Aristotle and the Ontology of St. Bonaventure

van Buren, Franziska

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Bonaventure writes in the first question of Book II of his *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*, “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 to say that if one wishes to provide a satisfactory account of the forms and their causal efficacy, one should develop an understanding of the forms as being separate neither from sensible things nor from God. We then have two main topics for discussion: the relationship of forms to sensible things and the relationship of forms to God.

In this chapter, I will examine Bonaventure’s understanding of the ontological status of the forms per se and their relationship to sensible particulars – without, however, going into issues such as plurality of substantial forms, how forms are ordered within a composite, individuation, secondary causation, etc. These topics, which concern the details of Bonaventure’s physics, I will save for the final and seventh chapter. In chapter 5, we will discuss how Bonaventure approaches the question of how one should conceive of the forms as having their existence in God, i.e. as they are pre-contained in their cause.

Turning to my goals for this chapter, I will first of all show that Bonaventure asserts that it is the universal forms which possess primary being, i.e. that they not only give esse, actuality, intelligibility, and goodness to composite things, but that they themselves are esse, actuality, intelligibility, and goodness – a position which he finds foundation for primarily in the thought of Aristotle.

If, however, the forms are esse, actuality, intelligibility, and goodness, the question then arises: How does their status as such not hypostasize the forms? This question can be answered from two points of view: from the point of view of the relationship between the forms and sensible things, and from the point of view of the relationship between the forms and God. Again, saving the question of their relationship to God for the following chapter, in this chapter we will show how Bonaventure understands the forms to be entirely immanent in the natural order and thereby neither transcendent nor hypostasized, as were the forms, for example, of Plato and Proclus. It is important to stress, even in a preliminary way, that Bonaventure means something very different from Plato or the earlier Neoplatonists, pagan and
Christian alike, with his claim that the forms have esse. This point has been indeed overlooked in contemporary scholarship on Bonaventure, which rather portrays Bonaventure’s claim that forms have esse as simply a restatement of the Neoplatonic position — and, as such, his notion of forms would not be very interesting. To the contrary, while the Platonic/Neoplatonic forms have a transcendent being which exists separately from the sensible world of becoming, for Bonaventure, the forms are in no way separate. Rather, they are the only things which exist — they are the natural order. There is not one world of sensible things and one world of forms — there is only one world: the forms. Thus, while, like the Neoplatonists, Bonaventure maintains that forms have being in themselves, he denies that their being is in any sense separate from sensible composites.

In chapter 1, we saw Dionysius, as well as to a great extent Augustine, trying to eliminate the Neoplatonic hypostasis of the Intellect by placing the forms in God — but their solutions remained somewhat unsatisfactory insofar as they left the forms in a kind of ontological limbo where the forms weren’t precisely in God, because God causes them, but they weren’t precisely in nature either, because, as external to nature, they cause nature. Bonaventure, however, while taking much from the Neoplatonists with regard to the relationship of the forms to God — i.e. especially the notion of the forms being pre-contained in God as their cause — takes a very different route in approaching the relationship between forms and sensibles. On this point, he breaks with the Neoplatonic tradition and instead turns to Aristotle — using Aristotle now to locate the forms ontologically in the natural world, in order to eliminate decisively the worry of the Neoplatonic hypostasis.

1. Form, Esse, Actuality, Goodness

In this section, I would like to lay out the basic aspects of forms in Bonaventure’s thought, i.e. how the forms are related to other principles such as being, actuality, potency, goodness, etc., before beginning a discussion, in the following sections, of how they relate to particular sensible things. The most foundational question here is whether the forms themselves have esse — and if so, in what sense. As we saw of Aquinas’ position on this matter in the previous chapter, Bonaventure’s position concerning a distinction between form and existence is likewise revealed by his answer to the question of whether or not angels have spiritual matter. Here, my method will be to look at the reasons why Bonaventure asserts that angels have spiritual matter in order to show how he is thinking about forms. This is to ask: Why does Bonaventure think an angel cannot simply be a form? One could perhaps explain Bonaventure’s notion of form without delving into these arguments, but (1) they are standardly covered in the secondary scholarship on Bonaventure’s forms and, more importantly, (2) they are addressed in such a way which often inaccurately presents Bonaventure’s understanding of forms and of universal hylomorphism,
i.e. that the foundational position for his claim that angels have matter is that forms have esse. This presents Bonaventure’s argument as being fairly weak, as the claim that forms have esse can easily be dismissed by maintaining a distinction between form and being/act, à la Aquinas – in which case angels could be pure form without being pure act or pure being. I will show, to the contrary, that the foundational position for Bonaventure’s assertion that forms are esse and therefore angels must have matter is that forms are universal – a more difficult claim to knock down, particularly insofar as Bonaventure later in the Commentary provides a number of arguments for this position. With regard to Bonaventure’s use of Aristotle in this question, naturally many of the foundational concepts (e.g., act and potency, etc.) which are at play here are Aristotelian, but what is most important is that the assertion at the foundation of these arguments for spiritual matter – i.e. that forms must be universals – is one which Bonaventure quite explicitly attributes to Aristotle. As for Bonaventure’s more extended arguments for the claim that forms must be universals, again derived from Aristotle, these will be treated in the next section of this chapter.

To the question of whether angels have matter, Bonaventure answers in the affirmative, attributing to angels (and to rational souls) not corporeal but spiritual matter – a concept which comes down to him from the Fons Vitae of Avicebron, and which is often called universal hylomorphism. Bonaventure writes first of all: “I respond by saying, that it is certain that the angel does not have simple essence by the privation of all composition; for, it is certain that angels are composed in a multiplicity of ways.” Composition, for Bonaventure, is said in many different senses. The first type of composition relevant to angels is that angels are said to be composed because there is a distinction between themselves and their principle: “For [the angel] may be considered in comparison to its principle; and so [the angel] is composed as much as it is dependent upon it. For, that which is most simple is that which is most absolute....” This is to say, there is a distinction between the angel itself and any of its principles or causes, e.g., there is a distinction between the angel itself and its own form or matter.

Now considering angels themselves as principles, i.e. insofar as they have causal efficacy in the world, they have composition in yet another sense: “Second, [the angel] is considered to have [composition] in comparison to its effect; and so it has components of substance and potency.” An angel, as cause, has a potency with regard to

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301 In Sent. II, d. 3, p. 1, a. 1, q. 1, p. 90b. “Respondeo: Dicendum, quod certum est, Angelum non habere essentiam simplicem per privationem omnis compositionis; certum enim est, quod Angelus compositus est compositione multiplici.”


303 In Sent. II, d. 3, p. 1, a. 1, q. 1, p. 91a. “Habet secundo considerari in comparatione ad suum effectum; et sic habet componi ex substantia et potentia.”
a certain causal efficacy, i.e. its own causal efficacy with regard to a particular effect is not identical with the angel’s own substance; the converse is the case with God, i.e. God’s causal efficacy is identical with his own essence. To illustrate this type of composition in angels with an example: I am the cause of the tuna ragù I’m making for dinner. Certainly my effect, my ragù, is contained within me because the recipe is in my mind. And in this way, I and my dinner adhere to the Proclean notion that an effect proceeds from its cause, i.e. my ragù is on the stove not in my mind but still remains in its cause, i.e. the form of the ragù is still in my mind. Yet, my essence, what I am, is not “the form of my tuna ragù” – the ragù is simply something I have the potency to make. Thus, when I am considered as a cause, there is a distinction between myself and my causal efficacy, as there is with an angel – or else an angel could do nothing at all.

Considered as composed in the above ways, secundum metaphysicum, Bonaventure concludes that angels are composed of act and potency and, secundum logicum, of genus and differentia. Bonaventure then draws the wider set of conclusions: (1) with regard to actual being, angels have composition of ens and esse, i.e. they are each a being which partakes in being itself; (2) with regard to essential being, they have composition of quo est and quod est, i.e. what the angel is (its form) and the angel itself; and (3) with regard to individual (or personal) being, they have a composition of quod est and quis est, what they are and who they are.

Yet, none of these compositions amounts precisely to a composition of form and matter. Bonaventure approaches this final type of composition with caution: “But concerning the composition of matter and form, or material and formal composition, there has been doubt. Some want to say, that such composition is not present in angels, and there are in them [only] the compositions above stated.”

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304 In Sent. II, d. 3, p. 1, a. 1, q. 1, p. 91a. “Habet nihilominus considerari ut ens in genere; et sic secundum metaphysicum componitur ex act et potentia, secundum logicum vero, ex genere et differentia.”

305 In Sent. II, d. 3, p. 1, a. 1, q. 1, p. 91a. “Item, habet considerari ut ens in se; et sic quantum ad esse actuale est in ipso-compositio entis et esse, quantum ad esse essentielle, ex quo est et quod est, quantum ad esse individuale sive personale, sic quod est et quis est. – Cum ergo angelica essentia dicitur simplex, hoc non est per privationem harum compositionum.”

306 This quo est/quod est distinction is found also in Alexander of Hales and Bonaventure’s student, John Peckham, as well as many other medieval Scholastics in some form or another. See: Alexander of Hales, SH II, n. 60, p. 75. As Alexander writes: “… no creature is its own essence, nor does it have being (esse) from itself, but it rather depends on another; there in all creatures the quo est differs from the quod est; therefore, this common composition is in all creatures (… nullum creatum est sua essentia nec a se habet esse, sed aliunde dependet; ergo in creatura omni quo est et quod est differunt; ergo haec compositio communis est omni creaturae).” Commentary on the Sentences II, n. 59 a, p. 74 (my translation). For Peckham’s position, see Summa de Esse et Essentia 7.

307 The third of these would apply also to human beings, but not to any other creatures which cannot rightly be called “persons.”

308 In Sent. II, d. 3, p. 1, a. 1, q. 1, p. 90a. “Sed de compositione materiae et formae sive materialis et formalis, de hac dubium est. Et voluerunt aliqui dicere, quo talis removetur ab Angelo, et sunt in eo compositiones prius dictae.”
not simply one thing. They have composition in the sense of mutability “not only towards non-being but according to diverse properties, so there is the principle \( \text{(ratio)} \) of passivity, again there is a principle \( \text{(ratio)} \) of individuation and limitation, finally a principle \( \text{(ratio)} \) of essential composition according to their proper nature.”

Angels have all of the above different compositions within themselves and thus one cannot say that they are each simply and purely a form – precisely if we take a form to be a universal. To maintain that angels are forms, one would have to maintain not only that forms are potential with regard to the act of being, but that in a form there are also all of the above types of composition. It seems absurd to say that forms are composed of \( \text{quo est} \) and \( \text{quod est} \) – there is no composition in a form between that “by which” the form is and “that which” the form is, such as there is in any particular thing – i.e. there is a distinction, for example, between Rye the Horse and the form, horse, but there isn’t a correlate kind of distinction in the form, horse, itself. It is rather clear that angels possess actuality and potentiality not just with regard to being, but with regard to all of these other types of composition which constitute their mutability, as well as their particularity. Thus, all of the above ways of composition boil down to one composition: actuality and potentiality (i.e. matter and form).

To be clear, what all of these arguments rest upon is not the claim that forms have \( \text{esse} \), but the claim that forms are universals and therefore cannot have these types of composition which are peculiar to individuals, such as angels or cats – an angel cannot be an individual person and also the universal kind that it is, for this would amount to asserting, e.g., that animality itself could ever be an individual thing. This point Bonaventure finds most explicitly made by Aristotle in \textit{De Caelo}, where Aristotle makes a distinction between the form itself (i.e. the universal) and the form in the matter (i.e. the form in the individual thing) – a distinction which we will see Bonaventure quite frequently shorthand by quoting the line, as he does here: “When I say heaven I mean the form, and when I say this heaven I mean the matter.”

Or again, using Aristotle to substantiate what it means for the form to be universal, he cites the \textit{Posterior Analytics}, that “the universal form is by nature

\[309\] \textit{In Sent. II, d. 3, p. 1, a. 1, q. 1, p. 91a. “Sicut, sic ostensum est supra, cum in Angelo sit ratio mutabilis non tantum ad non-esse, sed secundum diversas proprietates, sit iterum ratio passibilitatis, sit iterum ratio individuationis et limitationis, postremo ratio essentialis compositionis secundum proprietat natum.”}

\[310\] \textit{In Sent. II, d. 3, p. 1, a. 1, q. 1, p. 90a. “... et si composita est ex diversis naturis, illae dueae naturae se habent per modum actualis et possibilis, et ita materiae et formae. Et ideo illa positio videtur verior esse, scilicet quod in Angelo sit compositio ex materia et forma.”}

\[311\] \textit{In Sent. II, d. 3, p. 1, a. 1, q. 1, p. 89b. “Cum dico caelum, dico formam; cum dico hoc caelum dicit materiam.” \textit{De Cael. I.9.} Duns Scotus also mentions this phrase: \textit{Ordinatio II, d. 3, p. 1, q.6, 202, p. 490. There is also a parallel text in the \textit{Metaphysics} XII.8 1074a, where a similar point is made. Scotus uses this reference similarly in q.3. q.6. In this passage from the \textit{Metaphysics}, Aristotle connects the heaven example with the example of Socrates, i.e. in Socrates there is a distinction between man (universal), Socrates’ humanity, and Socrates.
‘always and everywhere’” (i.e. not here and now).\textsuperscript{312} The only way, then, to get around the position that angels must have matter is to assert that forms are not universals – or to be somewhat ambiguous about it, as Aquinas is – and then angels could each be one individual form (and thereby would be composed simply of act and potency but not of form and matter). However, as we will see Bonaventure further argue in the next section (again, using Aristotle), an individual or particular form is a contradiction in terms: forms insofar as they are intelligible must be universals.\textsuperscript{313} Indeed, this would hold as a strong objection to Aquinas’ claim that each angel, as a form, is a species unto itself. To be a species is to be universal – i.e. to be applicable to many members of a species (e.g. equinity is no individual horse) – and no angel is universal, but is an individual thing, and moreover an individual person.\textsuperscript{314}

The above discussion gives us not only Bonaventure’s claim that forms have esse, but also his more foundational commitment that forms are universals. The next step is to clarify the sense in which Bonaventure claims that forms have esse. While Bonaventure’s arguments for spiritual matter are often considered sufficient to assert plainly that Bonaventure considers the forms to have esse, I would like to delve into this notion that forms have esse a bit deeper. The first place I would like to look is Bonaventure’s response to the question of whether the image of God is greater in men than in women. His answer (thankfully) is no. His reasoning is as follows: “[T]he esse principally [of man and woman] consists in the soul.”\textsuperscript{315} And soul is the form of a human being, and it is the same in man and in woman. Thus, he concludes “that man is not more an image [of God] than woman, they proceed from the image with regard to their primum esse [i.e. the form of the soul].”\textsuperscript{316} Here, plainly, with regard to the being – the primary being – of man and woman, which is the form of the soul, there is no distinction.

\textsuperscript{312} In Sent. II, d. 3, p. 1, a. 1, q. 1, pp. 89b-90a. “Si tu dicas, quod materia vocatur ipsa hypostasis, sive ipsum quod est; ego quero a te de hypostasi: aud addit aliquid supra essentiam et formam, aut nihil. Si nihil addit, ergo non contrahit: ergo sicut ipsum universale est natum semper esse et ubique, sic ipsa hypostasis, sicut patet in divinis, quia person non addit supra essentiam, sed est ubique et immensa, sicut essentia. Ergo cum hypostasis Angeli sit finita et arctata et limita, et ita hic et nunc, necessario oportet, quod ultra formam addat aliquid arcantis substantiale sibi; hoc autem non potest esse nisi materia...” Post. An. l.31.

\textsuperscript{313} In Sent. II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 3, pp. 439-442.

\textsuperscript{314} Even if an angel were the only member of its species, it still is not the species itself. This position is argued against explicitly by Aristotle in the Metaphysics, i.e. that no form can be an individual thing. He uses the example of the sun, which although being the only member of its kind (i.e. there are no other suns), is nonetheless still a member of a kind. Meta. VII.15 1040a28-1040b4. We will see Bonaventure use this text in chapter 7, when we discuss individuation.

\textsuperscript{315} In Sent. II, d. 16, a. 2, q. 2, p. 403b. “Ratio imaginis non est magis in viro quam in muliere quod primum esse, sed tantum quod accidentalem proprietatem. Respondeo ad praedictorum intelligentiam est notandum, quod, sicut ex praecedentibus patet, imago quantum ad suum esse principaliter consistit in anima...”

\textsuperscript{316} In Sent. II, d. 16, a. 2, q. 2, p. 403b. “Rationes enim ostendentes, quod non magis est imago vir quam mulier, procedunt de imagine quantum ad suum primum esse, sicut intuenti patet.”
This assertion that it is the form which is primary being is more made emphatic in Bonaventure’s further discussion of the nature of form and matter in themselves, and what each brings to the sensible composite. He writes: “The metaphysician considers the nature of all creatures, and especially substance [which has] being in itself (per se entis), in which is considered the act of being (actus essendi), and this is what the form gives [to composite substances].” In contrast, the matter gives “existence (existere)” and “stability for things existing (per se existendi).”

However, “to exist” and “to be” seem almost to be the same thing. But they are not: Bonaventure is making a distinction between the form’s being (esse) and the composite’s existing (existere). Here, we might say, the form is the being of the composite substance, while the composite is the existing of the form, i.e. precisely insofar as the form has entered into composition with other forms and matter. That is, while form considered purely in itself is being (esse) – and is always and everywhere – its existing in a composite (and the composite itself) presents the form in one particular spatial-temporal location – its existing (existere) here and now. The form of horse is not in one temporal or sensible place, it does not change, it simply is; the particular horse, however, exists in particularized times and places and is the object of sense perception. What the form gives to the particular horse is that relationship to the form’s own act of being, and this grounds the particular horse ontologically and intelligibly in the universal (which exists and which is the object of knowledge). Yet, what the matter gives to the particular, and in fact to the form as well, is not being per se but a temporal and physical existence – something the form, precisely insofar as it is universal (i.e. always and everywhere), cannot itself provide. Accordingly, Bonaventure writes: “For just as the matter of corporeal things sustains and gives to the forms existere and subsistere, so also does spiritual matter.”

We see the above notion that the form gives esse, while the matter gives existere, again in Bonaventure’s argument that the rational soul must have matter (i.e. spiritual matter). The argument is similar to that regarding spiritual matter in angels, i.e. that the human soul is composed and individual and therefore must have a material component. Within this discussion, Bonaventure clarifies the way in which existere is applied to substances which are spiritual, such as angels or human souls. He brings out here that the difference between the form of the soul and oth-
er forms is that the soul is meant to exist (existere) per se, i.e. to have spiritual matter which renders the form-matter composite eternal (at least in separation from the body) like angels. From this, we can see the contrast: other forms (e.g., tree) only have the capacity to take on physical matter and thus when they exist (existere), they exist as physical temporal things. Thus, even angels and the separated souls exist (existere), but they do not have being (esse) – rather, the title of esse is reserved only for the forms, whether they be forms of trees or forms of human souls or angels. Thus, Bonaventure concludes that the rational soul has a “material principle, from which it has existere, and a formal principle, from which it has esse.” Here again, we see the fundamental position is that forms are universal and not composed, and so anything which is individual cannot be a form and cannot have esse in itself. To have esse, something has to be universal.

To give a final statement of this position that forms alone are esse, let us turn to a question in the Commentary on the Sentences which we will see resurface a number of times: whether the seminal reasons are universal forms. Bonaventure answers no – the reason for which we will see momentarily in the next section. Forms for Bonaventure, most properly spoken of as universals, rather “embrace complete esse”; thus he asserts, misquoting Boethius, “that the species [i.e. the universal form] is the total being of the individual.” Again, we see Bonaventure’s stress that the form is the “being of” the individual, but is not identical with the individual.

Bonaventure then adds an important facet to this notion that form is esse – that the form is furthermore bene esse or (loosely called) bonitas. The form is responsible not only for giving being to the composite thing but also for making it good – and in this sense it orders the composite in finem, towards its end. Bonaventure writes that the ordering of rational creatures “is according to a certain image [i.e.

\[\text{Pati, muovere et moveri, quod habet intra se fundamentum suae existentiae, et principium materiale, a quo habet existere, et formale, a quo habet esse.}\]

\[\text{In Sent. II, d. 17, a. 1, q. 2, p. 415b. “Ipse autem anima, cum sit rationalis, cum sit per se existens, aliquam compositionem habet, quam aliae formae non sunt natae per se habere, dum non sunt natae per se existere; nihilominus tamen ipsa anima simplicior aliis formis dici potest.”}\]

Here we can see that if this were not the case, not only angels would be forms but also separated souls – which would be an odd claim.

\[\text{In Sent. II, d. 17, a. 1, q. 2, pp. 414b-415a. “... anima rationalis, cum sit hoc alicud et per se nata subsistere et agere et pati, movere et moveri, quod habet infra se fundamentum suae existentiae et principium materiale, a quo habet existere, et formale, a quo habet esse.”}\]

\[\text{In Sent. II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 3, p. 439b. “Ergo forma universalis, quae est species, est forma totius, quae comprehenderit totum esse, et quae est sufragii ratio cognoscendi quantum ad esse substantiale.”}\]

\[\text{In Sent. II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 3, p. 439b. “Dicit etiam Boethius, ‘quod species est totum esse individualis.’ This should be referencing Boethius, Libr. III. Comment. in Porphyr. c. de Specie. This line, however, is nowhere to be found in Boethius’ text.”}\]

\[\text{Form gives esse and bene esse. In Sent. II, d. 1, p. 2, dubia 2, pp. 51b-52a. “Respondeo dicendum, quod bonitas est duplex in creatura: una quae est ex forma dante esse, alia quae est ex froma dante bene esse. Prima est bonitas substantialis, quae non addit supra formam novam essentiam, sed solum relationem ad finalem causam, ex qua comparatione omne alius et Deo habet esse bonum.”}\]
of God] and according to a certain bene esse."\(^{328}\) The former (i.e. the image of God) applies only to the rational soul insofar as it is caused immediately by God, while the latter (i.e. according to a certain bene esse) applies to all things and is that which makes things a vestige of God,\(^{329}\) insofar as things are ordered \textit{in finem}.\(^{330}\) The notion that the form is the good of the composite is indeed another way of stating that the form is the final cause of the composite, i.e. that for which the composite exists. Put another way, the form is the “actuality and \textit{entelechia}” of the composite,\(^{331}\) a position for which Bonaventure relies on the authority (and terminology) of Aristotle, “for the final cause tends to be the greatest good and the end of the [other causes].”\(^{332}\)

Here we find quite an Aristotelian take on an Augustinian equation of being and goodness. In the previous chapter, we saw Aquinas apply this being=goodness equation to God: God is goodness and being, and he gives goodness/being to creatures, and thus we have participation in the transcendentals. While, for Aquinas, forms are called the final cause (the end or \textit{telos}) of the composite, this has little more than a nominal weight insofar as the forms have no existence in themselves until they are \textit{actualized} by the composite. This is to say, they have no actuality in themselves independent from and prior to the actuality of the composite. God alone is actuality. Here, however, Bonaventure takes his cue from Aristotle and asserts that it is the \textit{form} which has \textit{esse} and which is the final cause, the good, the actuality, the \textit{entelechia} of the sensible composite – not God immediately.

These preliminary remarks which Bonaventure makes in asserting that the forms are good, and that they make things good, insofar as they are final causes, is far from a radical Aristotelianism but would be worrying to an Augustinian. If God is goodness and being, then he should cause goodness and being in creation – and thus all things should participate in him via goodness and being, i.e. via the transcendentals. Isn’t Bonaventure here going explicitly against Boethius’ claim in \textit{De Hebdomadibus} – which we saw taken up by Aquinas – that things participate in God via their being and goodness? And this is the worry brought out explicitly in the \textit{dubia} which correspond to Bonaventure’s claim that forms are the perfection of things as being the \textit{bonitas} of things. Put plainly, the objection is as follows: Augustine says “insofar as we [i.e. creatures] are, we are good.” But, Bonaventure, you

\(^{328}\) \textit{In Sent.} II, d. 16, a. 2, q. 1, p. 401a. “Attendendum autem, quod convenientia creaturae rationalis ad Deum secundum ordinem quaedam est imaginis, et quaedam de bene esse.”

\(^{329}\) “Vestige” is simply to say that all things are a symbol of God, but vestige is less of a symbol of God than an image.

\(^{330}\) \textit{In Sent.} II, d. 17, a. 2, q. 1, p. 401a-b. “De bene vero est, quod creatura, quae est imago, praepo-natur alis, quae tenent rationem vestigii; et quod alia [i.e. quaedam bene esse] ordinentur in ipsam tanquam in finem.”

\(^{331}\) \textit{In Sent.} II, d. 18, a. 2, q. 1, p. 445a. “Sicut dicit ‘properius actus havet fieri in propria materia; sed anima rationalis est actus et entelechia corporis humani.’ \textit{De An.} III.9 414a26–27.

\(^{332}\) \textit{Meta.} V.2 1013b27–29.
seem to be saying that things are good because of their forms. Forms are essences. Thus, it seems that “we are good *per essentiam*, which is contrary to Boethius in *de Hebdomadibus*, who says that we are good by participation [i.e. in God].” Now, let us recall Aquinas’ *per essentiam*/*per participationem* distinction in his commentary on Boethius’ *de Hebdomadibus*. Things are what they are *per essentiam*, i.e. a cat is a cat by virtue of its form. But things are and are good, true, etc. for all the transcendentals, *per participationem* in their cause (i.e. God). Aquinas here is adhering to the traditional Augustinian account.

Bonaventure, however, seems to have left God and the transcendentals entirely out of the picture and replaced God’s causal efficacy with that of the forms. This is to say, from an Augustinian perspective, Bonaventure seems to be giving too much causal power to the forms by letting them cause goodness and being in creation. But this is precisely what he wants to do, and he stands by his position: “[G]oodness is twofold in creatures: one is from the form giving *esse*, and the other from the form giving *bene esse*” – i.e. the forms make things good in the first place simply by making them exist and, secondarily, the forms make things good insofar as the forms are the final cause of things. The forms are (esse) themselves and give to the composite, *esse* and *bene esse*. However, of course, properly speaking, the forms are not *bonitas* — they are not goodness itself, but each is one good thing, which designates for members of a kind what it is that makes them good. This is true because the forms are, and therefore *are good*, but they are not goodness itself and thus, again properly speaking, do not give *bonitas* itself to anything. God alone is *bonitas*. Thus, Bonaventure clarifies the way in which things are good: “The first is the substantial goodness which does not add any new essence in addition to the form, but only a relation to the final cause [i.e. *bene esse*], from which by comparison all things have goodness [*esse bonum*] from God.”

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333 Although Bonaventure does not respond to this position in this vein, he could have said simply that forms are not essences — essences are peculiar to the particular composite, i.e. they are the form (as we will see) particularized in the composite. This position Bonaventure makes clear when he lists the different kinds of things which we may call substance: (universal) forms can be called substances, and in addition to particular things themselves, so can the essences of particulars be called substances. Naturally, quoting Aristotle, he writes: “Praeter enim illos quatuor modos, quos dicit Philosophus, quod substantia dicatur materia, forma, compositum, et essentia uniuscuiusque...” *In Sent.* II, d. 37 dubia 4, p. 877a. cf. Phys. II.1.

334 *In Sent.* II, d. 1, p. 2, dubia 2, p. 51b. “Ergo videtur, quod nos boni simus per essentiam, quod est contra Boethium in libro de Hebdomadibus, qui dicit, quod sumus boni participatione.”

335 *In Sent.* II, d. 1, p. 2, dubia 2, p. 51b. “Dicendum, quod bonitas est duplex in creatura: una quae est ex forma dante esse, alia quae ex forma dante bene esse.”

336 We will address this point again when we discuss evil in the final chapter.

337 *In Sent.* II, d. 1, p. 2, dubia 2, pp. 51b-52a. “Prima est bonitas substantialis, quae non addit supra formam novam essentiam, sed solum relationem ad finalem causam, ex qua comparatione omne aliud a Deo habet esse bonum.”
whatever they are. But, of course, God is in an absolute sense the final cause of all things, and thus goodness (bonitas) comes from him in an absolute sense, e.g., God is the final cause of a horse not in the sense that God is what it means to be a good horse, but in the sense that God is good, and the horse strives to be a kind of good – in wanting to be a kind of good (the form), the horse strives to be good (God).

Bonaventure then can easily address the worry from Boethius by saying “what is called itself good per essentiam is that good which is absolutely good and not dependent on another [i.e. God]. But in this way, no creature is good, except by comparison to God, and thus by participation [in God].” Here, Bonaventure is indicating that the objection which is being brought against him in the dubia is implying a position too absurd for anyone to maintain, i.e. that anything could be essentially good other than God. Things are essentially whatever they are (i.e. their form). If we equate, then, the esse that the form gives with the final cause (bene esse) of the thing, i.e. that which directs it to be what it is and thereby makes it good, we can say that this goodness is essential insofar as the form gives being, but it is also accidental insofar as the form gives bene-esse which is in turn related to God’s supreme bonitas: “participation is not accidental with respect to the first goodness [i.e. esse], which is the form giving being, although it is accidental according to what is from the form giving bene-esse.” This is to say, things are good because their forms make them good, and this is (only) with regard to their essence and their substance – and in this sense alone we say that things are good per essentiam, i.e. the essence of what something is makes it a good whatever it is. But this is not how we apply good per essentiam to God – we apply good per essentiam to God, as Boethius would, to indicate that the very essence of God is goodness. Thus, taking this (more proper) sense of per essentiam into account, if we focus in on just the goodness of things, participation in goodness has also to be said to be accidental because nothing is essentially good the way God is. And in this sense we qualify what the forms give and call it bene esse, not goodness Itself (i.e. bonitas).

While sacrificing some of his strict Augustinianism, we can see how thoroughly clever this answer is – especially, by recalling my issue with Aquinas’ Fourth Way. My issue in that discussion was that designating God as the good and the sole cause of goodness does not ontologically ground comparisons among things of a kind but only comparisons among the kinds themselves. This is to say, I cannot ground

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338 *In Sent.* II, d. 1, p. 2, dubia 2, p. 51. “… quod ipse vocat bonum per essentiam illud bonum, quod est absolute bonum non ex dependentia ad aliud. Hoc autem modo nulla creatura bona est, immo ex comparatione, et ideo participacione.”

339 *In Sent.* II, d. 1, p. 2, dubia 2, p. 51. “… quia participatio non est accidentalis respectu primae bonitatis, quae est ex forma dante esse, quamvis sit accidentalis, secundum quod est ex forma dante bene esse.”

340 To put this another way, if we bring God into the picture, goodness among creatures is accidental; if we leave him out, and consider only the relation of the sensible thing to its form, it is essential.
my claim that Verdi is better than Puccini because the form, composer, has no existence unto itself, and no goodness unto itself—hence, it is not a standard for (a particular kind of) goodness. What Bonaventure has done, quite to the contrary, is posit each form as a bene esse, which gives bene esse to each sensible, and he has posited God as bonitas itself which grounds these individual instances of bonitas. Thus, with reference to bene esse, which is one form, I can (finally) say Verdi is better than Puccini and this statement has ontological weight, because Verdi and Puccini really exist and so does the objective standard for bene esse, the form of the composer. Then, with reference to bonitas (i.e. God’s goodness), I can also say a composer is better than a tree. Here, Bonaventure denies that more purely Augustinian position that God alone causes being and goodness in favor of an Aristotelian equation of form and final cause—yet with the classificatory addendum that each form is only a good not goodness itself. In so doing, he provides, not merely a logical, but an ontological grounding for comparisons between things of the same kind—a necessary facet of realism missing from Aquinas.

To turn now to one final aspect of forms, I would like to address the relation of the forms to number, i.e. their simplicity and unity. As we saw above, while God is and is goodness itself, forms have to be particular goodesses—e.g., goodness qua cat. Or again, God is actuality itself, whereas forms are actuality in a certain way. While God is actuality and goodness itself, the forms are each an instance, a kind, of actuality and goodness. In what sense, then, are the forms simple, if at all? They are certainly limited in a number of ways. First of all, each is one finite kind of thing—e.g., equinity or humanity—and thereby finite with regard to its actuality and its being, and "in no way can be pure act, in no way can be infinite." In the sense that the forms are each one finite thing, we can say that forms are simple—if we take simple to mean limited, i.e. one instance of limited being, one kind of thing. Yet, there also is a sense in which they are not simple—but a sense which does not imply that they have any composition of principles in themselves, e.g., of act and potency. That sensible things are not simple is evident from the fact that they are composite in a plurality of ways, i.e. if we even just look at the most basic composition within them of limited being (i.e. form) and themselves as an individual sensible thing—something which can be said of any individual thing (e.g., angels,

\[\text{341} \] This is obviously more of an analogy than an example because there is no natural form for composer. It makes an easier example, however, than trying to say one man is better than another—insofar as it would take a good ten pages to define my standards.

\[\text{342} \] In Sent. I, d. 43, a. unicus, q. 3, p. 772a-b. "Infini tum enim in actu est actus purus, alioquin, si aliquid haberet de limitatione et artactione, esset finitum…. Si igitur creatura, eo ipso quod creatura, aliunde est et ex nihilo, nullo modo potest esse actus purus, nullo modo potest esse infinita." Or to put this another way, the form is the actuality of some particular, but not actuality itself: "dicendum, quod causa universalis, quae non est actus purus, indiget actualitate causae particularis." In Sent. II, d. 1. p. 1. a. 2, q. 2, p. 29.
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trees, horses, people, etc.). By contrast, the precise way in which the forms are not simple is not because they are composed of principles in themselves, but insofar as they are the causes of the sensible things, i.e. they are participated in. Because they are causes, there is a distinction between a certain form qua this certain form and this form qua cause of something else. Bonaventure indicates that forms are not purely simple by the fact that they can be in many supposita: “for essences are multiplied in supposita.” This is to say, that even a form (or any kind of principle), while not composita ex allii, is nevertheless componibile allii – i.e. while forms are not themselves composite, they compose other things and accordingly are not wholly simple by the fact that they are touched by their many participants. Put still another way, there is a distinction between, e.g., the form of cat itself and the form of cat being in any of its participants, as we will see now clarified in the next section. Moreover, this discussion of how forms are not absolutely simple seems to imply the necessity of something which is really simple, which can ground the existence of forms – and of course this will be God, as we will see in the following chapter.

2. Universal Forms and Seminal Reasons

Having designated forms as the being and goodness of things, we now need to get into the details of the relationship of forms to sensible things. Are these transcendent forms? Are they Neoplatonic? While we have certainly seen Bonaventure use Aristotle in developing his understanding of the forms as the final causes of sensible things, now we will see his Aristotelianism in full force. Although it is tempting to attribute the claim that forms have esse to the Neoplatonic character of Bonaventure’s thought, we will see, as promised, that he pulls this concept rather out of

343 In Sent. I, d. 8, p. II, art. unicus, q. 11, p. 168a. “... ideo in omni individuo differt essentia et suppositum.”

344 This is similar to, although not the same as, the notion that angels are composed because they are the causes of things, or my example that there is a distinction in myself between the recipe for my ragù in my mind and myself. The difference between the two is that there is a continuity with regard to intelligible content, e.g., the form of cat causes a cat. But when an angel causes, e.g., a flood, or I cause my ragù, the angel is not the flood nor am I my ragù, but the particular cat is simply a cat.

345 In Sent. I, d. 8, p. 2, art. unicus, q. 11, p. 168b. “... et ideo in omni individuo differt essentia et suppositum; multiplicatur enim essentia in suppositis.”

346 In Sent. I, d. 8, p. 2, art. unicus, q. 11, p. 168b. “Et iterum omne creatum aut est principium; et ita componibile alii; aut principiatum; et sic compositum ex aliiis....”

347 The former Bonaventure will properly call the universal, and the latter the seminal reason or natural form.

348 As I mentioned in the Introduction, this is the more common way of asserting that the forms have being for Bonaventure, e.g., Bettoni, San Bonaventura da Bagnoregio: gli aspetti filosofici del suo pensiero (Milan: Ediz. Biblioteca Francescana, 1973), 127, as well as 148, where he connects Bonaventure’s seminal reasons to Plato instead of Aristotle – despite the fact that Bonaventure attributes the notion to Aristotle and does not even mention Plato. See also: Gilson, La Philosophie de Saint Bonaventure (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1924), 98–101.
Aristotle’s texts. Again, this is to say, that while the forms have esse, Bonaventure conceives of this esse very differently than the Neoplatonists did.

This brings us to a key distinction which Bonaventure makes between universal forms and the seminal reasons – and this distinction will better clarify how Bonaventure considers the form to be able to make the sensible thing be what it is and be intelligible as what it is. “Seminal reason” is, of course, an Augustinian term – and the influence of Augustine on Bonaventure on this point has not gone unnoticed. In Augustine’s thought, seminal reasons are brought in primarily to explain the appearance and transference of forms in creatures – i.e. forms coming to be in particular sensible things after the six days of creation, in which God was supposed to have made everything. This is to say, the point of the seminal reasons is to explain how, while secondary causes appear to cause new forms, the forms are really all caused by God himself – the secondary causes only bring forth the forms hidden in things as these seminal reasons. Bonaventure, in a sense, adopts this schematic of causation, as we will see in chapter 7 – although he attributes it as much to Aristotle as to Augustine. However, in the literature, what is often missed in Bonaventure’s notion of seminal reasons is that they play another role. Until now, we have been speaking about forms as universals, but here Bonaventure posits a different kind of “form” – which properly speaking is not a form precisely because it is particularized, and thus he calls them not forms but “seminal reasons.” Insofar as they are particularized “forms,” seminal reasons function in a manner very similar to Proclus’ irradiated potency, or incomplete substance – yet, of course, while not having access to Proclus’ notion of an irradiated potency, he rather pulls a very similar concept out of Aristotle’s texts.

Let us then look at what Bonaventure has to say about these universal and particular forms. First of all, he says of these seminal reasons that they are “natural

349 Or better, originally Stoic, then Neoplatonic, then Augustinian.
350 Augustine explains this in *Trin.* III.8, where he discusses whether or not wicked angels have the ability to do what they wish with the material world. Augustine states: “water and fire and earth are subservient even to wicked men ... in order that they may do therewith what they will, but only so far as is permitted,” meaning that any agent may only act upon the material world according to the manner in which God set up the material world when he first created it, i.e. the wicked cannot go against nature. Augustine then explains his view of this nature, against which no creature may act, in terms of the seminal reasons. These hidden seeds rest in matter only to be brought forth by secondary causes, whether good or wicked, still in accordance with God’s first creation, which is in effect “dictating” to the secondary causes what is allowed according to the seminal principles in nature: “… some hidden seeds of all things that are born corporeally and visibly, are concealed in the corporeal elements of this world ... from which, at the bidding of the Creator, the water produced the first swimming creatures and fowl, and the earth the first buds after their kind, and the first living creatures after their kind.”
351 For example, in *In Sent.* II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 2, pp. 435b-435a, while relying on the authority of Augustine by citing the *Super Genesum ad Litteram*, he backs up his authority with references to the *Physics* and *Metaphysics*, e.g., in relating the seminal reasons to intrinsic causes. *Meta.* IV.1. Even in the *Collationes* Bonaventure’s use of Aristotelian language in describing the seminal reasons is not to be missed. *Hex.* IV.10.
forms”: “but seminal reasons are the natural forms.”352 This seems uncontroversial at first glance, but it in fact marks Bonaventure’s notion of seminal reasons in distinction from that of Augustine – precisely because he makes this comment in response to the question: Was Eve made from the rib of Adam according to the seminal reasons? Despite the fact that Bonaventure attempts to assert that Augustine is unclear on this issue, Augustine’s answer to this question in *Super Genesim ad Litteram* is a yes. Why? For Augustine, the seminal reasons’ function is, as said above, to explain secondary causality with reference to the transference of forms from one sensible thing to another. Thus, if it seems that a new form, e.g., that of woman, was generated from the rib of Adam after the six days of creation, we can neatly bring in our seminal reasons to explain this: there was a seminal reason within the rib of Adam, put there by God.

But Bonaventure’s answer to this question is a definitive no. This is because his notion of seminal reasons is a bit less “miraculous” than the notion which we find in Augustine.353 He asserts, contrary to Augustine, that seminal reasons are nothing more nor less than the natural forms – perhaps not universal forms, but nevertheless they still only may work according to their formal nature. A rib, however, is certainly not made by nature to generate a woman, i.e. does not have the natural form to do so – if it did, we would see this phenomenon of ribs generating women occurring in nature. But we don’t. Thus, Bonaventure concludes: “[I]f it is asked, whether woman was made from the rib [of Adam] according to seminal reasons, the response is no, because the rib, with respect to such a way of producing and with respect to such body ... does not have in itself anything except the potency of submission,”354 i.e. a potency by which, if other intermediate causes (such as God) come along, one thing may become another. Bonaventure’s example for this type of potency is bread having potency to become a man’s body: one would not say that there is a seminal reason in bread to become a man, but only a potency of submission, that if it is submitted to a series of intermediary causes (e.g., a man eating the bread, then digesting it, etc.), bread may end up being the body of a man.355

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352 *In Sent.* II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 2, p. 436b. “Regula autem agentis increati est forma exemplaris sive idealis, regula vero agentis creati est forma naturalis; et ita rationes causales sunt formae ideales sive exemplares, rationes vero seminales sunt formae naturales.”

353 Actually, it seems Augustine’s answer is the better one from a purely theological perspective because it explains precisely how God’s causal efficacy was communicated through the rib of Adam.

354 *In Sent.* II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 2, p. 435a. “Rursus, si quaeratur, utrum mulier facta sit de costa secundum rationes seminales; respondum est, quod non; quia costa respectu talis modi producendi et respectu tanti corporis ex ea formandi absque additione non habuit nisi solam potentiam obedientiae.”

355 *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 seminallis respectu hominis producendi, nisi vale accipiatur. Quod autem sic est in remota dispositione respectu effectus, aut perducitur ad illum effectum mediantibus illis, ad quae habebat ordinem immediatum, aut immediate. Si mediente, tunc potest dici, quod effectus ille sit secundum rationem seminalem, utpote
Similarly, in the rib of Adam there was the potency to become the body of Eve, but only through intermediary causes (i.e. God). From this, we can see that Bonaventure is committing himself to a notion of seminal reasons simply and solely as natural forms – not as things hidden by God in nature in that precisely Augustinian sense by which seminal reasons often seem to work contra nature, such as the rib and Eve example. In a certain sense, one could say that Bonaventure is not too far from Aquinas on this point. While Aquinas rejects seminal reasons altogether, Bonaventure simply re-defines what they are, but keeps the name.

Now, inasmuch as Bonaventure considers these seminal reasons more properly to be natural forms, we need to look at what makes these natural forms different from universal forms – or put another way, we could ask here also why is the distinction between the two not simply a conceptual distinction. Fortunately for our project, precisely this question is asked in the Commentary on the Sentences: “Are the seminal reasons universals?” And Bonaventure’s answer to the question is “yes and no” – loosely “yes,” but more properly “no.” In his respondeo, he first takes a step back and clarifies: “[T]he seminal reason is an active power, inserted into the matter,” and then continues “and this active power is the essence of the form.” The seminal reason, however, is “incomplete” (i.e. esse in potentia), while the universal form is “complete” (i.e. esse in actu). Bonaventure then turns to the question of why there needs to be a distinction between this form which is in the sensible thing and the universal form. Why can we not simply say that the universal is the seminal reason – that the universal form is in and dependent on the sensible thing – and so when I know Socrates, I can know the universal form, humanity?

It is important first to clarify that there are two ways in which one can talk about “in-ness.” The first is that something can be in a whole and dependent upon the existence of the whole for its own existence – in this way, it is ontologically dependent upon the thing which it is in, or one could say, as Bonaventure does, “inserted into matter.” A second sense of “in-ness” is that something can be “in” a composite in the sense that it composes the composite, but without being onto-

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356 In Sent. II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 3, p. 440a-b. “... quod cum satis constet, rationem seminalem esse potentiam activam, inditam materiae; et illam potentiam activam constet esse essentiam formae, cum ea fiat forma mediate operatione naturae, quae non producit aliquid ex nihilo.”

357 In Sent. II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 3, p. 440b. “Satis rationabiliter ponitur, quod ratio seminalis est essentia formae producendae, differens ab illa secundum esse completum et incompletum, sive secundum esse in potentia et in actu.” Interestingly, Bonaventure here uses the same words as Proclus. Also interesting to note: Bettoni attributes this definition of seminal reasons as “incomplete” to Gilson’s interpretation of Bonaventure instead of to Bonaventure himself. Efrem Bettoni, S. Bonaventura: gli aspetti filosofici del suo pensiero (Milan: Ediz. Biblioteca Francescana, 1973), 147.

358 In Sent. II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 3, p. 440b. “... et quia omne quod est in natura, habet fundari in materia, tam formae universales quam singulares in materia habent esse.”
logically dependent upon the thing which it is in. It is the in-ness in the sense of dependence which is at issue here and which Bonaventure ultimately denies can be applied to the forms considered as universals – the ontologically dependent in-ness he rather applies only to seminal reasons/natural forms.

However, this still has not answered the question: Why does he make this distinction between these two types of form (i.e. universals and seminal reasons)? Or, further, why can he not, like Aquinas, say that (individual) humanity exists in Socrates and in Plato and then one simply abstracts to the universal? Bonaventure first of all considers the position which does not make a distinction – or at least an explicit distinction – between the seminal reason (i.e. a particularized form) and the universal form, and he entertains it as a serious possibility: “For there are some who want to say that, because universals are not fictions (fictiones), they really and according to truth exist not only in the mind but also in nature.” This is clearly a position which wants to be realist, i.e. does not want to deny being to the universals, but wants to say that they simply exist and have being only insofar as they are in matter: “[A]nd since all things which are in nature have been inserted into matter, so universal forms just as much as singualrs, have being (esse) in matter.”

The form of humanity exists in both Socrates and Callias, albeit only as it is in the matter, and this is sufficient for us to know universals. This brand of realism seems either not to make a distinction between a singular/particularized form, i.e. what Bonaventure calls a seminal reason/natural form, and a universal form, or it concedes that only the singular form exists external to the mind and the universal properly exists only in the mind, abstracted. Humanity, accordingly, only exists extra-mentally whenever there is a particular man, e.g., Socrates or Callias. Thus, when I know Callias or Socrates, I can know the (universal) form of man.

At first, Bonaventure admits that this seems not to be a bad solution, as it also finds support in auctoritati, rationi, et sensui. It is supported by the authority of the Commentator, and reason seems to support this as well because one can say that the “singular indicates being in act and matter is being in potency, and the universal form means in one sense being in actuality [i.e. when the composite is actualized]

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359  *In Sent. II*, d. 18, a. 1, q. 3, p. 444b. “Forma igitur universalis non est aliud quam forma totius, quae, cum de se nata sit esse in multis, universalis est....” On the other hand, however, despite being in the many, it does not lose its status as actuality in itself by its conjunction with matter. See: *In Sent. II*, d. 13, a. 2, q. 1, p. 317. Or again: “… quod praesentia materiae non tollit actualitatem formae, maxime quando corpus multum habet de specie et parum de materia.”

360  *In Sent. II*, d. 18, a. 1, q. 3, p. 440b. “Quidam enim dicere voluerunt, quod cum universalia non sint fictiones, realiter et secundum veritatem non solum sunt in anima, sed etiam in natura.”

361  *In Sent. II*, d. 18, a. 1, q. 3, p. 440b. “… et quia omne quod est in natura, habet fundari in materia, tam formae universales quam singulares in materia habent esse.”

362  This is not dissimilar to Scotus’ position that the forms only exist when they are contracted into individuals.
and in another sense, being in potency [i.e. when the composite is not actualized].”

Sense seems to support this position as well, since when we know, we proceed from what is more universal to what is more particular, as Aristotle says in the *Physics*.

However, there are two main problems which Bonaventure sees with this position. Bonaventure targets these two problems in a two-horned critique of the above – what one might want to call – quasi-realist or, perhaps, proto-conceptualist position. The first horn rests on the fact that it is impossible to place a universal form into a particular sensible thing, insofar as this would render the universal form particular and therefore not universal. It follows from this that if the universal form is to exist precisely as a universal, it must be ontologically prior to the particular – i.e. not “in” in the sense of “ontologically dependent on.” Our second horn: Bonaventure then argues that a particularized form is not sufficient to ground (1) any kind of human knowledge (even of the particular sensible thing) or (2) univocal predication.

First of all, why does Bonaventure consider that the universal cannot ever really be in a sensible particular? He refers us back to his responses to the opposing positions where he argues, on the basis of Aristotle’s texts, that it is impossible for a universal qua universal to be in a particular thing – again, remembering that the in-ness we are considering here is in-ness in the sense of ontological dependence. Bonaventure then provides six arguments, all of which show that one cannot posit that universal forms are dependent on this or that particular composite, e.g., that humanity is dependent upon the existence of Socrates of Callias, without rendering this universal particular – and thereby negating the very universality of the form:

(1 and 4) He begins the first argument: “The philosopher writes in *De Anima*: ‘the universal is either nothing or it is posterior’ – but the seminal reason is always prior: therefore it cannot be the universal form.”

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363 *In Sent.* II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 3, p. 440b. “Rationi etiam concordat, quia, cum singulare dicat ens in actu, et materia ens in potentia, et forma universalis quodam modo dicat ens in actu, et quodam modo in potentia; rectum videtur et congruum, quod materia perducatur ad formam completam mediantibus formis universalibus.” This is a particularly interesting line insofar as it shows how this opposing position would consider that the universal form and the complete form are indeed two different things. The complete form is alone achieved by the mediation of the universal form, not something equated with it.

364 *In Sent.* II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 3, pp. 440b-441a. “Sensui etiam concordat, quia, sicut vult Philosophus in principio Physicorum [Libr. 1, text 2. seqq.], progressus nostrae cognitioni assimilatur progressui naturae in sua operatione; sed nobis innata est via ab universalioribus ad minus universalia: ergo consimiliter erit in natura.”

365 Ockham makes a similar argument, using Aristotle, although he quotes instead the *Metaphysics* – and in a manner similar to Bonaventure, he argues against the existence of universals as being peculiar to the sensible thing while still predicatable of the many: *Ordinatio* I, d. 2, q. 7, p. 236-7.

366 In what follows, I have slightly changed the order of them for clarity’s sake.

367 *In Sent.* II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 3, p. 439b. “Philosophus in libro de Anima: ‘Universale aut nihil est, aut posterior est; sed ratio seminalis semper prior est: ergo ratio seminalis non potest esse forma univeralis.” *De An.* 402b1-402b18.
An Aristotelian Account of Universals

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tively everything which Bonaventure has said above about universal forms having esse – but he clarifies the type of priority meant here with his fourth argument:

All working of nature is terminated in a particular (hoc aliquid) and concerns a particular; but the particular means the form with matter, but the universal means just the form: therefore, the universal form, likewise, neither is the principle of operation nor is it the terminus of operation per se; but the seminal reason means the principle of operation, then the seminal reason cannot be the universal form.

Here, we can see that the priority of the seminal reason in the first quote seems to be with respect to the composite substance alone – i.e. its priority in the sense of being the operational principle in the composite, something which the universal does not and cannot do. Hence, in this sense, the universal is posterior – or nothing: the sensible substance does not begin as a universal nor end up being a universal, but it begins with being the particularized potency to be whatever it is supposed to be – and this is why the seminal reason, not the universal, is the operative principle in the particular sensible substance. While the universal, in this sense, is posterior, or nothing, with regard to the generation of particular sensibles, the universal nonetheless has a different kind of priority. For the universal form is what possesses esse, in the sense that it is, as Aristotle says, “always and everywhere.” And it is precisely this kind of priority which prevents the universal from being in the sensible particular (i.e. in the dependent sense of “in”).

(2) We see this point reiterated in the second argument which, again, begins with the quote from Aristotle from Posterior Analytics: “The universal is always and everywhere; but the seminal reason is with respect to this matter, in which it is made determinately: therefore, the seminal reason cannot be the universal form.”

(3) Bonaventure’s next argument is with reference to predication. Here his citation of Aristotle is from De Interpretatione: “the seminal reason is not predicated of that of which it is a seminal reason... – but ‘the universal is predicated of singulars’: therefore, the seminal reason cannot be a universal form.”

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368 Peckham likewise puts together the first and third of these arguments to explain each other: “the work of nature indeed is ended in the particular, although the intention of nature looks towards the universal. And thus, this man by generating man, generates man, just as Aristotle says that the universal is either nothing or it is posterior.” Summa de Esse et Essentia VII.2, in An Introduction to the Metaphysics of John Peckham (Marquette, WI: Marquette Univ. Press, 2023), 111.

369 In Sent. II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 3, p. 440a. “Item, omnis operatio naturae terminatur ad hoc aliquid et est circa hoc aliquid; hoc aliquid autem dicit formam cum materia, universale autem dicit formam tantum: ergo forma universalis, secundum quod huiusmodi, nec est operationis principium nec est operationis terminus per se; sed ratio seminalis dicit operationis principium: ergo ratio seminalis non potest esse forma universalis.”


371 In Sent. II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 3, p. 439b. “Item, ‘universale est semper et ubique’ sed ratio seminalis respicit hanc materiam, in qua fundatur determinate: ergo ratio seminalis non potest esse forma universalis.”

372 In Sent. II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 3, p. 439b. “Item, ratio seminalis non praedicatur de eo cuius est seminalis ratio – non enim potest dici, quod homo sit semen, vel quod corpus hominis sit embryo – sed
(5) Bonaventure’s fifth reason (and sixth reason as well) shows the absurdity of the position that the whole of the universal is really in the particular. This line of reasoning relies on Aristotle’s prohibition against a universal being present in a substrate, as found in the *Categories*. Bonaventure writes: “[I]f the seminal reason means the universal form, it is therefore either the form of the genus or the form of the species. If the form of the genus, then in man there is the seminal reason with respect to a donkey”\(^{373}\) – to have the seminal reason of animality would mean that I have the active potency to become any animal. And this is obviously not the case. His next alternative is to consider the possibility that the universal form of the species is present in the sensible composite:

But this is the seminal reason of something (*aliquid*), which before it preexists in matter is the complete thing in act (*res completa in actu*): therefore before there is the form of humanity in matter, there is the complete thing. But this is false and unintelligible, that the form of humanity be in some [particular], and that [the particular] not be the complete thing: therefore, one may not think that the universal form is the seminal reason.\(^{374}\)

Bonaventure’s worry here is that the universal indicates the complete thing in act – the form of humanity is the whole of humanity. If the whole of humanity is in one man, this is unintelligible because one man is not the whole of humanity. Socrates is not the actuality of humanity. While the critical edition does not give reference to Aristotle here, I’ll provide my own, where Aristotle gives the same two examples: “For man is said of the particular man as substrate, but is not in a substrate: *man is not in the particular man*.\(^{375}\) Aristotle likewise does not allow the universal genus to be in the particular things: “Similarly, animal also is said of the particular man as substrate, but animal is not in the particular man.”\(^{376}\)

(6) We see Aristotle’s *Categories* at work in the final argument as well, and again Bonaventure makes clear the absurdity of placing a universal form within the particular, this time as its operative principle:

if the universal form, with respect to the particular, were the seminal reason, then, while “this white” (*haec albedo*) means the singular form, and “white” (*albedo*) means the form of the species, and “color” the form of the genus, and “sensible quality” furthermore the more universal form, universale praedicatur de singulari [cf. Aristot. I. Periherm. c. 5. (c. 7)]; ergo ratio seminalis non potest esse forma universalis.” Aristotle, *De Int.* I.17.

\(^{373}\) *In Sent.* II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 3, p. 440a. “Item, si ratio seminalis dicit formam universalem, aut ergo formam generis, aut formam speciei. Si formam generis: ergo in homine est ratio seminalis respectu asinii.”

\(^{374}\) *In Sent.* II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 3, p. 440a. “Sed illud est ratio seminalis alicuius, quod ante praexistit in materia, quam sit res completa in actu: ergo ante erit forma humanitatis in materia, quam sit res completa. Sed hoc est falsum et non intelligibile, quod forma humanitatis sit in aliquo, et illud non sit res completa: ergo non est ponere, quod forma universalis dicat rationem seminalam.”

\(^{375}\) *Cat.* V.5 347-21.”ὁ γὰρ ἀνθρώπος καθ’ ὑποκειμένου μὲν τοῦ τινὸς ἀνθρώπου λέγεται, ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ δὲ οὐκ ἐστὶν, — οὐ γάρ ἐν τῷ τινι ἀνθρώπῳ ὁ ἀνθρώπος ἐστιν.” Translation modified.

\(^{376}\) *Cat.* V.5 347-21. “ὡςάντως δὲ καὶ τὸ ζωικὸν καθ’ ὑποκειμένου μὲν λέγεται τοῦ τινὸς ἀνθρώπου, οὐκ ἐστὶ δὲ τὸ ζωικὸν ἐν τῷ τινι ἀνθρώπῳ.” Translation modified.
then nature, in producing “this white” (haec albedo), would proceed through the mediation of all of these: therefore, ‘quality’ would be made before “corporeal quality,” and “corporeal quality” before “sensible quality,” and “sensible quality” before “color,” which is not intelligible.

Here, again, Bonaventure is bringing out the absurdity of placing a universal within a sensible thing as a principle of production within it. In order to get at the “this white,” which properly is in the sensible thing, i.e. belongs to this particular white thing, nature would have also to create every universal form within the white thing proceeding from the most general to the most specific. This would amount first of all to producing the universal form of sensible quality and the universal form of color, and the universal form of white within this particular white thing – this again substantiates Aristotle’s prohibition that the entirety of, e.g., white be predicated (or in) a particular: “For example, white, which is in a substrate (the body), is predicated of the substrate; for a body is called white. But the definition of white will never be predicated of the body.”

It is clear from Bonaventure’s arguments above (as well as his use of Aristotle in them), that he considers it impossible for the universal form to be in a particular thing, insofar as what is in a particular thing (i.e. in the sense of being ontologically dependent) must be particularized – if something is dependent upon Socrates, it belongs to him and is thereby particularized in him. With regard to generation, this must be the case since what is the cause of generation in a particular sensible thing must be particular itself, not universal – i.e. it must be Socrates’ humanity, in a proximate sense, which causes him to grow up to be a man, not humanity in general. However, with regard to knowledge or predication, if what is in the particular sensible thing is itself particular, it is no real predicate or object of knowledge. With respect to the latter point, Aristotle writes: “Sense-perception must be concerned with particulars, whereas knowledge depends upon recognition of universals.”

The humanity that exists in Socrates belongs to Socrates – it is not the humanity in

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378 *Cat.* V.1 2111-19 “οἷον τὸ λευκὸν ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ ὅν τῷ σώματι κατηγορεῖται τοῦ ὑποκειμένου, – λευκὸν γάρ σώμα λέγεται, – ὅ δέ λόγος τοῦ λευκοῦ οὐδέποτε κατὰ τοῦ σώματος κατηγορηθῆσεται.” Translation modified.

379 Of course, Bonaventure considers that humanity (i.e. the universal) is ultimately the cause of Socrates, but more immediately he considers it necessary that the incomplete seminal reason be present in Socrates as the principle from which he actually grows – i.e. it is the potentiality to become humanity which is more immediately the cause of him becoming a man, than is the actuality towards which he is aiming because, temporally speaking, he has the potentiality before the actuality.

380 *Post. An.* I.31. 87b36-39. Bonaventure cites the lines just preceding this. I am adding this in myself.
Callias, it is not the universal, and thereby it is only perceived by the senses, not known by the intellect.\textsuperscript{381} The universal definitions which we predicate of particulars can never belong to the particular. Indeed, given the quasi-realist position you cannot avoid reducing the being of the universal qua universal – not qua singular instantiated in matter (in which case it is no universal at all) – to having being \textit{only} in the soul. Thus, “if one wishes to maintain this position, one would have to be able to avoid reasons brought up to the opposition, saying, that he is speaking of the universal which has being only \textit{as it is abstracted in the soul}.”\textsuperscript{382} “To put this another way, if it is impossible for the universal to be in and dependent upon the sensible particular, then where does this universal, which really is a universal, exist? The only place that is left is in the soul. The universal only attains existence in the mind – and these universals are dangerously close to being \textit{fictiones}.”\textsuperscript{383} Or put in a perhaps kinder way, this position which attempts to posit the universal form as being in the particular ends up more or less constituting a conceptualist position.

This brings us, of course, to the further issue with the quasi-realist position, which Bonaventure now will target – i.e. the second horn of his wider argument which is now targeted not only at the implied conceptualism of the above position, but at the position of the “self-aware” conceptualist as well. Those who maintain this latter position explicitly assert that the extra-mental particularized form in Socrates or Callias is sufficient to allow the mind to abstract to the universal form, humanity, i.e. there is an ontological grounding for the universal in the mind, namely, this particularized form. This, however, for Bonaventure – as for Ockham – is impossible.

Here, Bonaventure’s argument against particularized forms grounding knowledge of universals is itself twofold: “[I]t is necessary to posit universal forms for the sake of \textit{cognition} and of \textit{univocal predication}.”\textsuperscript{384} This is to say, a universal for Bonaventure is necessary not only for knowing the particular thing, i.e. by naming the universal of it, but also for being able to connect different particulars of the same kind. These arguments are again very similar to arguments made by Ockham, where Ockham shows that individual forms cannot ground knowledge – but to make the wider point that universals are only found in the mind and without grounding in the extramental particular. Bonaventure, however, is working towards a quite different goal: that because the individual forms cannot ground knowledge, there must exist

\textsuperscript{381} This is, moreover, very similar not only to the problem brought out in the \textit{Categories}, but to Plato’s sail problem in the \textit{Parmenides}.

\textsuperscript{382} \textit{In Sent. II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 3, p. 441a.} “Si quis autem hanc positionem sustinere velit, poterit declinare rationes ad oppositum adductas, dicens, quod loquuntur de universali secundum quod habet esse abstractum in anima.”

\textsuperscript{383} Now, while I do not wish to assert that Bonaventure intends this argument to be targeted at Aquinas, it does apply neatly to Aquinas’ position. But, of course, it applies to many other thinkers (e.g., Avicenna). Ockham critiques a position strikingly similar to the one against which Bonaventure is likewise arguing. See \textit{Ordinatio I}, d. 2, q. 8, pp. 271–272.

\textsuperscript{384} \textit{In Sent. II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 3, p. 441a.} “Rationi quidem, quia necesse est ponere universales formas propter cognitionem et praedicationis univocationem.”
universal forms, independent from particulars and distinct from particularized forms/seminal reasons.\textsuperscript{385}

To begin his argument concerning cognition, Bonaventure first asserts that when we know, we know the universal: “It is not complete cognition, if the whole being of the thing (\textit{totum esse rei}) is not cognized; and it is not cognition unless it is through the form”\textsuperscript{386} – a position he takes from Aristotle.\textsuperscript{387} Here it is clear that he considers knowledge to be acquired by the abstraction of the form from the sensible thing. And indeed, we only know what a thing is, when we know its whole essence (i.e. the universal form), which is not only in the one particular but in many particulars:\textsuperscript{388} “[T]he thing abstracted from matter [i.e. the cognized universal] itself may very well be in other things, which each have their own matter and form [i.e. seminal reason], just as the similitude of color in a mirror.”\textsuperscript{389} Avicenna for Bonaventure seems to indicate this as well: “For he says, that the essence is nothing other than the quiddity of the universal thing.”\textsuperscript{390} Knowledge being dependent upon this universal, which is in the many, is evident in the fact that I really only know what a particular thing is, not when I know the particular thing alone, but when I know the particular thing’s universal form, e.g., if I have access only to Socrates’ humanity, I cannot know either what humanity is or Socrates is. Respective of knowledge, we appear to ourselves to be working from a particular to a universal because we encounter the particular first.\textsuperscript{391} However, we do not know what the particular is before we have connected it to the universal, and so we really know the universal first – even though the first thing which we do is connect the universal to the particular, i.e. name the universal of the particular. Or, again, I need to know more primarily what man is than what Socrates is, because I can only say what Socrates is (i.e. a man), once I know what man is. Thus, it is impossible to ground knowledge of a universal form in a particular

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\textsuperscript{385} One could say that while Ockham does not consider a form which has \textit{esse} and is ontologically independent from sensible things and which is also not transcendent à la Platonic forms, Bonaventure does just that.

\textsuperscript{386} \textit{In Sent.} II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 3, p. 441b. “Si igitur non est integra cognitio, nisi totum esse rei cognoscatur; et non est cognitio nisi per formam; …. “

\textsuperscript{387} This point is found in many places in Aristotle. The Quaracchi editors cite: \textit{De An.} II.2 and III.8, but the same point is made evident in the above quotation from \textit{Post. An.} I.31 87b37-39: “Sense perception must be concerned with particulars, whereas knowledge depends upon recognition of universals.”

\textsuperscript{388} Of course, here Bonaventure would mean “in” in the non-ontologically dependent sense because he is discussing universals.

\textsuperscript{389} \textit{In Sent.} II, d. 17, a. 1, q. 2, p. 415b. “... res enim abstracta a materia propria bene potest fieri in re alia, quae suam habet propiam materiam et formam, sicut similitudo coloris in speculo.”

\textsuperscript{390} Indeed, this is not quite accurate. Avicenna means that it is the quiddity which we know, not the universal in itself. \textit{In Sent.} II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 3, p. 441b. “Dicit enim, quod essentia nihil aliud est quam quidditas rei universalis.” Avicenna III. \textit{Metaph.} c. 8., and IV \textit{Metaph.} c. 1.2.

\textsuperscript{391} Aristotle makes this point in \textit{Phys.} I.1. While the particular is what we encounter first, what we know and what is prior is the universal. Interestingly, here, Aristotle is speaking more precisely about universal rules rather than definitions. In chapters 6 and 7 we will see Bonaventure connect the definition and the rules – identifying forms more properly as rules operative in nature.
form, because quite the opposite needs to be the case: knowledge of the particular has to be grounded in knowledge of the universal. Thus, as Bonaventure writes, if we want to have objective cognition of anything (particular or universal), “it is necessary, that some form be that which embraces the whole esse; but this we call the essence and this is the universal form.”

Bonaventure then turns to the second line of argument: that we need the universal really to exist also in order to make univocal predications – this argument is similar to the first, but while the first concerned knowing the particular and the universal, this argument concerns connecting two particulars together by virtue of a universal, i.e. that I can predicate of two particulars the same quality or essence, and this quality or essence means the same thing for both particulars. Bonaventure writes: “Similarly, it is not true univocation, except when somethings (alia) are really assimilated to a common form, which is then essentially predicated of them [i.e. of the aliqua]” He continues: “But this form, to which many assimilate, cannot be but the universal form; for what is essentially predicated of them, cannot be but the form which embraces them all.” This is to say, if I only have access to the particular humanity in Socrates and the particular humanity in Callias, how can I say that they are both humans? Even if I could know Socrates’ humanity without the universal, I still would be knowing a particularized humanity, i.e. the humanity which I would abstract from Socrates would not be applicable to Callias. This consideration indeed strengthens Aristotle’s prohibition against the universal being in the particular: it seems plainly absurd to say that what Callias and Socrates assimilate to is already complete (completus) – the totum esse rei – in Callias and Socrates – particularly if Callias and Socrates are each assimilating to one and the same thing, how could it already be particularized in each of them? Thus, Bonaventure concludes: “The universal form, therefore, is nothing other than the form of the whole (forma totius), which, because born from itself it is in the many, is universal....”

Of course, this form is “particularized” when it enters into conjunction with matter and becomes Socrates’ humanity instead of just humanity itself – but this

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392 Ockham would agree here, and – like Bonaventure – takes this to indicate that the conceptu-alist position is absurd. However, of course, Ockham – contrary to Bonaventure – does not take this point to indicate that we have to attribute a stronger sense of being to universal forms.

393 In Sent. II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 3, p. 441b. “... necesse est, aliquam formam esse quae completatur totum esse; hanc autem dicimus essentiam, et haec est universalis forma....”

394 In Sent. II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 3, p. 441b. “Similiter, non est vera univocatio, nisi quando aliqua in una forma communi realiter assimilantur, quae de ipsis essentialiter praedicatur.”

395 In Sent. II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 3, p. 441b. “Forma autem, in qua plura assimilantur, non potest esse nisi forma universalis; quae vero essentialiter praedicatur de illis, non potest esse nisi forma totum completens.”

396 In Sent. II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 3, p. 441b. “Forma igitur universalis non est aliud quam forma totius, quae, cum de se nata sit esse in multis, universalis est....”
indicates the seminal reason, not the universal in itself.\footnote{In Sent. II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 3, p. 441b. “… particularizatur autem non per additionem ulterioris formae, sed per coniunctionem sui cum materia, ex qua coniunctione materia appropriat sibi formam, et forma materiam, sicut dictum est supra.”} This line of thinking should also remind us of Proclus seeing that it is necessary to posit a universal form to allow for members of a kind to all be named as members of the same kind, while simultaneously seeing it necessary to posit the individualized potency (incomplete substance) within them which makes each individually be what it is. We can recall the example of Eternity, Venus’ eternity, and Venus, which correlates to the above example of Humanity, Socrates’ humanity, and Socrates.\footnote{See the section on Proclus in chapter 1.}

Nonetheless, considering the difficulty of the task of establishing the existence of these universals, and taking the above arguments as a starting point, it would seem a much easier solution for Bonaventure to conclude, as Ockham does: there is no universal, and there is no grounding of my knowledge of the universal to be found in the particular, the universal is a name. But, of course, Bonaventure doesn’t do that. Wanting to defend a realist account – but one which will withstand his own arguments – Bonaventure decides the better course to take is to work out a way by which one can understand universal forms as being independent from and ontologically prior to sensible things so that they can both ground the intelligibility of sensible things as really existing independently from a particular mind and ground the existence of sensible things as their cause. Here, the main difficulty is that Bonaventure has to resolve something which seems like a plain contradiction: universals cannot exist “in” particular sensible things, but they also cannot exist separately from them,\footnote{He means this in two ways: that the universal has to be present in the sensible things and also that the universal itself is never without its composition in sensible things, but a composition which does not render it dependent upon its composition.} as the forms of Plato are – the latter position being one which Bonaventure quite plainly rejects.\footnote{As we saw in the previous chapter. In Sent. II, d. 1. p. 1. a. 1, q. 1, pp. 16b-17b.}

3. **Universals**

We now have at play two different “kinds” of forms – and I use this term “kinds” loosely because I don’t want us to think of Bonaventure’s seminal reasons as entirely distinct from universal forms. This is to address precisely why Bonaventure answered the question of whether the universal is the seminal reason with “yes and no.” Here, before I delve into the texts, I would like to make a few preliminary and explanatory remarks about what Bonaventure is trying to get at in the following discussion.
First of all, recalling our preceding discussion, Bonaventure has asserted that the universal forms have esse – they are what exist. Often the issue targeted in the claim that the forms exist is the (implicit or explicit) position that the forms are separate – they are causes external to their effects. This, of course, results in a plurality of issues: the third man, the sail, etc. A solution to these problems is proposed by Proclus – and it is a fair solution. However, a necessary part of Proclus’ solution was to maintain these forms as a distinct and mediating hypostasis between the first principle and sensible things. And a Christian cannot maintain this position.

The first step of Bonaventure’s solution is one which we have already seen: to posit that the forms are the only things which really exist (esse). Indeed, this is crucial. Only the forms exist (esse) – the existere which sensible things have is only a highly contingent and dependent existence, i.e. no real existence at all. What Bonaventure means by this contingency is that sensible things exist (existere) only inasmuch as the universals compose them. This position then allows him to maintain that the universal forms can really exist as universals and that they are neither particularized nor rendered ontologically dependent by virtue of their being in composites. There are, as we have said, two senses of the word “in” at play here: one way in which the form is “in” as particularized, and another sense of “in” in which the form is an ontologically independent component of the particular.

The causal relationship which Bonaventure intends here between the universal and the particular composite, thanks to his insistence that the forms are never separate, is ultimately not Proclean, but Aristotelian – forms rather are conceived of as inseparable “components” of sensible things. For as Bonaventure writes quite clearly: “And since the form is never separated from matter, it is never without [its] particulars.”

This is to say, it is not à la Proclus that the form, separate from the particular, causes the particular – with cause and effect being in two different realms of being. Rather, the type of causal relationship which Bonaventure is getting at here is rather more analogous to the causal relationship between bronze and the statue; it is the causal relationship of a component to a composite, however, a component which is independent from the composite and a composite which is dependent upon its components – the bronze can exist without the statue, but the statue cannot without the bronze.

What, then, of the distinction between the seminal reason (i.e. the particularized/singular form) and the universal form itself? Earlier, I noted that positing a

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401 As we saw above in our discussion that forms, while in a certain sense simple, nonetheless compose other things. Only God is simple in the sense that he is external to sensible things: “Si ergo simplicitas privet compositionem ex aliis, sic convenit etiam creatis, utpote primis principiis, quae non componuntur ex aliis. Et iterum omne creatum aut est principium; et ita componibile aliis; aut principiaturum; et sic compositum ex aliis; et sic accipitur simplicitas, prout est rei proprietas, per privationem, videlicet, utriusque compositionis.” In Sent. I, d. 8, p. 2, art. unicus, q. 11. p. 168b.

402 In Sent. II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 3, p. 44sb. “Et quia nunquam est forma haec separata a materia, nunquam est forma universalis sine particulari.”
particularized potency in distinction from the universal from sounded very Proclus. However, for Proclus, the relationship between the particularized potency and the form itself is indeed a causal relationship: there is an ontological distinction between the two. For Bonaventure, there is not. Bonaventure instead makes a distinction between the universal itself (which happens to be part of the composite) vs. the universal qua part of the composite – or better, we could say qua operative principle within the composite. This distinction, as he makes clear, is not an ontological distinction, i.e. these are not two terms distinguished as cause to effect. When it comes to our understanding these two notions philosophically, they are one thing which may be considered in two different ways, i.e. as a universal form or as a seminal reason. However, this distinction is also not merely conceptual. Bonaventure writes:

if the universal form is said properly, according to the thing which is ordered into a genus, which metaphysics considers, the seminal reason is not the universal form. If, however, the universal form is designated as a form existing (existens) according to an incomplete being in matter and indifferent and able to be produced in many, then one may call the seminal reason the universal form. This is to say, they are equatable only insofar as we consider the universal form as “existing in potency” in some composite, i.e. qua operative principle in some composite. Thus we land at a distinction between the seminal reason and universal which is neither an ontological distinction, insofar as the seminal reason and the universal form are not really distinct, but also not a conceptual distinction, insofar as they do indeed exist in two different ways. The crux of the distinction is that the universal form really exists (esse) while the seminal reason has merely a contingent existence. Or put another way, insofar as the universal form exists (esse), it is distinct

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403 In Sent. II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 3, p. 442b. “… quod si forma universalis dicatur proprie, secundum quam res est ordinabilis in genere, quam metaphysicus habet considerare, ratio seminalis non est forma universalis. Si autem dicatur forma universalis forma existens secundum esse incompletum in materia et indifferens et possibilis ad multa producenda; sic potest dici ratio seminalis forma universalis.” It is difficult to say where the “indifferent” language comes from here. On the one hand, it could be from William of Champeaux, whose doctrine is different from Bonaventure’s insofar as he does not maintain that the universal really exists, or it could be adopted from Avicenna. For more on William’s view, see: Peter King, “The Metaphysics of Abelard” in The Cambridge Companion to Peter Abelard (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), 65–125. However, if this language is adopted from Avicenna (which would be the more interesting option), we can say that what Bonaventure proposes as a seminal reason is similar not only to Aquinas’ immanent (extra-mental) form, but also Avicenna’s (insofar as both Aquinas and Avicenna are themselves similar) – and thereby Bonaventure uses “Avicennian” terminology to describe his own form as “indifferent.” However, properly speaking, the form is indeed in itself universal – and the universal form is considered as “indifferent” in the sense that it is indifferent to the fact that it happens to be instantiated in this or that particular. And it is on this point where Avicenna’s account is not satisfactory in Bonaventure’s eyes. Properly speaking, for Bonaventure, the form must exist in itself as a universal – it is not dependent upon and immanent in sensibles to attain extra-mental existence.

404 In Sent. II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 3, p. 442b. “… secundum quam forma universalis dicitur quaecumque forma existens in potentia.”
from the fact that it happens to exist (*existere*). This means that we neither have two entities nor two names for the same thing. We thus have a kind of distinction between these two terms which is neither conceptual nor real.⁴⁰⁵

Interestingly, Boehner provides a similar interpretation not of Bonaventure’s relationship between the seminal reason and the universal form, but of Alexander of Hales’ relationship between *quo est* and *quod est* – i.e. the “by what” something is and the “what” something is. Boehner asserts that, for Alexander, the distinction between the two is precisely a formal distinction. Bonaventure utilizes the notions of *quo est* and *quod est* in a manner very similar to Alexander – something which Boehner himself does not mention.⁴⁰⁶ For Bonaventure, however, the *quo est* is precisely a seminal reason, while the *quod est* is the universal form – the seminal reason is that by which a sensible thing exists (i.e. the operative principle), while the universal form is what the sensible thing is (i.e. its definition). Thus, while Boehner does not connect his insight about the relationship between the *quo est* and *quod est* in Alexander to the – perhaps more developed – understanding in Bonaventure, his insight is an important one, insofar as it indicates that Bonaventure’s view of the relationship between a universal and a particularized form is one which is foreshadowed in Alexander’s thought – or rather, that this was an often utilized way of thinking about such a relationship in the Franciscan school.

Boehner, however, does not provide much evidence for the fact that Alexander *must* intend a formal distinction between these two principles – indeed, Alexander himself describes the relationship as *secundum rationem* (conceptual distinction), and Boehner then interprets this as a formal distinction insofar as he sees that it makes better sense for this not to be a purely conceptual distinction. However, Bonaventure, unlike Alexander, never says that the distinction between the two is *secundum rationem*. Moreover, for Bonaventure, it is much clearer that he must mean a kind of distinction which is neither real nor conceptual, albeit not necessarily a formal distinction per se. We can see this by referring to the above discussion of Bonaventure’s prohibition that universals be in the sensible thing, in the sense of particularized in, coupled with his strong assertion that the forms never be separate from the sensible. Here, if Bonaventure did not intend that this distinction lies somewhere between the real and the conceptual, he would be contradicting himself.

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⁴⁰⁵ Here, one could say, it is similar to Duns Scotus’ formal distinction. It is also good here to note that Bonaventure does have a well-developed account of what a conceptual and a real distinction are. He indicates a conceptual distinction with the phrase *secundum rationem* (which we see more of in the following chapter, when Bonaventure applies this conceptual distinction to, e.g., God as final end and God as beginning). It is to be noted that he does not use this phrase in discussing the distinction between the seminal reason and the universal. For a study of the different types of distinction in Bonaventure, see: Sandra Edwards, “St. Bonaventure on Distinctions,” *Franciscan Studies* 38 (1978): 194–212.

with regard to one of these two positions: if the distinction were conceptual, the universal would be in the particular; if the distinction were real, the universal would be separated from the particular.

By way of illustration, let us imagine the form of “horse-ness.” And we have Rye the Horse. Things compose Rye, like flesh and blood and fur, etc. Yet, on a deeper level, forms compose him: horse-ness, four-legged-ness, mean-ness, etc. Although being one of his components, “horse-ness” which has “being in itself” can be distinguished from its own “being in Rye” – it can be distinguished from itself qua operative principle. This doesn’t mean that horse-ness isn’t composing Rye, it just means that horse-ness in itself is distinct from the fact that it is composing Rye. In the first sense, it is not properly “in” Rye, since we are not considering it as being in him. In the second sense, it is in him and its “being in him” is dependent on him. Of course then, if Rye dies (which hopefully will not happen soon), his components endure, but their “being in him” dies with him. The form of horse-ness endures, and we can find it composing (but not properly “in” in the sense of dependent upon) any other horse, such as Spirit or Alejandro – but the particularization of it in Rye is destroyed when Rye dies, just as the particularization of it in Spirit or Alejandro will die with them as well. But the universal itself is properly always and everywhere and so the destruction of this physical-temporal particularization has no effect on it.

Moreover, making clear this point that only the forms possess *esse* – i.e. that they are the only things which exist – helps perhaps to forestall any worry which would target the question of where the forms are. This would be looking at the situation from the wrong point of view, i.e. from the position that it is sensible things which exist and thereby we must locate forms among them. Indeed, while we can to a certain extent think of what Bonaventure has developed here as quite similar to Scotus’ relationship between universal forms and particulars, for Bonaventure, “being” is placed among universals not particulars. Accordingly, the question of where the forms exist is no longer applicable since Bonaventure considers there to be no real being (*esse*) among sensible things.

Here, someone could also pose an objection along the lines of the following: perhaps the forms do not need this particular composite, but they need some composite to exist, e.g., does not the form of the dodo bird no longer exist, since dodo birds are now extinct? No, indeed. While Bonaventure is not aware that species go out of existence, he is aware of a phenomenon which happens in the reverse: new species appearing after the world was created. On this point he responds that “all things were created at once, but were not all made at once,” i.e. that all things existed but did not happen yet to be made into sensible particulars – forms exist (*esse*) whether or not they happen to have a spatial-temporal existence (*existere*).\(^{407}\) We can apply

\(^{407}\) *In Sent.* II, d. 12, a. 1, q. 2, p. 297b. “Omnes igitur Sancti in hoc concordant, quod omnia sunt simul producta in materia; et ideo concedunt omnia simul esse creada, sed tamen non simul facta.”
this notion now to our species which has gone extinct: what has happened with the form of the dodo bird is that even though it does not exist (existere) anymore, it still is (esse) – it always is and always is everywhere. It simply happens not to exist (existere) in particular dodo birds. In a certain sense, the fact that the dodo bird still is (esse) is evidenced by the fact that I can still know what a dodo bird is, i.e. I can have a concept of it in my mind, and so it must still be in order for it to be the object of my intellect – and indeed it exists (existere) when I think of it, or when someone describes it, in a certain spatial-temporal location. Indeed, there are a lot of things which we think of as existing, despite the fact that they lack a certain spatial-temporal instantiation. For example, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the old bel canto repertoire fell out of fashion and so, e.g., Donizetti’s Anna Bolena was rarely performed, if at all, for a period of about fifty years. I nevertheless would not say that the opera ceased to exist simply because it was not being performed – precisely because ontologically speaking it is the opera itself which exists primarily, and the performances have an existence contingent and dependent upon the opera. Similarly, since the forms exist (esse) primarily, it is of no import with respect to the forms themselves that they happen not to exist (existere) or even to exist (existere).

This is sufficient for a preliminary explanation. Let us now turn to the texts: Bonaventure first of all makes explicit his division of the form into two – but per my above analogy, this division is based on the relation of the forms to the sensible things they compose. The universal, he clarifies, is “the form of the whole (forma totius)”; this is in contrast to the “form of the part (forma partis)” which is rather the seminal reason – (again we see neither an equation nor an ontological distinction between the two).408 And we clearly need the form of the whole because: “Soul is not said with respect to one man, but rather with respect to man.”409 Here, “soul said with respect to one man” (or here we could say, qua operative principle in one man) is the particularized form (forma partis), while “soul said with respect to man” is the universal (forma totius) – where the former is applicable to only part of the set of members of this kind (i.e. only to one man), while the latter is applicable to the entire set of members (i.e. to the whole). This is to say, when I designate soul as the form of a man, I know soul itself as something which is related to many men or to man in general (i.e. to the whole) – as we have already seen, I do not even know what a particular soul is, if I cannot relate it to the universal. But the universal cannot be (particularized) in the particular, rather this universal form is the form “which gives being to all, and this is called the essence of the thing (essentia rei), which embraces

408 In Sent. II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 3, p. 441a-b. “... est enim forma partis et forma totius; et universale non est forma partis, sed forma totius.” And again later: “... ergo forma universalis, quae est species, est forma totius, quae complectitur totum esse, et quae es sufficiens ratio cognoscendi quantum ad esse substantiale; et hoc melius tactum est supra distinctione tertia.”
409 In Sent. II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 3, p. 441a. “Anima enim non dicitur respectu unius hominis, sed potius homo.”
the complete being (esse).”\textsuperscript{410} And, of course, this is the form which “metaphysics considers.”\textsuperscript{411} This is perhaps a key observation which Bonaventure makes: the universal and the particular forms appear to differ because they play different ontological roles, and so metaphysics considers the universal, and physics the particular form.

Bonaventure continues: “But the form of the part, which ... does not have being except through its reduction [i.e. into the sensible thing] is not properly speaking called the universal...”\textsuperscript{412} Yet, again, neither are they ontologically distinct. There is still a kind of identification between the particular form and the universal, and in this way the particular form may, in a sense, be called universal by its rooting (radicatio) in the universal – but this is only in a highly general sense (large),\textsuperscript{413} e.g., Socrates’ humanity is not distinct from humanity itself, except for the fact that the former is particular and the latter is universal.\textsuperscript{414} This is analogous to how we would say that “humanity” and “the humanity in Socrates” both are and aren’t the same thing. Indeed, here we can say that the seminal reason (or particularized form) is the way in which the universal is considered to be in and part of composite things. The seminal reason, the relational aspect of the universal, allows the universal to be “in” the many (ontologically dependent and particularized), while the form itself is independent (“in” as the component of the composite, but still independent).

To summarize, there is a universal which really exists (esse) as the form of the whole and is independent from its composition, and it exists (existere) as the form of the part insofar as it happens to be in a particular thing and thus it acquires this relational existence (existere), i.e. existens qua seminal reason (singular form). The former (the universal) grounds our knowledge, and the being of the composite, the latter (the particular form) grounds the particular existence of the sensible thing. This latter point recalls Bonaventure’s assertion that it must be the particularized seminal reason which is the operative principle, not the universal.

Thus, Bonaventure’s universals forms, although they compose composite substances (and, indeed, qua parts or qua operative principles in the composite are dependent on the composite), are never, considered in themselves, dependent upon these composites. As Bonaventure writes: “But while one may not be without the other [i.e. the universal form and the sensible things do not exist separately from

\textsuperscript{410} In Sent. II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 3, p. 441a. “Illam autem dicunt esse formam totius, quae quidem dat esse toti, et haec dicitur essentia rei, quia totum esse complectitur...."

\textsuperscript{411} In Sent. II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 3, p. 441a. “... et hanc formam considerat metaphysicus.”

\textsuperscript{412} In Sent. II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 3, p. 441a. “Formam vero partis, quae in genere non habet esse nisi per reductionem, non est dicere proprie universalem...."

\textsuperscript{413} In Sent. II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 3, p. 441a. “... potest tamen aliquo modo dici universalis radicatone, cum illa est indifferens ad multa, quae possunt fieri ex ipsa; sicut causa dicitur esse universalis, quia potest in multa.”

\textsuperscript{414} The fact that Bonaventure also does not consider the seminal reason here to be really a form comes to his aid in designating a principle of individuation: he denies that this individual form could be a principle of individuation precisely because it is not a form, and thereby circumvents the criticisms of a position à la Scotus where, e.g., Socrates’ humanity is still considered to be a form.
each other], they nevertheless are different from each other. For, while white may not be without a body, it nevertheless differs from body, whence inseparability does not mean absolute identity.” In Sent. II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 3, p. 441b. “Quamvis autem unum non sit sine altero, differt tamen unum ab altero. Quamvis enim albedo non possit esse sine corpore, differt tamen a corpore, unde inseparabilitas non ponit indentitatem omnimodi.”

Indeed, here we can say that what Bonaventure develops is quite different from Proclus’ forms which are “nowhere and everywhere” – i.e. everywhere inasmuch as the forms are participated in by all things in the sensible realm, but nowhere inasmuch as they exist separately. Rather, Bonaventure’s forms are indeed “always and everywhere,” because whether physical things come and go, the forms themselves are the natural order, and hence never separate from the natural order. This is Bonaventure’s decisive Aristotelianism. Moreover, is it not even correct to say that the forms are separable – because, like natural elements, or even matter, they would have no place to separate to. They do not ever need to be located outside of nature because, again, they simply are nature – keeping in mind that, on Bonaventure’s account, it is the forms which exist, not sensible things, and hence they do not need ever to be in any composite. Again, to make a comparison to Scotus, while Bonaventure makes a distinction between his seminal reason and the universal form which is strikingly similar to Scotus’ formal distinction, he nonetheless stresses the point that it is the form not the composite which exists – and this is where Scotus and Bonaventure part ways. Indeed, this insistence that it is only the universal which exists is the key point which marks Bonaventure in contrast from the later Franciscan thinkers, even though his anticipation of their positions tie him to them – and marks him, yet again, in contrast to the realists before or contemporary with him.

What is perhaps also interesting to note is that Bonaventure very noticeably avoids calling the forms substances. We see this even when he calls the forms complete or incomplete – i.e. he calls them complete and incomplete but not complete.
or incomplete *substances* as Proclus does. The issue is that calling both forms and sensible things substances, implies two levels of substances and thereby two worlds, as Proclus does. However, “substance” for Bonaventure is not a term which applies only to the forms, but, as for Aristotle, it is a relative term which is context-dependent and thus, like being, can be “said in many ways” – i.e. as indicating “form, matter, composite, or the essence of each and every thing” – depending on what is taken to be primary in a particular context (e.g., in physics, the composite would be primary and therefore the substance in this context).

Moreover, we can see, as mentioned above, that Bonaventure could also respond to the usual criticisms of the “separate” forms of the Platonists. Indeed, Bonaventure is clear that the forms never exist separately from sensible things – although, perhaps, it is more accurate to say that sensible things are never separate from the forms, precisely because the forms are themselves what exist, i.e. that the created order is simply these forms. Thus, Bonaventure can avoid the criticism of separate-ness – there is nothing for the forms to separate from and nowhere from them to separate to. Moreover, while the seminal reasons are separate from each other, e.g., as Callias’ humanity is separate from Socrates’ humanity, the form itself is never separate from itself insofar as it possesses no spatial-temporal location, nor does it need one in order to have being.

The lack of tiers of being in Bonaventure, as well as the fluidity of his use of the term “substance,” also anticipates the criticism of Ockham who, in objecting to universals which exist, takes existing universals to be in a very Platonic sense substances existing in themselves. Ockham writes: “Furthermore, I argue with the arguments of the Philosopher, by which he proves the conclusion that no universal is a substance, in the following way: the substance of a thing is proper to that of which it is the substance, and the universal is proper to nothing, rather it is common; therefore the universal is not a substance.”

It seems to me that Bonaventure would be happy with this claim – but would not see it necessary because of this to deny being to the universals. As Bonaventure himself quotes from Aristotle,

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418 “Praeter enim illos quatuor modos, quos dicit Philosophus, quod substantia dicitur materia, forma, compositum, et essentia uniuscuiusque…” *In Sent.* II, d. 37 dubia 4, p. 877a. cf. *Phys.* II.1. There are further ways which Bonaventure mentions substance may be spoken of, e.g., those he derives from Augustine: permanent and independent, permanent but dependent, inherent. He then adds himself that one may say substance of whatever is essential being in act (*qualibet essentia actu ens*), which either may be independent or not (e.g., when they are instantiated, the forms of rational souls are born to be *per se stans*, while the forms of trees, when instantiated, are not, as we mentioned earlier, because forms of souls have spiritual matter when they are instantiated, while forms of trees have only physical matter). He then equates the ways in which substance is said with the plurality of different kinds of beings: “et hoc modo substantia se extendit ad omne ens.”

419 Ockham, *Ordinatio* I, d. 2, q. 7, 7-11, p. 237. “Praeterea, arguo per rationes Philosophi, per quas nimitur demonstrare istam conclusionem, quod nullum universale est substantia, sic: Substantia rei est propria illi cuius est substantia; sed universale nulli est proprium sed commune; igitur universale non est substantia.”
“either the universal is nothing or it is posterior” – but Bonaventure considers that this claim is made from the point of view of sensible things. If we want to define substances as particular sensible things (e.g., Socrates or Callias), then forms would be no substance. Moreover, the rest of Ockham’s critique in the passage that I cited again rests on the claim that these universal forms would have to be substances in themselves and separate – two claims which are notably and emphatically absent from Bonaventure’s account of universals.

Indeed, we can by way of summary see how Bonaventure seems to anticipate, and even to agree with, many of Ockham’s arguments against realism or conceptu-

alism. As we have seen, Bonaventure would agree with Ockham’s arguments that the universal cannot exist in (i.e. in the sense of dependent upon) a particular thing, and he would agree that the particular form is not sufficient to ground knowledge of a universal (i.e. one cannot simply abstract from the individual to the universal). He perhaps would also agree with the claim that the individual form is at least in some sense to be equated with the individual itself, e.g., Socrates’ form of humanity (i.e. the particularized form) is just Socrates. Where he differs, however, is in that quick leap to nominalism. Instead he takes the above positions as the starting point for developing his own account of the way universal forms can compose particular things: while not being in themselves dependent upon particulars, their relation to the particular is certainly dependent upon the particular. In the former sense they are universal, and in the latter they are particular. And again, this is made possible because Bonaventure asserts that the forms are the only things which really exist: they can exist in themselves while their relationships to other forms and compositions is contingent. He thus can have his universals in the natural world, but ontologically prior to and independent from their compositions (i.e. sensible particulars). Bonaventure concludes his discussion of the universals by appealing to authority:

For this position agrees with authority. For the Philosopher says, ‘when I say heaven, I mean the form; when I say this heaven, I mean the matter’: therefore, the individual does not add form beyond the universal, but only adds matter. For Boethius says, ‘that the species is the whole being of the individual’: therefore, the universal form, which is the species, is the form of the whole, which embraces complete being, and which is the sufficient principle of knowledge (ratio cognoscendi) with regard to substantial being....

While the Boethius quote seems to be non-existent, the Aristotle quote proves a useful one for Bonaventure to bring in here. It seems prima facie a bit of an odd

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420 Ockham, Quod. 5.11, p. 437-441.
421 In Sent. II, d. 18, a. 1, q. 3, p. 441b. “Concordat etiam haec positio auctoritati. Dicit enim Philosophus, quod ‘cum dico caelum, dico formam; cum dico hoc caelum, dico materiam’: ergo, individuum super formam universalem non addit formam, sed solum materiam. Dicit etiam Boethius, ‘quod species est totum esse individui’: ergo forma universalis, quae est species, est forma totius, quae complectitur totum esse, et quae est sufficiens ratio cognoscendi quantum ad esse substantiale; et hoc melius tactum est supra distinctione tertia.”
quote to insert since it is not obvious how this substantiates Bonaventure's twofold understanding of form. However, if we look at the full passage in Aristotle from which Bonaventure is quoting, we see precisely what Bonaventure has in mind: “Suppose for instance only one example of a circle were apprehended, the distinction would nonetheless remain between (1) the essential nature of the circle and (2) the essential nature of this particular circle. The (1) one is simply the form, and the (2) other is the form-in-matter and must be counted among the particulars.”

From this Aristotle concludes: “This heaven and heaven in general are therefore two different things, the latter being distinguishable as form or shape and the former as something compounded with matter” – the former, this heaven, is not itself the compound of form and matter, i.e. is not the composite itself, but that which is compounded with matter, i.e. the form considered as part of the composite, or what Bonaventure would take as the particularized form or seminal reason.

Or again, Aristotle writes: “In all formations and products of nature and art alike a distinction can be drawn between the shape in and by itself and the shape as it is combined with the matter.” This dual way of thinking about a (certainly not separate) form in Aristotle’s thought seems to be what Bonaventure is drawing on here. “Essential nature of the circle” would be our form in itself and “essential nature of this circle” would be the form considered qua seminal reason/singular form.

Although one could very well say that the “essential nature of the circle” exists only in the mind while the “essential nature of this circle” is the only thing which exists extra-mentally, Bonaventure seems to be taking Aristotle rather to intend both as having an extra-mental existence – as indeed, given Bonaventure’s previous discussion of the quasi-realist position, this is the only way to read Aristotle so that (1) Aristotle is a realist, and (2) that, as a realist, he is not contradicting himself.

It probably is also a good idea here, so as to forestall any objection to the way in which Bonaventure has used Aristotle to defend his notion of forms having esse, that of course Bonaventure is assuming a certain reading of these texts, particularly the Posterior Analytics and the Categories, and to a certain extent De Caelo as we saw above: that they have an ontological, not only a logical import. This, of course, has been questioned by contemporary scholars of Aristotle. Yet, Bonaventure’s reading is not without its merits, and it probably would not have even occurred to Bonaventure to read these texts as purely logical: Aristotle says that the object of our knowledge is the universal, and so if Aristotle is a realist (and granted, this is

\[422\] De Cael. I.9 278a27-11. Aristotle makes a similar point in Meta. VII.15 regarding the sun, which we will see Bonaventure use in discussing individuation.


\[424\] And here we see why he states that Augustine and Aristotle both agree when it comes to seminal reasons. In Sent. II, d. 15, a. 1, q. 1. p. 375a. “Haec positio rationabilior est et firmior, quia concordant in hoc tam Augustinus quam Philosophus.” He then cites from ad Orosium and the Generation of Animals.

\[425\] De Cael. I.9 277b30-35.
an “if”), it seems that Aristotle must posit the universals as existing in some way. Indeed, to Bonaventure, the more common (still realist) contemporary reading of Aristotle would correspond to the quasi-realist position, and so Bonaventure is naturally giving Aristotle the benefit of the doubt by not attributing to Aristotle a position which Bonaventure considers to be self-contradictory – and that Aristotle would be a nominalist would be still further from his consideration.

4. Conclusion

To bring this chapter on Bonaventure to a close, I would like to make a few points about the notion of form – as we have seen it developed thus far. First of all, I would like to comment on the parallel, which I noted briefly in the first chapter, between Bonaventure’s and Proclus’ solutions. Well aware, however (very much like Bonaventure), of the many absurdities which may result from this relationship between a particular thing and a separate universal form, Proclus saw it necessary also to posit a mode in which forms exist in the sensible world, in sensible things, as incomplete. Indeed, Bonaventure arrives at a solution similar to Proclus’ in the respect that, like Proclus, Bonaventure maintains two modes of forms: the particularized form which is a potency and thereby incomplete and the universal form which is in act and thereby complete. However, while Proclus does not relinquish the separate forms of Plato, Bonaventure does just this insofar as he understands these two modes not as being two distinct ontological terms (i.e. cause and effect), but as being one object under two relational considerations, i.e. in itself and related to the composite.

In so doing, Bonaventure, addresses the problem which Dionysius looked also to solve in his reception of a Proclean schematic, but he does so in a very different manner. Instead of eliminating the hypostasis of the intellect by attempting to move it up into God, he rather takes his cue from Aristotle and does quite the opposite: he identifies the forms with the created order itself – yet, he does so without depriving the forms of their ontological primacy, as Aquinas does.

Speaking of parting ways with the Neoplatonists, however, brings me to make a few points about the way in which we have seen Bonaventure’s use of Aristotle’s texts in developing his notion of form. The first is that I think it is fairly obvious from the foregoing discussion that Bonaventure is far from an anti-Aristotelian, particularly when it comes to his understanding of form. Indeed, I think it is fair to say that Aristotle is the source for Bonaventure when it comes to forms, the hylo-morphic composite, and his metaphysics/physics in general. And in this, it seems van Steenberghen’s position was not so absurd as it appeared, and still does appear to be, to scholars of medieval philosophy. Here, one might even ask the question: Where else would Bonaventure derive any notion of form? He has only Platonic/Neoplatonic texts and Aristotle – insofar as Dionysius and none of the traditional
Augustinian sources go into such detail regarding forms. And if Bonaventure is well aware of the issues of Platonic forms, to whom else would he look, if not to Aristotle? This issue regarding the Aristotelian nature of Bonaventure’s thought seems to be in a certain sense responsible for why Bonaventure’s notion of form, and to a certain extent his metaphysics in general, has not received its due attention in contemporary scholarship. Bonaventure’s Aristotelianism and his understanding of form, as we have seen quite clearly, go hand in hand. If one is committed to turning a blind eye to Bonaventure’s use of Aristotle, one ends up with either an overly Neoplatonic reading of Bonaventure’s forms – and thereby an inaccurate and indeed uninteresting account, since it would end up with the same issues which the earlier Neoplatonists had – or one ends up skimming over Bonaventure’s notion of forms altogether.

My next point regards the question of whether or not Bonaventure’s reading of Aristotle is actually a good one – or, at least, a fair one. In contemporary scholarship on Aristotle – very generally speaking – an understanding of form in Aristotle as something vaguely along the lines of Aquinas’ notion of form is considered the norm: forms do not have being in themselves but they exist whenever they exist in particular things, and so they exist extra-mentally and we have not committed Aristotle to a nominalism – yet. But, if we take as our starting point (1) that this position is self-contradictory and ultimately results in a nominalist position, and (2) that it is the job of the interpreter to give an interpretation which at least attempts to resolve any contradictions (i.e. to give the benefit of the doubt where possible), Bonaventure’s reading of Aristotle indeed becomes more attractive. In a certain sense, so does Ockham’s – insofar as, at least, both are consistent. Bonaventure’s reading, however, manages to avoid the contradictions which arise from the inconsistencies in the quasi-realist reading of Aristotle, while likewise avoiding the nominalist reading of Aristotle (as one would find in Ockham). In this sense, then, highlighting Bonaventure’s use of Aristotle is not only crucial for understanding Bonaventure’s notion of form, but also provides insight into further options when it comes to contemporary interpretations of Aristotle.