’s philosophy is nevertheless Augustinian.\textsuperscript{234} This was perhaps the easiest opposition for van Steenbergen to dismiss by responding that this point is more or less ir-

\textsuperscript{230} While the \textit{Collationes} does not make much mention of forms – which is, on my reading, the aspect of Bonaventure’s philosophy which is most Aristotelian – we nevertheless see Bonaventure’s Aristotelianism seeping in. For example, his discussion of virtue and vice makes constant use of Aristotle – and indeed he names him a number of times in this discussion. \textit{Hex.} V.1-17. He likewise uses him for considerations such as motion and the structure of the physical cosmos (\textit{Hex.} IV.17) as well as for teaching grammar and argumentation (\textit{Hex.} IV.19-23).


\textsuperscript{233} Philotheus Boehner, \textit{The History of the Franciscan School: John of Rupella and Saint Bonaventure} (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1943); Christopher Cullen, \textit{Bonaventure} (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010).

relevant for the study of Bonaventure’s philosophy. It is obvious that the “spirit” of Bonaventure’s philosophy would be Augustinian, but so would the spirit of Aquinas’ philosophy; we are dealing with two saints, after all. With regard to their philosophy, however, it makes little sense to appeal to the spirit of their thought. As van Steenberghen writes: “[W]hen isolated from theology by effort of reconstruction, it is no more than a rational system, of which it is difficult to say that it has any spirit at all...” It would be as if one said that Kant’s philosophy is based entirely on the thought of Luther, simply because Kant himself is a Protestant and has as his goal a philosophy which should work within a Protestant worldview.

In the face of the many critiques and qualifications of van Steenberghen’s position which preferred to say either that Bonaventure is anti-Aristotelian or, at best, a synthesis of Neoplatonism and Aristotelianism, van Steenberghen held his ground:

St. Bonaventure retained a very large part of the Aristotelian heritage: the whole of his logic, his doctrine of abstraction, his essential metaphysical theses (potency and act, matter and form, substance and accidents), his views on physics and biology, and finally, many notions of moral philosophy. Thus, without the slightest doubt, we are dealing with a philosophy, all of whose bases are Aristotelian, whose technical vocabulary, principles, methods, and doctrines are largely borrowed from Aristotle.

This passage summarizes a position very similar to what I will maintain and show throughout the course of this and the following three chapters. Why this is important to my wider topic concerning universal forms is that if we miss Bonaventure’s Aristotelianism, we miss his solution to the many problems, as we have seen, which arise in developing the relationship between particulars and universal forms. It is the fact that Bonaventure to a certain extent rejects Neoplatonism with regard to his understanding of form, and instead embraces Aristotle, that he is able to provide a coherent and, indeed, satisfactory account of forms, their causal efficacy, and their relation to God.

What we want now, naturally, is some good textual research, of which unfortunately (or as Roch puts it “irritatingly”) van Steenberghen provides none. In response to van Steenberghen, a few scholars actually did look up the references to Aristotle in Bonaventure’s Commentary on the Sentences. There is, of course, the well-known study done by Bougerol, which was more detailed and more accurate than the study of Aristotle’s texts which he presented in his book, Introduction à l’Étude de Saint Bonaventure. According to Bougerol’s numbers, in the Quaracchi edition of the opera omnia, Bonaventure makes 1015 appeals to Aristotle, of which Bougerol

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236 Ibid., 60.
finds 593 actual citations of texts. Of these 593, 308 are to the *Organon*; 125 to the *Metaphysics*; 136 to the *Physics*; 152 to the *Libri naturali*; 142 to *De Anima*; 142 to the *Ethics*; and but ten to the *Rhetoric*. Unfortunately, Bougerol does not provide us with a number of citations of Augustine to which we could compare these numbers.

However, while Bougerol seems reluctant to make the strong claim that van Steenberghen makes, he admits that his study shows that one cannot deny that Bonaventure knew Aristotle’s texts at least sufficiently well and had no qualms about using Aristotle whenever and wherever he could. Yet, on Bougerol’s reading, Bonaventure’s use of Aristotle is just that: he is *using* Aristotle, but this does not make him an Aristotelian. What perhaps is “irritating,” then, about Bougerol’s study is the large number of citations of Aristotle, coupled with the claim that Aristotle does not have much of a real influence on Bonaventure’s thought. All Bougerol concludes is that Bonaventure knew Aristotle “sufficiently,” that Bonaventure did not have a negative attitude towards Aristotle, and that he considered Aristotle a master (only) of logic and natural science. Yet, one would at the very least like Bougerol to tell us the precise philosophical positions on which Aristotle and Bonaventure disagree, and that this is what drives that wedge between the two and justifies us placing them into two different, or even opposing, philosophical schools of thought.

While Bougerol fails us on this point, Léo Elders in his aptly titled “Les Citations d’Aristote dans le ‘commentaire sur les sentences’ de Saint Bonaventure” at least targets a point of conflict between Bonaventure and Aristotle: the ontological status of the forms. For Bonaventure, forms possess esse and this is what marks his thought as Neoplatonic and plainly un-Aristotelian – Elders maintaining a reading of Aristotle which would better accord with Aquinas’ philosophy. Interestingly (and conveniently), Elders’ study fails to look at the places in the *Commentary* where Bonaventure explicitly develops his understanding of the forms as having esse and their relationship to composite substances. For if he did, he would see precisely what his article claimed to study: *citations d’Aristote*. This lacuna is precisely what we will fill in the following chapter.

Moreover, a further failing in both of the studies by Elders and Bougerol, as well as in a similar work done by Marchesi, is that all of them choose as their representative

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239 There is something misleading about Bougerol’s presentation of these citations: instead of listing each work from the *Organon* with the corresponding number of citations, he lumps all the citations together which makes it look like Bonaventure is using Aristotelian *logic* most, not Aristotelian *metaphysics*.


241 Ibid. “… il considère qu’Aristote peut être le maître de logique et le naturaliste….”

examples of citations of Aristotle in Bonaventure quotes which are more or less meaningless. For example, the *De Caelo* reference which Bougerol uses as his paradigm is: “[A] small mistake in the beginning results in a large mistake in the end” – something which could have been said by anyone in any number of contexts. While it is a good line to use in order to determine which translation Bonaventure has, to fail to note the more philosophical citations of *De Caelo* paints an inaccurate picture of Bonaventure’s use of *De Caelo*. The triviality of the examples which Bougerol and others give makes Bonaventure’s use of Aristotle likewise appear trivial – not foundational.

To bring this section to a conclusion, we can say that after eighty years or so since this debate was sparked by van Steenberghen’s heresy, we have no accurate sense of how much Bonaventure quotes Aristotle in his philosophical texts, or what weight these quotations have in his wider philosophical project. The latter point will be addressed throughout the following chapters. Right now, however, I can address the first. I myself counted the number of Aristotle and Augustine citations to give the accurate comparison – but restricted my counting only to the second book of the *Commentary on the Sentences*, precisely because my concern here is Bonaventure’s natural philosophy, not his theology. It is probably good to remember that much of the second book deals with topics where Aristotle’s texts would seem to have little use, i.e. angels, sin, human nature before the fall, etc. If I really wanted to get at only Bonaventure’s philosophical positions, I would have eliminated these questions, but I did not – so even in my numbers the bias should be towards Augustine, not Aristotle. Again, my bias should be in favor of Augustine since I am relying on the references provided by the Quaracchi editors, who often miss or give an incorrect reference to Aristotle. I counted every type of reference to Aristotle and Augustine (i.e. every quotation, mention, and reference), which made my numbers larger than Bougerol’s but gives a more accurate picture of where Bonaventure was making use of concepts derived from either Aristotle or Augustine, not only mentioning their names for the sake of an argument from authority. I found 658 references made to Augustine in comparison to 972 to Aristotle. Among these 972 references to Aristotle, the most often cited texts are, in the following order: *Physics* (155), *De Anima* (150), *Metaphysics* (147), *Topics* (96), *De Caelo* (81).

Moreover, I found Bonaventure to use Aristotle in a manner that does not indicate a “sufficient” knowledge of Aristotle, but an extremely deep knowledge of the texts

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244 It is interesting to mention again Bonaventure’s use of *De Caelo* in these questions concerning the ontological status of the forms, because Elders himself translated and wrote a commentary on *De Caelo*. Thus it is surprising that someone who knew the text so well would miss the references to it made by Bonaventure, especially when Bonaventure mentions the title of the text and the book number explicitly, and the full reference is given by the editors of the Quaracchi edition.
and a willingness to use them even for the discussion of theological matters. An interesting example is that Bonaventure explicitly argues against Augustine’s account of evil as a pure privation in favor of the view of evil he finds in the *Metaphysics*: in Distinction 18 which deals greatly with the topic of evil, Augustine is referenced 16 times and Aristotle 41. Again, in the question of whether the seminal reason of Eve was in the rib of Adam, Bonaventure, by answering in the negative, departs from the traditional Augustinian notion of seminal reasons and instead endorses a view of seminal reasons which he claims to derive from Aristotle. Moreover, Bonaventure cites from effectively every work in the Aristotelian corpus, including spurious or obscure works – this is to say, he is not just citing from the *Topics* to form arguments, he is citing from, e.g., *De Caelo* to form foundational concepts. Indeed, he is happy to put his knowledge of Aristotle’s texts to use in questions where one would not expect Aristotle to be in any way applicable. A prime example of the kind of in-depth knowledge which Bonaventure has of Aristotle’s texts, and the way in which he often reaches for obscure (and arguably unnecessary) references to Aristotle: in discussing sin among angels, as we mentioned earlier, Bonaventure uses the example and analysis which Aristotle gives, almost parenthetically, of the character of Medea in the *Poetics*.

Indeed, to say that Bonaventure had a “sufficient understanding” of Aristotle, as Bougerol concluded from his counting, is a great understatement. Naturally, however, numbers do not amount to a full understanding of the way in which Bonaventure uses Aristotle, as well as his other sources. Indeed, Bougerol’s numbers could have been correct while, nevertheless, the fewer Aristotle citations could be of greater importance in Bonaventure’s development of foundational metaphysical theses. Alternatively, despite my numbers, Bonaventure might very well be using Aristotle in a superficial manner. My task now is to show that the latter scenario is not the case and to show instead that Bonaventure is rather using Aristotle as the starting point for the development of his understanding of forms, and that this use of Aristotle is of key importance to Bonaventure’s wider philosophical project. For this, we now need to examine the texts themselves.

2. The “Anti-Aristotelianism” of the *Collationes*

But first, as promised, I wish to address in more detail those places in the *Collationes* where earlier scholars saw such a clear testament of Bonaventure’s anti-Aristotelian sentiment. As we mentioned in the introduction, in the *Collationes*, Bonaventure accuses Aristotelianism of a “threefold blindness” – which includes maintaining the three erroneous views: (1) the eternity of the world, (2) the unity of intellect, and (3) the denial of exemplar causation or transcendent ideas (i.e. Platonic forms). Quite clearly, the unity of intellect is not a position which Aristotle himself maintains (or at least maintains explicitly), thus our focus in this section is on the first and third

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245 *In Sent.* II, d. 6, a. 1, q. 2, p. 163b.
positions, both of which concern God’s causal efficacy – i.e. that he creates at one point in time and does so via exemplars.

Turning our attention first of all to the eternity of the world, it is indeed difficult to find a commentator on Bonaventure’s thought who does not consider this issue to signify a major rift between Aristotle and Bonaventure. My thesis concerning Bonaventure’s arguments against the eternity of the world is that it is plainly incorrect to use this point in Bonaventure to assert an anti-Aristotelian sentiment. Why? (1) Because his arguments against an eternal world come from Aristotle, barring the sixth which is based on definition – in fact, Bonaventure cites only Aristotle in this discussion – and, (2) Bonaventure explicitly takes the stance that Aristotle’s own position on this point is, speaking prudently, unclear.246 What I mean here is that Bonaventure states that he himself is unsure whether Aristotle considered the world to be eternal in an absolute sense or in a relative sense, i.e. with regard only to natural moving causes, not with regard to a first principle outside of nature – the latter being an option which Aristotle does not consider in his arguments for an eternal cosmos. This is not an odd position to take. A similar position is maintained by a thinker who we would certainly call “Aristotelian”: Albert the Great. Thus, contrary to the generally held view among scholars, Bonaventure sees Aristotle as a neutral in this debate, not an opponent, i.e. someone whose arguments may be used by either side.247 This is, moreover, precisely how Bonaventure expresses his so-called critique of Aristotle in the *Collationes*, by saying that the view that the world is eternal is not necessarily one supported by Aristotle, but imposed on Aristotle by later thinkers.248 Indeed, in the *Commentary*, Bonaventure asserts that within Aristotle’s own system, it is not only consistent to say that the world had a beginning, but rather makes more sense than asserting the opposite.249 This is to

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246 This latter point is particularly important insofar as we will see Bonaventure maintain a similar position with regard to Aristotle’s view of preexisting principles. *In Sent.* II, d. 1, p. 1, a. 1, q. 3, pp. 22b-23a. “Quidem tanti moderni dicunt, Philosophum nequaquam illud senisse nec intendisse nec intendisse probare, quod mundus omnino non coeperit, sed quod non coeperit naturali motu. – Quod horum magis verum sit, ego nescio; hoc unum scio, quod si possuit mundum non coeperisse sencudm naturam, verum possuit, et rationes eius sumtae a motu et tempore sunt efficaces. Si autem hoc sensit, quod nullo modo coeperit; manifeste erravit, sicut pluribus rationibus ostesum est supra.”

247 To a certain extent, this is also similar to the approach taken by Simplicius to the problem of the eternity of the world in Aristotle – looking to resolve the apparent conflict (certainly) not between Christianity and Aristotle, but between Plato and Aristotle.

248 *Hex.* VI.4. “... as Aristotle seems to say, according to all of the Greek Doctors, as Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, Damascus, Basil, and all of the Arabic commentators....” “Ex quibus sequitur triplex caecitas vel caligo, scilicet de aeternitate mundi, ut videtur dicere Aristoteles secundum omnes doctores Graecos, ut Gregorium Nyssenum, Gregorium Nanzianzenum, Damascenum, Basili- um, et commentatores omnium Arabum, qui dicunt, quod Aristoteles hod sensit, et verba sua sonare videntur. Nuncquam invenies, wuod ipse dicat, quod mundus habuit pricipium vel initium; immo regarduit Platonem, qui solus videtur posuisse, temus incepisse. Et istud repugnat lumini veritatis.”

249 *In Sent.* II, d. 1, p. 1, a. 1, q. 3, p. 23a. [Quotation continued from note 246] “... Et necesse fuit, eum ad vitandum contradictionem ponere, aut mundum non esse factum, aut non esse factum ex nihilo. Ad vitandum ante antem infinitatem actualem necesse fuit ponere aut animae rationalis corruptionem,
say that while Aristotle himself might not have maintained that the world had a beginning, Aristotelianism supports the claim that the world began at one point in time and, as a philosophical system, Aristotelianism is helpful – if not foundational – in arguing for this claim.

Contrary to my points above, for Gilson (naturally), the fact that Bonaventure argues against the eternity of the world is only further evidence of Bonaventure’s anti-Aristotelian (or generally anti-philosophical) sentiment. Bettoni, whose approach to Bonaventure as a philosopher is more sympathetic, does not use Bonaventure’s arguments against the eternity of the world to support the position that Bonaventure is anti-Aristotelian. On the other hand, he makes no mention of the fact that Bonaventure uses Aristotle throughout these arguments. Bougerol takes a similar approach to Bettoni – neither using the arguments to deny Bonaventure’s Aristotelianism, nor to affirm it, but nevertheless denies that Bonaventure was much influenced by Aristotle or knew his texts very well. Marchesi lists this issue about the eternity of the world as a major rift between the two thinkers. Quinn comes close to the reality of the situation in saying that Bonaventure’s first two arguments are based on Aristotelian notions of infinity. However, he then asserts that at their foundation they rather depend upon an Augustinian notion of time, despite the fact that Augustine is neither explicitly nor implicitly referenced in any of the arguments – indeed, Quinn references Augustine frequently in his summaries of the arguments. Quinn also grants the Aristotelian nature of the fifth argument, but is sure to say as the closing remark of his analysis that even though Bonaventure is aware that Aristotle’s position concerning the eternity of the world is not as problematic as the Arabic thinkers, this “does not imply that Bonaventure is an Aristotelian.” In fact, only a few scholars stand out who paint an accurate picture of Bonaventure’s use of Aristotle in these arguments: indeed Boehner alone is consistent in giving the references to Aristotle in listing these arguments. How-

aut unitatem, aut circulationem; et ita auferre beatitudinem. Unde isse error et malum habet initium et pessimum habet finem.”

250 It is interesting that Gilson thinks this, because he is actually one of the few scholars who notes that these arguments are based in Aristotle.


255 Ibid. 228.

ever, he does so in a book which, despite Boehner's death over eighty years ago, has yet to be published in any form other than a mimeograph copy.257

In the course of the six arguments which Bonaventure presents, Aristotle is mentioned by name once, directly quoted in two, and referenced in all but the final. After presenting the arguments, we see Bonaventure state explicitly almost the same position which he will maintain with regard to Aristotle’s notion of the world and preexisting principles: that Aristotle’s wider metaphysical system is not in conflict with a temporal creation *ex nihilo*, even though he does not explicitly take such a position. The fact that this addendum to the six arguments is rarely mentioned in scholarship indeed contributes greatly to the perception that Bonaventure is arguing against Aristotle, when, in fact, he considers it most likely that Aristotle is on his side in this debate. His opponents are rather the Arabic thinkers, whose arguments he notes are, like his own, based in Aristotle’s texts, but supplemented, i.e. that these arguments are “added onto Aristotle’s reasons by commentators and contemporaries [i.e. of Bonaventure].”258

I am going very quickly to summarize the arguments, since they are fairly standard and easy to understand259 – and I leave the task of assessing their validity to Aristotle in connection with Bonaventure’s arguments, but he is right to compare Bonaventure’s use of Aristotle to both Albert the Great and John Philoponus – although the latter is not interested in having Aristotle on his side in this debate, as we will see, Bonaventure indeed is (which would rather make his approach closer to that of Simplicius than Philoponus). Cullen also discusses the influence of Aristotle on Bonaventure’s arguments in *Bonaventure* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2005), 43–44.

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257 See also: Francis Kovach, “The Question of the Eternal World in St. Bonaventure and St. Thomas – A Critical Analysis,” *The Southwestern Journal of Philosophy* 5, no. 2 (1974): 141–172. Kovach calls Bonaventure’s reasoning “Aristotelian” in his fifth argument (only) but does not mention Aristotle with reference to the other arguments – even at a point when Kovach quotes Bonaventure directly quoting Aristotle – and simply attributes this to Bonaventure. He does however provide the Aristotle references for Aquinas’ arguments. Again, Bonansea considers Bonaventure to be arguing against Aristotle and that Bonaventure thinks Plato maintains the position similar to the Christian position (i.e. in the *Timaeus*) – no reference to Bonaventure’s texts is provided in support of this. In reality, Bonaventure does not mention Plato or the Platonists in the entirety of the question on the eternity of the world. He references Plato only in his discussion of whether the world was made from preexisting principles, where he asserts that for Plato there are two eternal principles, form and matter – a reading of Plato which implies that Bonaventure considers that Plato thinks the world is eternal, or at least its principles are, and thereby the account of “creation” provided by Plato and the Platonists *reprobata est*. Bonansea interestingly provides the citations of Aristotle, but then continually places the words into Bonaventure’s mouth: “if the world were eternal, as Aristotle says.” Bernardino Bonansea, “The question of an eternal world in the teaching of St. Bonaventure,” *Franciscan Studies* 34 (1974): 7–33.


259 It is important to note a point which I think is often glossed over in secondary scholarship on these arguments: these arguments are mainly targeting an eternity *in the past*, not in the future. It would be exceedingly more difficult to assert that Aristotle thinks the world will come to an end – and, indeed, this is not the position which Bonaventure is attributing to Aristotle (or to Aristotelianism), but only that it began in the past.
The Controversy: Bonaventure and Aristotle

The first argument – i.e. it is impossible to add to the infinite – contains a quote from De Caelo, which is the premise for the argument, “it is impossible that infinity be increased.” The second argument, that it is impossible to order the infinite, names Aristotle as an authority but does not provide a reference to a text or a quote. The Quaracchi edition adds references to Physics VIII.5 and Metaphysics II.2, i.e. the argument for a first mover and an argument against an infinite downward motion, respectively.

The third argument begins with a quotation from the Posterior Analytics: “It is impossible to traverse the numerically infinite.” This seems also to be referencing an argument from De Caelo, where Aristotle writes: “It is impossible for the infinite line to move at all, for if it moves even the slightest bit, it must take an infinite time.” This argument indeed closely resembles Bonaventure’s claim that movement across infinite time, since time is the measurement of motion, would take an infinite amount of time, and we would therefore never reach the present. Aristotle also likewise asserts in the Physics: “It is impossible therefore, that there should be


This is not perhaps a direct quote, but refers to the argument in De Cael. 1.7 that an infinite body cannot be increased.

Therefore, since it is impossible to traverse the numerically infinite, we shall not know by means of demonstration those predicates which are demonstrable.” Post. An. I.22 34a1-5, cf. Meta. X.10.

in a straight line, continuous movement which is everlasting."\textsuperscript{264} Bonaventure may also be referencing the discussion of infinite motion in \textit{Metaphysics} III.3, where a similar argument is spelled out.

The fourth argument, that a finite mind cannot comprehend the infinite, seems to be a reference to the \textit{Metaphysics}, where Aristotle asks: "[H]ow is it possible to obtain knowledge of the numerically infinite?"\textsuperscript{265} Codices P and Q also have written in the margin a reference to the end of \textit{Physics} VII, which seems less similar but still somewhat applicable, where Aristotle asserts that something which is finite cannot have infinite power – i.e. knowing the infinite would imply infinite power on the part of the knower.

The fifth argument contains a direct quote from Aristotle, and a paraphrase of Aristotle's position that no natural thing can contain an infinity.\textsuperscript{266} Bonaventure then asserts that if the world were eternal, there would be an infinite number of souls, since souls only endure for a small amount of time. For Bonaventure, this is an unavoidable conclusion insofar as he himself considers the transmigration of the soul to be impossible. The basis for the position that there is no transmigration of the soul, he takes from Aristotle, whom he quotes, "the proper act is in the proper matter."\textsuperscript{267} Therefore, the soul, while it may be all things potentially, is only the proper act of this particular man – it cannot be in many men. The last argument is the only one which does not depend on Aristotle and instead is merely based on the definition of creation.

Having given his arguments against an eternal world, Bonaventure then addresses the question of where Aristotle – whom he here calls the "most excellent of philosophers" – stood in this debate.\textsuperscript{268} He first of all makes clear that the arguments of his opponents, like his own, are not entirely representative of Aristotle's position – both sides of the debate are indeed adding on to Aristotle. Here, Bonaventure could have very well maintained that Aristotelian principles and concepts are helpful in forming an argument for a temporal beginning to the world, but nevertheless Aristotle, or Aristotelianism as a whole, would contradict this claim. However, we see Bonaventure rather take somewhat the position of an agnostic on this point. Indeed, quite to the opposite of what is the common picture painted in contemporary scholarship (based only on the \textit{Collationes}), in the \textit{Commentary} Bonaventure thinks if not Aristotle himself, at least Aristotelianism may very well be on his side in this debate. He writes: "[S]ome contemporaries say that the Philosopher did by no means

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\textsuperscript{264} \textit{Phys.} VIII.8 263a2-4.

\textsuperscript{265} \textit{Meta.} III.3 999a27-28.

\textsuperscript{266} \textit{Meta.} XI.9 1066b21-35, \textit{Phys.} III.5 204a8-10.

\textsuperscript{267} \textit{De An.} II.2 414a26-27. The precise line runs as follows: "For the actuality of each thing is naturally inherent in its potentiality, that is in its own proper matter."

\textsuperscript{268} \textit{In Sent.} II, d. 1, p. 1, a. 1, q. 2, p. 22b. "... et adeo rationabilius, ut etiam ille excellentior inter philosophos, Aristoteles, secundum quod Sancti imponunt, et commentatores exponent, et verba eius prætentunt in hunc errorem dilapsus fuerit."
feel nor intend to demonstrate that the world did not begin at all, but only that it did not begin by a natural motion. – Which of these is true, I don’t know….” Here, he is indicating that a position similar to Albert’s is fully possible, but is not himself committing to it. Indeed, and particularly from a modern viewpoint, we would say that Bonaventure should know that Aristotle affirms that the world is eternal. Yet, he is reluctant to commit to this position either. He continues: “But I know that if he posited the world did not begin according to nature, then he reasoned correctly, and his reasons summarized from motion and time are efficacious. But, if he felt that the world did not begin at all; then plainly he was wrong, according to the many reasons put forth above” – reasons which were all based on foundational positions in Aristotle’s metaphysics.

This is somewhat of an odd position: if Aristotle said that the world did not begin, with the caveat that he is making this claim only in a discussion of physical causes, then Aristotle is right. But, of course, if Aristotle did think that there was absolutely no beginning to the world, then, according to Bonaventure, he is wrong. Yet, Bonaventure does not take this as a given; rather, the position that Aristotle only maintained an eternal world from the perspective of physical causes is just as probable as the position that he maintained the world was eternal in an absolute sense – this constituting Bonaventure’s agnosticism. However, the strong point which Bonaventure is making is that if Aristotle thought the latter, then he is in contradiction with his own more foundational positions – and accordingly, even if not Aristotle himself, at least Aristotelianism supports the claim that the world began at one point in time.

The takeaway from Bonaventure’s agnosticism here is that he does not seem to want to admit that Aristotle is in contradiction with his own position – i.e. Aristotle is not Bonaventure’s opponent here (nor is he in the Collationes). And Bonaventure appears to take this approach for two reasons: (1) because he wishes to use Aristotle in forming his own arguments against the eternity of the world and, perhaps more importantly, (2) he quite clearly considers Aristotle as an authority and thereby wants to eliminate the possibility of the Arabic philosophers claiming him as an authority on their side of the debate, i.e. to say to his Arabic counterparts that they cannot claim Aristotle because Aristotle is unclear on this point.

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269 In Sent. II, d. 1, p. 1, a. 1, q. 2, pp. 22b-23a. “Quidam tamen moderni dicunt, Philosophum nequaquam illud sensisse nec intendisse probare quod mundus omnino non coeperit, sed quod non coeperit naturali motu. – Quod horum magis verum sit, ego nescio….”

270 In Sent. II, d. 1, p. 1, a. 1, q. 2, p. 23a. “… hoc unum scio, quod si posuit, mundus non incepisse secundum naturam, verum posuit, et rationes eius sumtae a motu et tempore sunt efficaces. Si autem hoc sensuit, quod nullo modo coeperit; manifeste erravit, sicut pluribus rationibus ostensum est supra.”

271 In Sent. II, d. 1, p. 1, a. 1, q. 3, p. 23a. “Si autem hoc sensit, quod nullo modo coeperit; manifeste erravit, sicut pluribus rationibus ostesum est supra.”

272 In contrast to Albert who would say the former is correct.

273 Van Steenberghen takes a similar position here regarding how Bonaventure viewed Aristotle: that Aristotle only thinks the world is eternal because it wouldn’t have occurred to him not to think so.
Here, we can also compare Bonaventure’s approach to Aristotle regarding the eternity of the world to Aquinas’ approach. On the one hand, Aquinas asserts that Aristotle made all of the right moves insofar as Aristotle had only access to human reason, which, for Aquinas, even taking into consideration a transcendent cause, would lead one to say that the world is eternal – Aristotle was missing only a copy of the Bible. On the other hand, Bonaventure says that Aristotle made all the right moves working within a purely physical cosmos – he is missing precisely the consideration of a transcendent God. This is to say that if someone asked Aristotle, while he was writing the *Physics* or *De Caelo*: “What about the God of *Metaphysics* XII?” or, “What about another kind of transcendent principle?” Aristotle could very likely have expressed the same position as Bonaventure. Thus, for Bonaventure, the limit on Aristotle was not placed by the insufficiency of human reason, but only the context in which Aristotle was forming these arguments.

An important connected issue here is the question of not only creation at one point in time but also creation *ex nihilo*, i.e. “God produced all things immediately.” Bonaventure’s main opponents in this discussion are indeed again not Aristotle, but Plato and the Neoplatonists. Bonaventure summarizes the Neoplatonic position, (interestingly) referencing the *Liber de Causis*, “which posits an ordered ranking in producing, descending in the following manner: God, while he is utterly simple, whose act is intellection, does not produce anything but the one and the first intelligence.”

According to the Neoplatonic position, there is a distinction between a God, who is utterly simple insofar as he knows only himself, and the intelligence, which lacks simplicity insofar as it knows itself and God, the principle above it. Thus, the intelligence “produced its orb and the intelligence of the second orb; and so following this all the way down to the orbs of the moon and the tenth intelligence, which irradiates upon rational animals, and just as there is order in producing, so there is in irradiating.”

The first issue Bonaventure has with this position is that it posits (or implies) a preexisting principle of matter, or potentiality (*potentiali sive materiali principio*),

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In this sense, Aristotle was simply “acculé à considérer l’univers comme éternel dans le passé” – i.e. the eternity of the world is not a position which Aristotle actively defends, just one to which he also does not actively object. Fernand van Steenberghen, “Le Mythe d’un Monde Éternel: Note Complémentaire,” *Revue Philosophique de Louvain* 80, no. 47 (1982): 497.

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*275* *In Sent.* II, d. 1. p. 1. a. 2, q. 2, p. 29a. “… qui posueruntordinem in producendo gradatim descendendo hoc modo: Deus, cum sit omnino simplex, cuius actus est intelligere, non produxit nisi intelligentiam primam et unicam.” He seems to be referring generally to the *Liber de Causis*. We find this position in Proclus in *El.* §§ 3, 9, 16.

*276* *In Sent.* II, d. 1. p. 1. a. 2, q. 2, p. 29a. “… ita produxit orbem suum et intelligentiam secundi orbis; et sic deinceps usque ad orbem lunae et intelligentiam decimam, quae irradiat super animas rationales; et sicut ordo est in producendo, ita in irradiando.”
which is not properly caused by (any of) the first principle(s). This indeed concerns the issue of the existence of non-being (or evil). Bonaventure’s solution, along the lines of what we saw (albeit briefly) in Dionysius, will be discussed in the final chapter, but we can nevertheless grant this as a fair objection to the Neoplatonic system of emanation. If everything in the natural world is caused by the intelligences, or the forms, where does matter/non-being or potentiality come from?

Bonaventure’s second objection is somewhat more obvious, given that we are dealing with a Christian thinker: the fact that the Neoplatonic emanation posits quasi-deities which stand between God and the physical cosmos. Bonaventure makes this objection, however, not by appealing to Christian doctrine, but by asserting that it is absurd to posit a first principle – if it is most simple and most powerful – that can only produce one thing. To put this another way, why does the first principle, if it is really first, need the help of the intellect to communicate itself causally? Bonaventure writes:

For [this position of the Neoplatonists] says that God, since he is most simple, produces only one thing; but all the more is the opposite the case, since the degree to which something is simple is the degree to which it is powerful (potentius), and the degree to which something is powerful is the degree to which it can be in many things (in plures potest): therefore, if God is most simple, he can be in all things without mediation.

From this, we see that Bonaventure is very much committed to avoiding such an emanation: he rather considers the world to be caused by God immediately.

Well aware, then, of this worry about mediation, he also knows that he cannot posit forms separate from material things – and, accordingly, he argues against the separate forms of Plato. Naturally, he takes the position: “The world was produced from nothing both according to the whole and according to its intrinsic principles.” He understands the Platonists to posit preexisting principles, matter and forms, with the forms being separate from their sensible and temporal participants. Bonaventure targets, in a preliminary way, two points in this position to critique. Of course, the most obvious is the third man which Bonaventure references, albeit without spelling it out: “[A]nd it seems absurd to posit a third man...”

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277 *In Sent.* II, d. 1, p. 1, a. 2, q. 2, p. 29a. “Sed supposito potentiali sive materiali principio plures fuerunt philosophi...”

278 *In Sent.* II, d. 1, p. 1, a. 2, q. 2, p. 29. “Dicit enim, quod quia simplicissimus est Deus, non producit nisi unum; sed hoc magis est ad oppositum, quia quanto aliquid simplicius, tanto potentius, et quanto potentius, tanto in plura potest: ergo si Deus simplicissimus, hoc ispo potest in omnia sine media.”

279 *In Sent.* II, d. 1, p. 1, a. 1, q. 1, p. 16a. “Mundus de nihilo est productus et secundum se totum et secundum sua principia intrinsec.”

280 *In Sent.* II, d. 1, p. 1, a. 1, q. 1, p. 16b. “Fuerunt et tertii, qui mundum es principiis praeeexistibus factum posuerunt, scilicet materia et forma; se materia per se posuerunt, formas seperatas et postmodum ex tempore ob opifice summo esse coniunctas. Et hi fuerunt Platonici. – Sed quia illud irrationabile videtur, quod materia ab aeterno fuerit imperfecta, et quod eadem forma sit seperata parit-
second issue which Bonaventure raises goes in a slightly different direction and simply attacks the possibility of positing forms in any way separate from matter, insofar as matter is pure potentiality – for “matter, which is in itself imperfect, is not perfected except through the form,”281 i.e. matter never exists unless it receives (or is composed with) some principle of being, namely, a form.282 If, then, the forms are always separate from matter, matter never attains any level of perfection, i.e. it never exists in any way. Were matter never to have form, it would never attain any kind of existence, and no material thing would ever exist. But material things do exist. Hence, it is absurd to say that forms could ever be separate from matter.

Before we find Bonaventure’s next set of criticisms of the Platonists, he entertains the position of the Peripatetics, whose princeps et dux was Aristotle.283 Approaching this text from the standard view of the relationship between Aristotle and Bonaventure, one would expect Bonaventure to find Aristotle’s understanding of whether the world came to be from preexisting principles also to be problematic. Yet, just as we saw in the previous question concerning the eternity of the world, here again Bonaventure gives Aristotle the benefit of the doubt. He quotes, in support of the claim that Aristotle might very well have maintained a creation ex nihilo, the Meteorology: “I say therefore that the sea was made,”284 and then references the beginning of De Caelo.285 Moreover, Bonaventure adds that he also thinks there there are “so many other places (pluribus aliis locis)” where Aristotle says this that he does not even have to provide the citations himself.286

This is indeed an interesting position for Bonaventure to take here; again, he does not seem to think Aristotle’s philosophy is in conflict with a Christian temporal

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281 In Sent. II, d. 1, p. 1, a. 1, q. 1, p. 16b. “… materia, quae de se est imperfecta, nisi perficiatur per formam.”
282 This is similar to Aristotle’s criticism: “How can the Ideas, if they are the substances of things, exist in separation from them?” Meta. III.4 991b3-5.
283 In Sent. II, d. 1, p. 1, a. 1, q. 1, p. 17a. “Fuerunt etiam quarti, scilicet Peripatetici, quorum princeps et dux fuit Aristoteles….”
284 It is unclear how this helps insofar as the sea could have been made from something else. Meteor. II.3. Amusingly, Cicero says precisely the opposite about Aristotle and Plato as Bonaventure does. Cicero says that Plato thinks the seas were made but Aristotle does not. Disputationes Tusculanes I.xxviii.70.
285 Note here that the editors of the Quaracchi edition have added a reference to Aristotle’s defense of the eternity of the world in De Cael. I.10, but this is obviously not what Bonaventure himself is referencing since (1) Bonaventure says, “at the beginning of De Caelo” and (2) De Cael. I.10 indeed provides quite the opposite position, i.e. that Aristotle thinks there is no beginning to the world at all, let alone a beginning ex nihilo. Here, although it is not entirely clear, I would think that Bonaventure is referencing the discussion in De Cael. I.4-5, where Aristotle argues that circular motion cannot be infinite – again, Bonaventure takes the prohibition on infinite motion to indicate precisely a temporal and ex nihilo beginning of motion.
286 In Sent. II, d. 1, p. 1, a. 1, q. 1, p. 17a. “… Aristoteles, qui veritati magis appropinquantes dixerunt mundum factum, sicut legitur in secundo Meteororum: ‘Dico igitur, quod mare factum est,’ et in principio De Caelo et mundo et de pluribus aliis locis potest elici.”
**creatio ex nihilo.** The main evidence which Bonaventure seems to be hinting at, in asserting that Aristotle does not really seem to deny a temporal creation *ex nihilo* (since he does not provide references), is Aristotle’s refutation of Platonic preexisting principles (i.e. the forms), coupled with Aristotle’s assertion that forms are not separate from matter – from which Bonaventure has the sense on the whole that the Peripatetics “say that the world was not made from preexisting principles.”

Bonaventure considers that if Aristotle refutes Plato’s preexisting principles, the logical conclusion is that there were no preexisting (or mediating) principles at all, and that the world came to be from nothing. Yet, Bonaventure, being transparent on this point, admits that this creation from nothing is not explicit in Aristotle, and as to whether Aristotle would really have maintained that “matter and form were made from nothing, I don’t know.”

Bonaventure makes the further concession regarding this precise creation *ex nihilo* that he “[believes] nevertheless that [the Peripatetics] did not come to this conclusion….” This is to say, for Aristotle, a creation from nothing is at best implied by his refutation of Platonism, and so “[the position of the Peripatetics] is lacking, but less so than the others [i.e. the Platonists and Neoplatonists].”

Bonaventure then returns to his assessment of Plato, and this line of critique comes directly from Aristotle, whom he cites explicitly – and this time there is good textual basis: the *Metaphysics*. Here, Bonaventure writes: “For just as the Philosopher objects [to Plato], the forms of things outside of God, and separate from singulars, may cause absolutely nothing, neither with regard to operation nor with regard to cognition.”

This is, as we will see in the following chapter, a nice microcosm of Bonaventure’s placement of forms in his wider ontology: the forms can neither be separate from God nor separate from nature – on both fronts, explicitly against a Neoplatonic emanation.

There are a number of points I would like to make here about Bonaventure’s use of Aristotle in the text cited above, beyond the obvious that he seems much more sympathetic to Aristotle’s position than the Platonic or Neoplatonic position. First
of all, Bonaventure’s sympathetic attitude towards Aristotle indicates that Bonaventure thinks there is no emanation in Aristotle – but he should, if he is thinking that the *Liber de Causis* is by Aristotle. Yet, he cites the *Liber de Causis* as a text which supports mediating intelligences. This indicates strongly that at least at the point of writing this question, Bonaventure did not think that the position found in the *Liber de Causis* was Aristotle’s position. Alternatively, in other questions, he cites Aristotle as the author of the *Liber de Causis*. This makes one think that this particular question was written later than the questions in which Aristotle is named as the author of the *Liber de Causis*, and that perhaps in the interim Bonaventure became aware, or at least suspicious, of the fact that this was not a true work of Aristotle. \(^{293}\) It is interesting also that other than these two citations, the references to the *Liber de Causis* are fairly sparse, and they are often cited as an opposing position. Why does this matter? I am making this point in order to address a reader who may think that Bonaventure’s “Neoplatonic” reading of Aristotle is due to the fact that he thinks Aristotle wrote the *Liber de Causis* – it seems, rather to the contrary, that Bonaventure throughout the *Commentary on the Sentences* is reluctant to use the *Liber de Causis*, and almost always when he does cite it, it is cited as a negative position.

Secondly, with regard to scholarship on the relationship between Bonaventure’s understanding of God (particularly exemplar causation) and his use of Aristotle: generally, Bonaventure’s doctrine of exemplars is considered to be a wholly un-Aristotelian aspect of his thought – in the sense that there is nothing in Aristotle which Bonaventure finds as a correlate to his own doctrine. However, the above passage indicates that Bonaventure sees Aristotle’s natural philosophy to be at the very least not in conflict with, and in fact often in support of, those places in which Bonaventure does part ways with Aristotle, i.e. on the notion of exemplarism, the question of the eternity of the world, etc.

Indeed, the above passage, which is sympathetic towards Aristotle’s understanding of how the world came to be and where the forms should be placed in the ontological hierarchy, is ignored in scholarship; in its place only a statement which Bonaventure makes in the *Collationes* is referenced, which appears to admonish Aristotle for denying Platonic forms. As we have mentioned earlier, the supposed critique of Aristotle’s rejection of Platonic forms is not really targeting the fact that Aristotle rejects Platonic forms generally, but that he rejects the transcendent forms of virtues, which Bonaventure considers need to exist in God himself. \(^{294}\) Plato perhaps comes closer because although he does not posit the forms in God, at least they are “transcendent.” However, above in the *Commentary on the Sentences*, Bonaventure rather explicitly rejects Platonic forms as being in any way like

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\(^{293}\) Another, and indeed not improbable, option is that he cites it as being written by Aristotle only when it is helpful or convenient to himself to do so.

\(^{294}\) *Hex.* VI.2–7.
The Controversy: Bonaventure and Aristotle

divine exemplars, precisely because, although they are transcendent, they are not in God – and instead speaks positively only of Aristotle, praising him precisely for rejecting the forms of Plato. The only positive mention of Plato in this passage from the *Commentary* is to note that Augustine says Plato posited the forms in the mind of God.295 In fact, Bonaventure does not seem to be convinced that Augustine is right on this point. If Augustine is right, then Plato is to be commended; but if Augustine is wrong, then Plato’s position is wrong – as we saw above in all of the arguments that can be raised against Platonic forms which stand between a first principle and sensible things, separate from both. However, in the *Commentary*, when Bonaventure assesses Plato, he assesses him as if Augustine’s evaluation is incorrect and instead cites Platonic forms as the opposing position.

The fact, however, that the above *Commentary* citation is replaced with the comment from the *Collationes* also highlights a worrying aspect of scholarship on Bonaventure. Indeed, what is often seen in Gilson and others’296 in a discussion of Bonaventure’s critique of emanation is a list of citations from the very discussion I am citing, the omission of the comment about Aristotle, and then the insertion of the *Collationes* citation as if this were all coming from the same text and the same context. This reveals a deeper problem than wrongly portraying Bonaventure’s feelings towards Aristotle insofar as it incorrectly presents Bonaventure’s forms, and/or his divine exemplars, as if they are similar to Plato’s forms – while neither Bonaventure’s notion of forms nor his notion of divine exemplars, as we will see respectively in chapters 4 and 5, are at all like Plato’s forms. Indeed, portraying Bonaventure’s forms as Platonic creates a common confusion about where Bonaventure’s forms are to be placed in an ontological structure – are these forms which have esse divine exemplars? Or are they transcendent like Plato’s forms? If the exemplars are equated with Platonic forms (or even Bonaventure’s notion of forms), we have a kind of ontologism where knowing the forms would mean seeing into God’s mind – which also would imply a plurality in God, also absurd. Quite to the contrary, Bonaventure makes clear that the relation of the forms to God is that of creature to creator: “[S]ince these eternal ideas are not distinct from the

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295 Of course, Augustine, too, must be saying this in a general way. In *Sent. II*, d. 1, p. 1, a. 1, q. 1, p. 17b. “Quod obicicitur, quod omne quod producitur, producitur per simile in forma, et congnoscitur similiter; dicendum, quod est agens secundum naturam, et secudum intellectum. Agens secundum naturam producit per formas, quae sunt vere naturae, sicut homo hominem, et asinum asinum; agens per intellectum producit per formas quae non sunt aliquid rei, sed ideae in mente, sicut artifex product arcam; et sic productae sunt res, et hoc modo sunt formae rerum aeternae, quia sunt Deus. Et si sic posuit Plato, commendandus est, et sic imponit ei Augustinus. Si autem ultra processit, ut imponit ei Aristoteles, absque dubio erravit et ratio sua, quae praedicta est, omnino nihil cogit. Nam sicut ostendit Philosophus, formae rerum extra Deum a singularibus seperatae nihil omnino faciunt, nec ad operationem, nec ad cognitionem.”

Creator, they are not the true essences or quiddities of things. But the creature and the Creator differ necessarily in essence. On the other hand, if we try to say that Bonaventure’s notion of forms are separate and transcendent like Plato’s, then we are back to the problem of emanation – which we saw was so difficult to avoid in the earlier Christian Neoplatonists who did not have Aristotle. We can see then so clearly that it would be absurd for Bonaventure, well aware of the issues with Plato and Neoplatonism, to take Plato as his point of departure – the quasi-affirmation of Platonic forms in the Collationes must be said, as van Steenberghen asserts, only to placate his audience. Moreover, so must be the affirmation of Plotinus, whose positions regarding emanation we just saw Bonaventure quite explicitly reject. Thus, if we have two contradictory positions in two different writings, and one is made free of political/social pressure, this is the one which we have better reason to believe to be the position Bonaventure actually held: that Aristotle’s thought is more compatible with the system Bonaventure is developing.

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297 Sc. Chr., II concl. (p. 89). He makes a similar point in stressing that God creates the essences of things in Hex. II.22.
299 Hex. III.27.