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Book Author(s): Franziska van Buren

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CHAPTER 1

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In the present chapter, my goals are to introduce some historical and philosophical themes which will be important to engage with when we turn our attention to Bonaventure himself in the coming chapters. First of all, I would like to present a discussion of the Neoplatonist Proclus, which will set up some foundational problems in thinking about the relationship between forms and sensible things (or better, universals and particulars) and presents Proclus' quite nuanced and indeed solid response to many of the problems which may result from such a relationship. Proclus serves first of all as a potential influence on Bonaventure's way of reading Aristotle (via the *Liber de Causis*, which Bonaventure seems to be aware is not written by Aristotle, but a Neoplatonic thinker), remembering here that Proclus himself is also very much influenced by Aristotle. Moreover, Proclus is an excellent point of comparison to Bonaventure's view of forms, which – while it does indeed bear many similarities to Proclus – also differs on one main issue: the transcendence of forms, a position which Proclus maintains but Bonaventure rejects.

We will then turn our attention to some broader issues in the Christian appropriation of Neoplatonic ontology. Here we come upon the difficult question of locating the universals in a hierarchy of being which now must also include a first principle that bears an immediate relationship to the sensible world. For Plato and the (pagan) Neoplatonists, there was a hierarchy of being which included the mix of being and becoming as found among sensible things, the realm of being where we find the immutable and transcendent forms, and finally a first principle which exceeds being and thereby is better named as the good or the One. Incorporating such an ontology into a Christian theology is difficult on two fronts: the first, that the Bible seems quite clearly to name God as “being” not as the good or the One “beyond-being”; and the second, that such an ontology is built upon a mediation (by way of the forms) between the first principle and the sensible world which is incompatible with Christian belief. Accordingly, we will examine those problems by looking, first of all, at how such an ontology is formulated by Plato and Plotinus, before turning our attention to the Christian attempts at resolving this problem, first in Augustine and Marius Victorinus and then in Dionysius the Areopagite, who will prove to be the most influential on Bonaventure's view of divine causation.

To bring this chapter to a close, we will also raise the question of the influence of the early Franciscans on Bonaventure, particularly on his reading of Aristotle. Here, we will (at least in a preliminary way) see that Bonaventure is going in quite a different direction than his earlier Franciscan counterparts when it comes to questions concerning his basic ontology and view of forms.

1. THE NEOPLATONIC VIA PROCLUS: THE ONE AND THE MANY

Important in this section will be the task of highlighting the distinction which Proclus makes between complete and incomplete substance – which is very similar to the distinction which Bonaventure makes between the universal considered in itself and the universal considered as part of the sensible composite, i.e. as a seminal reason. Indeed, the very language used by Proclus of complete and incomplete is mirrored by Bonaventure. It is, however, important to note that Bonaventure himself does not explicitly reference the *Liber de Causis* when he uses this language which very much reminds one of Proclus – nor is a discussion of incomplete and complete substance discussed at great length in the *Liber de Causis* itself. Nonetheless, the similarities are striking and so it is well worth discussing Proclus' account, even simply for a point of comparison.

In explaining this distinction between the complete and incomplete substance in Proclus, it is also important to note that we are highlighting a *very* nuanced point in Proclus' ontology – one which is often skimmed over in scholarship on Proclus. Generally, we find Proclus' account of the relationship between effect and cause described as a “three-tiered” hierarchy of participation, consisting of (1) a participant (i.e. effect) and a division within the universal cause into (2) participated and (3) unparticipated. Our discussion will reveal rather a four-tiered hierarchy in which we will divide the second term (i.e. the participated universal) into (a) participated as a one-in-the-many and (b) participated as a one-over-the-many, or simply as (a) incomplete and (b) complete.

However, in order to understand Proclus' distinctive concept of participation and of the relationship of the one to the many, we first should turn our attention to his concept of causation. Proclus writes in Proposition 35 of his *Elements of Theology* “every effect remains in its cause, proceeds from it, and reverts upon it.”¹⁴ All effects proceed from their causes, as an effect is something distinct from its cause. The effect then “reverts” upon its cause inasmuch as the effect strives to attain the fuller perfection above itself, that perfection which the cause possesses; this is to say, the cause designates itself as the *telos* of the effect. Yet, in order for the effect to be able to aim towards that perfection above itself, it must “remain in” its cause. By this “remaining in” Proclus means that the effect must possess some similitude to its cause in order to direct itself back to it, i.e. something cannot aim at becoming that which is wholly other than itself (a kitten cannot aim at growing up to become a dog; rather, the kitten aims at growing up to be that which caused it, the form of cat, because a particular kitten is similar to cat-ness, not to dog-ness). Yet despite

¹⁴ *El.* § 35. Indeed, one might say that this short phrase presents a summary of Proclus' understanding of the entire ordering of the cosmos inasmuch as all things are arranged hierarchically according to their status of effect in relation to cause, ultimately all being caused by the first cause of all, the good or the One.

this similarity to its cause, there is a dissimilarity between cause and effect, i.e. that “proceeding forth” of the effect from its cause. Between cause and effect, then, there is similarity and dissimilarity; yet on the part of the effect, there is an ever-present striving to become wholly similar to and to revert upon its cause. This similarity of effect to cause and the striving of the effect towards its cause constitute the effect’s participation in its cause.

So far, this account of participation and causation is not much different from what one would find in Plato and Plotinus. Yet Proclus continues on to posit two different “modes” for any cause: one by which the cause is participated in (i.e. the “participated”) and another by which the cause remains entirely transcendent (i.e. the “unparticipated”). Proclus then establishes a relationship between these two modes: “All that is unparticipated produces out of itself the participated; and all participated substances are linked by upward tension to existences not participated.”¹⁵ As Proclus explains, for any series, or order of substances, participating in a common participated term, there must be a monad, i.e. the unparticipated, a single beginning to the order which can be that single beginning of the order precisely because it is untouched by the multiplicity of the order.¹⁶ The unparticipated term “produces out of itself” the term which is able to be participated in by the participants, while the participated is linked back to the unparticipated term which itself remains untouched by the participants. Hence, we see that the monad, i.e. the unparticipated, does not directly cause the participants – if it did, it would be participated in. Instead, as we shall see more clearly further along, it is the participated term in its mediating role which transfers the causal efficacy of the monad to the series of participants. Indeed, the monad itself does not have any relationship of participation with the participants, whether that be as a one-over-the-many or as a one-in-the-many. In itself, as the most primary unifier of the series, the monad is entirely untouched by the series of participants.

Inasmuch as the monad is one and unified and completely transcending both the participated and the participants, it has a few options, so to speak. The first is that it “remain fixed in sterility and isolation.”¹⁷ Yet the result of this is that it “so must lack a place of honour,”¹⁸ i.e. it would be imperfect. Proclus’ reason for saying this is based on his understanding of the good as being productive.¹⁹ All things which are perfect unities desire to produce something from themselves, inasmuch as they participate in the good which is productive of all: “[T]he principles consequent

¹⁵ *El.* § 23.

¹⁶ *El.* § 21. It is important to note that this understanding of causation involving an unparticipated monad and a participated term applies not only to the forms but also to any causal principle.

¹⁷ *El.* § 21.

¹⁸ *El.* § 21.

¹⁹ *El.* § 25.

upon [the good] are impelled because of their own proper completeness to generate further principles....”²⁰

The second option for the monad much more properly fits its “honourable status”: “[T]he monad] will give something of itself, whereof the receiver becomes a participant, whilst the given attains substantial existence as a participated term.”²¹ This is to say, the monad gives something to the participant – yet what it gives is not itself; rather what the monad gives is the participated term. The participated term, which itself has been brought about by the unparticipated, is secondary, δεύτερον, to the monad. The participated term then mediates between the monad and the participants – the substantial existence of the participated term being precisely what is participated in.

While then the monad is not itself participated in, via the mediation of the participated term, it nonetheless “is equally present [to all] and has filled [all the participants] out of its own being.”²² Here, Proclus is saying that the monad is both untouched by the participants, yet present in them all – a seemingly contradictory statement. Yet, for Proclus, it is precisely because the monad is entirely transcendent and untouched by the participants that it is able to be present to all and to fill all with being. To put this another way, inasmuch as the monad itself is not dispersed throughout the many, as the participated term is, it can be wholly present to every member of the series – in order for it to be in all, it must be in none. For, as Proclus writes, “[T]hat which is present to all alike, that it may illuminate all, is not in any but prior to all.”²³

Proclus explains how the radical priority of the monad is necessary in order for it to be present to all by considering three possible relationships that the monad could have to its participants: (1) it is in all, (2) it is in one out of all (i.e. in one member of the series but not in any other), (3) it is common to all but prior to all (i.e. unparticipated). By the first option, Proclus means that the monad is shared by the many (i.e. participated in), and indeed this first option resembles very much the understanding of the relationship between the forms and sensibles as sketched out, and objected to, in the sail problem of Plato’s *Parmenides*; one form which is shared by many (i.e. one uniting a series of participants), and in this sense *in* the many, and thereby itself made into many. Proclus knows very well to dismiss this first option for: “[A] principle which was in all (ἐν πᾶσιν) would be divided amongst all, and would itself require a further principle to unify the divided.”²⁴ To explain the sense in which the monad would require a further principle, we are not thinking about the monad as if it were some sensible object able to be cut into pieces and

²⁰ *El.* § 21.

²¹ *El.* § 21.

²² *El.* § 21.

²³ *El.* § 21.

²⁴ *El.* § 21.

divided among the participants, like pieces of a cake; rather, the sense in which it would be divided would be as in a series of participants, e.g., cats, all of which would share in the monad, cat, by being cats. The monad in this way would be able to unite the series of participants, cats, but not be able to unite the series which contains itself and all the cats. It would need a further principle: in this case, a third cat. This indeed would be the schematic which would result from our positing only the participants and a participated term – leaving out the unparticipated monad.

The second option, by which the monad would be present to only one out of all, solves the problem of positing a one over a series only insofar as it eliminates the series (because it is in only one, the monad doesn't stand over a many) – but to eliminate the series is clearly no solution at all since it is the series which we are trying to explain. We are left, then, with the third option which Proclus has already been arguing in favor of: that the monad is present to all precisely by being prior to all, i.e. not participated in by one or by all so that it may be present to all. However, the reason that the monad can be in this way both above all and present to all is that it generates out of itself its own participated term which mediates the relationship between itself (i.e. the monad) and the many. The monad in this way stands above the entire series, unifying, as cause, what is found in the many, while its own existence remains untouched by the many. Here, to resolve the issue of the one and the many, Proclus posits the one so far above the many that, not participated in by any, it can through its generation of the participated term yet be present to all.²⁵ It is Proclus' positing of such an entirely transcendent monad above each series that allows all the members of the series to be unified, to be caused ultimately by the one single monad, while avoiding the necessity of a "third man," insofar as the monad produces of itself the mediating term.²⁶

Let us look briefly at the form of Eternity as an example better to see the relationship between these three terms (the unparticipated, the participated, and the participant). Proclus writes: "[I]t is plain that an eternal thing is distinct from its eternity, and both of these from Eternity in itself, the first being a participant, the second the participated, and the third unparticipated...."²⁷ The participated eternity "exists only in those members which participate in it" – but "prior to these [is] the undivided Eternity ... the Eternity of eternities since [it generates] the participated

²⁵ Eric Perl shows a similar account in the thought of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, where Dionysius attributes such complete transcendence to God. Of Dionysius' God, Perl writes: "The more transcendent God is, the more – not the less! – intimately present He is to the world; the absolutely transcendent God of Neoplatonism is therefore nothing but what is manifest in and as all things...." Eric D. Perl, *Theophany* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 2007), 112.

²⁶ Proclus' explicit response to the third man argument as it found in Plato's *Parmenides* is a more complicated issue – and one which is not necessary to examine at a depth here. For more on Proclus' precise response to the problem of the third man in the *Parmenides*, see: Lloyd Gerson, "Proclus and the Third Man," *Études Platoniciennes* 9 (2012): 105–18.

²⁷ *El.* § 53.

terms,” and while itself transcending all, “is identically present everywhere and in all members of its order.”²⁸ Venus and Mars are eternal, i.e. both participate in eternity; Venus’ eternity, i.e. that eternity in Venus, is distinct from Venus, as Mars’ eternity is distinct from Mars. Moreover, both Venus’ eternity and Mars’ eternity are distinct from Eternity itself, for the former are participated eternities (i.e. participated in by Venus and Mars), and the latter is not. Even our ordinary language reflects this: we never say “Venus is Eternity” (for Eternity here would indicate the unparticipated term), but we do say “Venus is eternal,” a phrase in which the subject indicates the participant and the predicate nominative indicates the participated.

It is important to note that, on Proclus’ account, each monad which causes a series of participants is only a *relative* monad, i.e. no monad is the One itself which alone is One-ness itself, the supreme monad.²⁹ Moreover, it could be that what is the monad in one series is actually produced by a higher monad in another series. We can see this in the relationship between the forms and the Intellect. Any particular form is a monad, and thus has an unparticipated and participated term, such as we saw with Eternity. Yet, each particular form is itself produced by the monad, the Intellect, which is the unity of the forms and from itself produces the forms which, relative to the Intellect, are the participated terms (i.e. insofar as they are participated in by the sensibles),³⁰ but in themselves are the unparticipated monads for another series.

This account of the relationship between the monad and the series which I have outlined is yet only a most basic sketch. What I have stressed thus far is that Proclus uses the concept of the monad and the participated term to provide a more coherent solution to the question of how the one relates to the many. Now, however, I would like to look more carefully at how the monad creates a further “closeness,” both between itself and the participants and between the participated term and the participants. Proclus further refines and clarifies the relationship of the monad to the series of participants by giving a more detailed account of how the monad causes the members of the series by producing out of itself the participated term. Proclus writes: “[E]very original monad gives rise to two series, one consisting of substances complete in themselves, and one of irradiations which have their sub-

²⁸ *El.* § 53.

²⁹ *El.* § 23.

³⁰ One can certainly also say that the forms are participants in the Intellect, insofar as the unparticipated Intellect would generate of itself the participated term of Intellect in which the forms would participate. In the above passage, I have broken it down into less detail: Intellect (unparticipated), forms (participated), sensibles (participants). The entire set of causal principles in the ontological hierarchy could be broken down into the unparticipated-participated-participant schematic in a number of ways. For example, the One could be called the unparticipated, the Intellect the participated, and the sensibles the participants; the (hypercosmic) Intellect could be called the unparticipated, the (cosmic) Intellect the participated, and the cosmos the participant, etc. Proclus’ account of causation gives us not a static understanding of the hierarchy of being, but rather generates innumerable ways for us to conceive of this hierarchy.

stantiality in something other than themselves.”³¹ From the single monad comes a series of “complete substances” and another of irradiations which Proclus calls “incomplete substances.” What Proclus intends is that the participated term can be considered either as being *in* the participant (i.e. incomplete) or as being *above* the participant (i.e. complete) – although due to its “discrimination into a manifold”³² (i.e. its being participated in), even when we think of it as being above the participant, it cannot be above in the absolute sense in which the monad itself transcends the participants. The incomplete substances are those irradiations which exist *in* the participant, and, insofar as they exist in the participant, they are dependent upon the participant. Proclus writes that the incomplete substances “are upon such a level that they belong to their participants: for being incomplete, they require a substrate [i.e. participant] for their existence.”³³ The complete substances, on the other hand, are participated in, yet remain “above” and independent from the participant. Instead of depending upon the participant for their existence, they rather “make the participants belong to them: for being complete they fill the participants with themselves, and their substantial existence.”³⁴

Moreover, when Proclus says that the complete substances fill the participants with themselves, he does not intend that the complete substances mediate between the monad and the incomplete substances, but rather that the participated term considered as a complete substance is responsible, as he so clearly states, for the existence of the participant (certainly, the complete substances mediate between the monad and the participant but not between the monad and the incomplete substance). Proclus here is careful to make clear that both the complete and the incomplete substances are generated immediately by the monad and thus are identical with reference to their intelligible content, despite the fact that one is complete and the other incomplete. The monad, by generating from itself the participated term in this twofold manner, creates both the one-over-the-many (i.e. the complete substance) and the one-in-the-many³⁵ (i.e. the incomplete substance).

Here, then, we can see quite clearly that there is no mediation implied between the complete and incomplete substance; rather, the complete and incomplete are compared to each other as the perfect to the imperfect – the same substance (i.e. the participated term), but possessing different grades of being. While there is an ontological distinction between the two (i.e. that of perfect to imperfect), substan-

³¹ *El.* § 64.

³² *El.* § 64.

³³ *El.* § 64.

³⁴ *El.* § 64.

³⁵ Clearly the incomplete substance is not a one in the many in the way in which a transcendent universal form can be said to be “in” the many, as mentioned earlier. Rather, the incomplete substance is “one in the many” in the sense of being one (i.e. one form) in each member of the series and dependent on the members of the series. The incomplete substance, then, is more properly “in” the many, while we say of the complete substance that it is “in” only in the sense that things partake of it.

tially they are the same since both have their existence in the monad. For indeed, when we ask what something is, we ask what its substance is; this is to say, when we ask, to use a sensible thing for an example, “What is that tree?” we respond with the name of a complete substance, “Tree,” even though it is the incomplete substance which exists in the tree. The complete substance is substantially the same as the incomplete except that while the complete substance remains independent from the participant, the incomplete is present in and thus wholly dependent upon the participant. The form of tree which exists in the particular tree (i.e. the incomplete substance), which gives the particular tree its intelligibility and directs it to grow and exist as a tree, is drifting farther away from the unity and perfection of the monad, insofar as it exists in one of the series of the participants. The form of tree as it exists in the particular tree in this sense is only an irradiation, an incomplete substance, effectively an appearing of the monad in the natural world, yet no less immediately arising from the monad than the complete substance, but arising less perfectly.³⁶

Similarly, if we recall the two different types of knowledge, the knowledge possessed by the gods which grasps the forms in perfect unity and the knowledge possessed by human souls which grasps the forms as a multiplicity, we see a correlation with these two different substances. The object of knowledge, the substance, is not different for gods and for the souls of humans, but it is understood differently. For the gods it is understood as unity, as complete substance. Yet, for us, it is understood as multiplicity, as incomplete substances (i.e. irradiations) which we see within the sensible participants. However, both complete and incomplete substances are nothing more than the communication to the series of participants of the causal efficacy of the monad, as the monad expresses itself through greater or lesser perfection.

Now let us look still more closely at how the unparticipated term generates the participated term (both as incomplete and the complete substance) and how the participated term is participated in by the participant. Here, in particular, we want to see exactly how Proclus explains the mediating role of the participated – that is, how the monad’s causal efficacy is communicated to the participant without the monad itself being participated in. Every cause transcends its effects (i.e. is ontologically prior) and so the participated (as the complete substance) cannot itself be fully immanent in its effect, for if it were, it would be dependent upon its effect for its own existence.³⁷ Because the participated term (i.e. as the complete substance) is cause of the participant, it must remain separate from the participant (i.e. ontologically prior). Yet, in order for it to be “participated in” there must be a “mean

³⁶ The complete substance, of course, is only relatively perfect. It is perfect in the sense that it is complete and not lacking in anything per the kind of thing it is, but it is not perfect in the absolute sense that the monad is. The same, indeed, is true of the monad when compared to the First Principle. These complete substances and the monads, being perfect, are also divine, while the incomplete substances, lacking in perfection, are not.

³⁷ *El.* § 75.

term to connect the [participant and the participated terms], one which more nearly resembles the participated principle than the participant does, and yet actually resides in the latter.”³⁸ Thus, the participated term is present to the participant not by itself being fully *in* it, as we have seen, but retaining its separateness (i.e. as the complete substance). Yet, it “is present to the participant through an inseparable potency (*δυνάμις*) which it implants”³⁹ – this potency Proclus identifies with the irradiation/incomplete substance and is that which allows the participant to revert upon its cause.⁴⁰ In this way, we see that while the complete substance, i.e. the participated term as independent from the participant, is not causally responsible for the existence of the incomplete substance (irradiation) in the participant, it is responsible for transferring the irradiation from the monad into the participant. Indeed this is to say, retaining the close connection between the unparticipated and the participants, that the entire causal power of the complete substance consists in communicating the causal power of the *unparticipated* term, i.e. in “implanting” the incomplete substance as that potency in the participant to revert upon its cause. Thus, this potency which proceeds to reside in the participant is the very presence of the cause (the monad) to its effect; in this way, it is yet the monad itself which guides and directs the sensible by giving its *telos* and its very existence as whatever it is.⁴¹

To bring this section to a close, I would like to bring out two points of interest from our discussion of Proclus. The first concerns the relationship between the unparticipated form and the participated form, both as incomplete and as complete substance. Bonaventure, in a manner quite similar to Proclus, will conceive of the form as having two modes: one complete and the other incomplete, one actual and the other potential, one independent of and one dependent on the sensible particular.⁴² In this sense, Proclus has been an ideal figure to look to if our purpose is ultimately to explain Bonaventure. Moreover, for Proclus, the distinctions between the unparticipated and participated forms, as well as between the complete and incomplete substances themselves, are real distinctions. Bonaventure, however, will conceive of the relationships in this schematic quite differently, and he does so precisely to avoid what Proclus is making such an effort to retain: separate forms. Yet, for a fuller account of Bonaventure’s alternative we will have to wait.

³⁸ *El.* § 75.

³⁹ *El.* § 81.

⁴⁰ *El.* § 81.

⁴¹ Indeed, Proclus’ account of form includes the three causes which Aristotle also attributes to form in the *Metaphysics*: final, formal, and first efficient (i.e. the cause of generation). See *Meta.* VII.7 1032b1-3 and *Meta.* IX.8 1050a3-11.

⁴² However, Bonaventure does not posit an “unparticipated” form which stands above the complete and incomplete substances. For Bonaventure’s use of complete and incomplete language, see his discussion of seminal reasons as “incomplete being” (*esse incompletum*) and how they are ordered to “complete being” (*esse completum*), *In Sent.* II, d. 8, a. 1, q. 3, pp. 4442b-443a.

My second point is that we see in Proclus a shift in the way of thinking about participation. In Proclus' ontology, participation is not simply a matter of explaining what things are, as it was for Plotinus and Plato. Rather, for Proclus, as it will be taken up by Dionysius and then later thinkers, including of course Bonaventure, there is now a new stress on the task of explaining precisely the "revelatory" presence of the forms in the sensible world. With this shift in thinking about the relationship between the sensible world and the causal principles above it, we can see in Proclus the origins of many of the more overarching views of causation, particularly divine causation, developed by later Christian thinkers – especially as we find it in Dionysius the Areopagite.

2. THE PROBLEM OF NEOPLATONISM IN THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

Our next topic, now turning in the direction of examining a general ontology rather than the specifics of causal relations between universals and particulars, is to discuss how Christian thinkers before Bonaventure approached the problem of establishing the ontological status of universals in relation to a Christian God – or, put in another way, how they answered the question of what is being. Indeed, as God is himself supposed to be being – as he communicates quite clearly in the Biblical statement "I am that I am" – it seems impossible for a Christian thinker to attribute the role of "being" to forms instead of to God himself. *Prima facie* what any Christian thinker must do is simply to name God "being" and abandon this claim that it is rather the forms which are being and have an existence apart from sensibles – or worse that they bear an ontological status which stands in between God and sensibles. Moreover, this includes abandoning the emphatic claim in Neoplatonic thought that whatever the First Principle is, it is not only unknowable, it is also not "being" – or, put more precisely, it is "beyond being."

However, rejecting the Neoplatonic God beyond-being in favor of the Christian God of being is not without its own problems. If one maintains the position that Scripture names God as being in a literal sense (as does, for example, Aquinas),⁴³ two potentially problematic positions result: (1) because God is (i.e. is being) and cannot himself merely be one of the forms, the forms cannot themselves be equated with being as they were for the (pagan) Neoplatonists, such as Proclus; and (2) because God is being, his causal efficacy is restricted solely to the *being* of his creation; i.e. if

⁴³ We will discuss Aquinas' distinction between essence and existence in the next chapter. I use Aquinas for my example above because he appears to posit a real distinction between essence and existence. Although medieval scholastics considered many of the Arabic thinkers also to maintain a real distinction, their position has been questioned in contemporary scholarship. See: Fedor Benevich, "The Essence-Existence Distinction: Four Elements of the Post-Avicennian Metaphysical Dispute (11–13th Centuries)," *Oriens: Zeitschrift der Internationalen Gesellschaft für Orientforschung* 45, No. 3–4 (2017): 203–258.

God is a principle of being (and clearly not a Neoplatonic form), there is no participation in God directly through *what* things are (i.e. their essences), but only *that* things are (i.e. through their being), as we mentioned also in the introduction.⁴⁴ For the pagan Neoplatonists, however, among sensible things, participation pertains both to *what* things are and *that* they are, because there is not one principle of being which is participated in, but many, i.e. the multitude of forms, which are finite essences and the causes both of being and of intelligibility in the sensible realm. The first principle, namely, the good or the One, inasmuch as it is the cause of the finite being of the forms must then be beyond being (as a cause must be greater than its effects). Here, we can see that the Neoplatonic God beyond-being is what guarantees the twofold participation, both in being and in essence – because God *is not*, the forms *can be*, and thus can function as the causes of both being and intelligibility. It seems, then, that Christian Scripture is irreconcilable on this front with Neoplatonism. How can the Christian Neoplatonists, reading Scripture which seems to imply a God of being, still maintain a Neoplatonic participation where sensible things are revelatory of the causes above them both via being and via their essence – particularly inasmuch as this position depends on a God who is *not being*?

Let us take a step back and first look at the relationship between God and being in the “pagan” philosophers, Plato and Plotinus. The understanding of a God which is beyond being is found first of all in Plato. For Plato, that which is intelligible (τὸ νοητόν) is that which is being (τὸ ὄν). This is shown clearly in the *Timaeus*, where Plato posits a distinction between things which are becoming (τὸ γιγνόμενον) and that which exists (τὸ ὄν).⁴⁵ *Timaeus* asks which of these two are intelligible, and the answer is clearly τὸ ὄν, that which is “uniformly existent.”⁴⁶ For Plato, there are many forms, all of which are “uniformly existent” and thereby intelligible, yet which are distinct from one another. Being, then, is a multiplicity; being is not simple, but rather differentiated among the forms. We see this theme of differentiation among the forms again in the *Sophist*, where Plato stresses the necessity of “otherness” (ἕτερος)⁴⁷ to be participated in by all forms: “And we shall say that [Other] permeates them all (i.e. being, or the forms); for each of them is other (ἕτερον εἶναι) than the rest, not by reason of its own nature, but because it participates (μετέχειν) of the idea of the Other (ιδέα αἰτίας θατέρου).”⁴⁸ The forms, by virtue of their participation in their

⁴⁴ This is of course a complex issue, particularly with regard to the thought of Aquinas – about which there has been much scholarly debate. However, on all sides of the issue, the most that one can have with Aquinas’ God qua being is a secondary participation through the essences of creatures, while the primary participation is through being. We will discuss this in detail in chapter 2.

⁴⁵ *Tim.* 27d.

⁴⁶ *Tim.* 28a.

⁴⁷ *Soph.* 255c.

⁴⁸ *Soph.* 255e. Translation edited. Translation originally said “partakes” for μετέχειν, but Plato clearly means participates and that is how μετέχειν is usually translated; “partakes” is misleading and inconsistent within this and other translations. I’ve also capitalized Other in certain places to

fellow form, Other, are thus differentiated from each other, forming a multiplicity of being,⁴⁹ not a simplicity, such as Parmenides would have it.⁵⁰

Plotinus likewise makes clear that everything which is in a primary sense, i.e. the forms, is a specific thing – finite and “defined” and thus intelligible.⁵¹ The forms, as multiple (πολύς) distinct beings,⁵² compose a single “realm,” i.e. the Realm of the Forms or the hypostasis of the Intellect. The forms, then, are as if many princes, all of which share in a common family tree.

However, if there are many princes, who reigns over them all, over the entire Realm of the Forms and being, as king? For Plato, the answer is the good, as the font and source of being and intelligibility, which stands beyond the Realm of the Forms, where being is possessed and shared by all. Plato describes the Realm of the Forms as the “offspring of the good which the good produced in proportion to itself.”⁵³ Whatever perfection exists among the forms, the good, which causes the perfection of the forms, is itself beyond it: “[I]f you think of the good as something even more beautiful than [knowledge and truth], you will think about it in the right way”⁵⁴ – here, we see in Plato the maxim that a cause must always be greater than its effects. Since Plato equates the intelligible (τὸ νοητόν) with being (τὸ ὄν),⁵⁵ he continues on to say that “being and reality is in [knowledge and truth] because of [the good], although the good is not being, but reaches even farther beyond it in rank and power.”⁵⁶ Whatever is a possible object of the intellect among the forms, the good is beyond it. The intelligible (i.e. that which is) may only be thought of as “good-like (ἀγαθοειδῆ)” but is not itself the good.⁵⁷ Again, he writes, “the state of the good should be valued much more highly” for it “gives us understanding and truth, yet it is beyond these in beauty.”⁵⁸ The good alone is ἀμήχανον κάλλος.⁵⁹

differentiate between when Plato is mentioning the form of Other or the participated “other” of each form (i.e. each form is other than the rest because it participates in Other).

⁴⁹ The forms, however, are not entirely distinct from one another, creating separate spheres of being with no interaction with one another. Rather, the forms relate to one another in a complex, differentiated “unity” of being. Plato calls this complex unity an “interweaving of the forms with one another (ἀλλήλων τῶν ἰδῶν συμπλοκήν).” Plato, *Sophist* 259e.

⁵⁰ For a discussion of the relationship between Plato and Parmenides concerning thinking about being, see: Eric D. Perl, *Theophany* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 2007), 17–34.

⁵¹ *En.* V.I.5.8–9.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Resp.* 508b.

⁵⁴ *Resp.* 509a.

⁵⁵ *Tim.* 27d.

⁵⁶ *Resp.* 509a.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* Plato’s use here of the word ἀμήχανον is very interesting because in addition to meaning something which is extraordinary, i.e. extraordinary in the sense that it itself surpasses reality, it is often used to refer to something which is impossible or unmanageable, i.e. extraordinary in the sense that it is utterly beyond *our* capabilities; the good is utterly beyond what we can accomplish. This indeed recalls Proclus’ assertion that the attainment of the principles above us is beyond our power, i.e. “impossible” or “unmanageable.”

Plotinus maintains a similar causal relationship between the good and its effects, yet explains this relationship with reference to number and unity – a notion not found as such in Plato. Multiplicity, i.e. number, is found among being, yet, as Plotinus writes, “number is not primary.”⁶⁰ There must be something which is more primary than being and number, something which is the cause of number, i.e. of the multiplicity in being. This something is the One or the good, the “simple God (ὁ ἀπλοῦς) who is prior to multiplicity, the cause of [the Intellect’s] existence and multiplicity, the maker of number.”⁶¹ This simple God, the One, must be beyond and without being in order for it to be the cause and origin of being in something else – for a cause must always be greater than the effect. In this sense, God is nothing – God *is not*, and accordingly is *no thing*. Yet, the One gives oneness to all beneath it, and thus acts as the “definer” of all, imparting to beings the determinations which allow them to be, to exist as this or that – while the One itself is no thing. All being is dependent upon, derived from, and determined by the One, and accordingly it is impossible for being to be first, to be primary.

Scholars, however, have attempted to conceive of Plotinus’ One not as non-being, but as infinite being relative to the finite being of the forms.⁶² Such a position, however, would be absurd for a Neoplatonist. For the very concept of “infinite being” violates that basic proposition of Neoplatonism, rooted in Plato himself, that to be is to be intelligible and to be finite. Moreover, insofar as the forms are being, it is impossible that their cause also is being – for a cause must be greater than its effects. If the first principle *is*, even if it *is* infinitely, then the forms would have to be something less than perfect being – but perfect being is precisely what they are, thus their cause must *not be*. As Etienne Gilson writes of Neoplatonic thought, “it is a general rule that the lower grades of reality *are* only because their cause *is not*.”⁶³

What, then, is a Christian Neoplatonist to do with this God beyond-being, when Scripture seems to identify God as being? Gilson asserts that a Christian metaphysics is necessarily a metaphysics which focuses on being as the first principle; each grade lower in the hierarchy “owes its own being to the fact that the first principle itself *is*”⁶⁴ – in contrast to Neoplatonic metaphysics, which Gilson calls the “meta-

⁶⁰ *En.* V.I.5.8-9.

⁶¹ *En.* V.I.5.

⁶² Lloyd Gerson, for example, maintains this position in his work, *Plotinus* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 26. Gerson states that Plotinus’ notion of the One as beyond being merely refers to the fact that the One is not a *limited* being (i.e. is not a form), not that the One does not possess being. For a similar position, see: John Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1967), 24-37. This interpretation of Plotinus would certainly place Plotinus’ concept of the One closer to the thought of Thomas Aquinas. Gilson sees this as an error which he attributes to the fact that many try to equate the Platonic/Plotinian good/One with the Christian God of being. *Being and Some Philosophers* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952), 24-29.

⁶³ Etienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952), 23 (emphasis added).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

physics of the One.”⁶⁵ For Gilson, there is no manner of reconciling these two metaphysics. Rather, to be a Christian metaphysician is, at its core, to refute the errors of Neoplatonism, to refute the Neoplatonic God beyond being, and, necessarily along with it, the Neoplatonic understanding of participation, i.e. the connections between the sensible order, the forms, and God. Gilson summarizes this view quite clearly: “Psychologically speaking, one cannot philosophize as a Neoplatonist, and believe as a Christian; logically speaking, one cannot, at one and the same time, be a Neoplatonist and a Christian.”⁶⁶

Yet, such a strict dichotomy between Neoplatonism and Christianity did not exist in the eight hundred years between Proclus and Thomas Aquinas. It is not until we arrive at the thirteenth century that we find a Christian philosopher who so definitively asserts that God is being to the effect of wholly eliminating from Christian thought the Neoplatonic understanding of God as beyond-being, and, along with it, the Neoplatonic concept of participation. In the intervening years, we find a series of Christian philosophers who, to a greater or lesser extent, fall under the influence of (pagan) Neoplatonism.

Augustine, for example, seems, at first glance, to follow Scripture to the letter in asserting that God is being. Yet, in speaking of creation’s relationship to God, Augustine indicates God as something more than being. Regarding, first of all, the way in which creatures reveal God through their *being*, Augustine writes:

I asked the sea and the deeps, and the creeping things, and they answered me: We are not thy God, seek above us.... And I replied unto all these, which stand so round about these doors of my flesh: Answer me concerning my God, since you are not he, answer me something of him. And they cried out with a loud voice: He made us.⁶⁷

Here, Augustine indicates that creatures show a connection to God through their very being inasmuch as God is the cause of their being.

Yet, Augustine goes on to say: “My questioning with them was my thought; and their answer was their beauty (*species*)” and later “their very nature (*natura*) says this.”⁶⁸ In these latter passages, it is clear that creatures bear a connection to God, not only through their being i.e. insofar as they owe him their existence, but also through their intelligible content, i.e. their *species* (translatable as either beauty or form) and their nature. Here, it is unclear whether this participation in God via the intelligible content of things is a direct participation, i.e. that God directly causes

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 31. Here, Gilson is thinking of Aquinas as the ideal Christian philosopher, since, in Aquinas, we find that perfect logical clarity in the concept of God as being. For Aquinas, God is not beyond being, but rather is infinite being, *esse*, above the finite beings of creation (*entia*). The forms, then, for Aquinas, are distinct from being, taken to be mere potentialities of being in relation to the pure act of *esse*. We will discuss this in further detail in chapter 5.

⁶⁷ Augustine, *Conf.* X.6.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

intelligibility, or if Augustine is speaking merely in a poetical manner. Moreover, it is also unclear whether Augustine maintains an equation of being and essence, or if he intends a distinction between the two. If the former is the case, Augustine would not be able to maintain that God is purely being, as someone like Aquinas does.

Augustine's seemingly Neoplatonic relationship between creatures and God appears more explicitly Neoplatonic when Augustine explains God's creative activity. For Augustine, God generates an internal word, i.e. the second person of the Trinity, which is one with him and which is then expressed as an exterior word, i.e. as creation⁶⁹ – this is analogous to when someone forms a word in one's mind and then expresses it audibly. With Augustine's concept of the interior word, we find something quite akin to the Plotinian Intellect, insofar as it is through the Word that God gives intelligibility to his creation – although Augustine is careful to identify the Word with God himself, so as not to hypostasize it.⁷⁰ Indeed, Augustine seems very much to indicate that God himself, through the Word, directly causes the intelligibility of things when he draws an analogy between God's causal power and the hearing of a word, using the word, *temetum*, as his example.⁷¹ Augustine explains that when someone hears this word, he recognizes it as a symbol of some meaning, which at first is unknown to him: the hearer accordingly recognizes "that it is not a mere sound, but that it signifies something."⁷² That which is signified, the "articulated *species*,"⁷³ makes itself known to the hearer through the symbol (e.g. the audible word, *temetum*), in order for him to be able to recognize the existence of the *species*.⁷⁴ Accordingly, the hearer goes beyond the mere stuff of the word, i.e. the sounds and letters, to knowledge of what is signified.⁷⁵ Augustine writes: "What more can be required for his greater knowledge, if all the letters and all the spaces of sound are already known, unless it shall have become known to him at the same time that it is a sign, and shall have moved him with the desire of knowing the thing of which it is the sign?"⁷⁶ The word *temetum* enters in through the senses while its hidden meaning is recognized by the mind although not fully known; analogously, so are the species of created things understood by the soul when it recognizes them as signs pointing back to God himself. According to this analogy with God's causality, we see again that lingering view that the very intelligible

⁶⁹ *De Trin.* XV.11.

⁷⁰ To do so would be to say that the second person of the Trinity, the Son or the Word, is inferior to the Father, which clearly goes against the basic Christian teaching that the three persons of the Trinity are equal. Additionally, to hypostasize the Intellect would posit a kind of Divinity between creation and God, which again would go against Christian teaching.

⁷¹ *Temetum* was a word for wine which was out of date by Augustine's time. *Trin.* X.1.2.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Note that Augustine uses the word "species" here, which I have provided in place of the translator's "form," since Augustine did not use the word "forma" but "species" which unlike "forma" means either beauty or form.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

content of things is caused directly by, and thus participates directly in, God himself – this content being not merely *that* these things exist, just as the letters and sounds of the word are not alone revelatory of the meaning, but precisely *what* things are, just as what is sought when hearing the word is the “species” of the word.

We see, moreover, Augustine’s tendency to incorporate Neoplatonism into his understanding of God in his, notably brief, discussion of the ideas in God’s mind in *de Diversis Quaestionibus*.⁷⁷ Here, we find in Augustine the “Christian Neoplatonic” view that the ideas are contained in some manner in God. While Augustine, however, does not go much into the details of this “containing,” the position nevertheless would be an odd one to maintain along with a God of being à la Aquinas, insofar as it would be unclear how a principle of being would be able to contain within *himself* the multiplicity of ideas of the intelligible nature of his creation.

From the above, we can see at least a hesitation on Augustine’s part to relinquish that (pagan) Neoplatonic understanding that some sort of divine principle (God, the hypostases, etc.) is revealed through the very intelligible content of sensible things. Yet, Augustine does not give us much more than a hint at how the forms, if *they* are being, are to be unified in God, i.e. in the Word. Thus, while Augustine certainly does name God as being, he does not apply to his understanding of participation all of the implications of that claim about God – such as we see Aquinas do in maintaining that participation in God occurs through the order of being alone. Augustine rather retains a quasi-Neoplatonic notion of participation, despite the fact that this might rather imply that God is beyond being.⁷⁸

Marius Victorinus, an older contemporary of Augustine, preserves Neoplatonism in his (Christian) metaphysics somewhat more systematically than Augustine. For Victorinus, God is called “being,” but, more properly, God is called “non-being.” In his *Liber de Generatione Verbi Divini*, Victorinus asks “What therefore may we call God?”⁷⁹ In answer to this question, Victorinus responds: “τὸ ὄν, ἢ τὸ μὴ ὄν (being and non-being).”⁸⁰ Victorinus continues:

But certainly we may call him ὄν, since he is the father of the things which are. But the father of the things which are is not being (τὸ ὄν)... [but rather] non-being (μὴ ὄν) may be called the cause of the things which are. For the cause is prior to those things of which it is the cause. Therefore, God is supreme ὄν (being), and just as He is supreme, God is called μὴ ὄν (non-being).⁸¹

⁷⁷ *Div. qu.* 46. For a discussion of this, particularly in relation to Aquinas, see: Vivian Boland, *Ideas in God According to Saint Thomas Aquinas: Sources and Synthesis* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 45–48.

⁷⁸ Regardless of these perhaps Neoplatonic tendencies in Augustine’s thought, Gilson praises Augustine for abandoning the Platonic God and embracing the true Christian teaching of God as being, what Gilson calls the “faultless rectitude of Augustine’s Christian feeling.” See: Etienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952), 31.

⁷⁹ *De Gen. Verb.* Vol. VIII, col. 1022. “Quid igitur dicimus Deum?” (my translation).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.* “Sed utique ipsum appellamus ὄν: quoniam eorum quae sunt, pater est. Set pater eorum quae sunt, non est τὸ ὄν... μὴ ὄν causam appellare. Causa enim prior est ab iis quorum causa est. Supremum ὄν igitur Deus est: et juxta quod supremum est, μὴ ὄν Deus dicitur” (my translation).

In this passage, Victorinus is making a twofold assertion about God: that he is being and is beyond-being, both being and non-being. On the one hand, God is called non-being insofar as he causes being and a cause cannot be identical in kind to its effect – here, Victorinus is simply following the Neoplatonic understanding of causation and participation. On the other hand, Victorinus extends Neoplatonic causation and participation to accommodate the name of God as being in Scripture. He reasons that because God is the cause of being, i.e. “the father of the things which are,” God also, in a sense, is being because there must be some likeness between a cause and its effects. The general notion, again Neoplatonic, is that the effect must in some way be in its cause, kindred to it, in order for the cause to be able to bring about the effect. Accordingly, being is in God as an effect is in a cause, and in this way, we may also call God being – although more properly he is called non-being. Insofar as Victorinus seems to indicate in these passages that God is beyond-being, God’s causal efficacy seems not to be restricted to the order of being. Rather, Victorinus’ notion of God would seem then to accommodate the Neoplatonic twofold participation via being and intelligibility – yet, now (as for Augustine) in God himself. Indeed, this is similar to what we saw indicated in Augustine, recalling the Neoplatonic notion of a God beyond being and, along with it, the possibility of a twofold participation of sensible things both via being and intelligibility.

My main point here is that in Augustine and Victorinus there is some hesitance to eliminate entirely Neoplatonic participation, and thus their naming of God as being seems far less definitive than we find in Aquinas. However, while the view that God is beyond-being is only hinted at by Augustine and just briefly described by Victorinus, Dionysius fully commits to this position. Indeed, Dionysius explicitly centers his metaphysics around a God who is most fundamentally beyond being and, at the same time, more systematically addresses the problem of collapsing the hypostases of the Neoplatonic system into one God.

Dionysius very clearly speaks of God as both being and as beyond-being. Explaining how God is beyond-being, he writes: “If, as is indeed the case, the good is above all being, then we are bound to say that what is above all form, gives form; that He who remains in Himself without essence is the acme of essence; that, being a lifeless reality, He is supreme life; that being a reality without intelligence, he is supreme wisdom, and so on...”⁸² Like any Neoplatonist, Dionysius follows the principle that to be (τὸ ὄν) is to be intelligible (τὸ νοητόν). Accordingly, in the sense that God is not being, he is also not intelligible, and so he is beyond all knowledge: “For if all knowledges are of beings and have their limit in beings, that which is beyond all being also transcends all knowledge.”⁸³ Thus, with regard to the question of knowing God, Dionysius writes: “[God] is superior to every expression and every knowledge,

⁸² DN IV.3.

⁸³ DN I.4.

and is altogether placed above mind and essence – being such as embraces and unites and comprehends and anticipates all things, but Itself is altogether incomprehensible to all.”⁸⁴

Yet, for Dionysius, God can also be called “being”: “[A]nd let us praise the good as veritable being, and giving essence to all things that be.”⁸⁵ In this passage, however, Dionysius does not name God as being in an unqualified way. Rather, this name of God (being) is used to express God’s relationship to being as its cause. As Dionysius writes: “[F]or the being (εἶναι) of all things is the Deity beyond being (ἡ ὑπὲρ εἶναι θεότης).”⁸⁶ Thus, God is not, but is the “being to things that be.”⁸⁷ In the most proper sense, God, as he was for Plotinus, is called beyond-being, beyond all that he causes.⁸⁸ However, like Victorinus, Dionysius calls God being in the qualified sense that God is the cause of being, and an effect is always present (or pre-contained) in its cause. In this way, remembering that being = intelligibility, Dionysius avoids hypostasizing the intelligibles;⁸⁹ i.e. inasmuch as Dionysius considers God to be the direct cause of being in all things, God is also then the direct cause of intelligibility. God thereby takes over the role of the Intellect and eliminates the need for the separate, mediating hypostasis.

Using the method of naming the cause by its effects, Dionysius extends the list of names which we give to God – taking a step beyond Augustine and Victorinus. Insofar, then, as God is the cause of life, truth, intellect, wisdom, etc., we may call him all of these other names: “the Age of things that be, Time of things coming into being, being of things howsoever being, Birth of things howsoever born.”⁹⁰ This does not mean that God is literally (i.e. in his essence) time, age, being, and birth. Rather, we call God by these names in the sense that *from him* “is age, and essence, and being, and time, and birth, and things born; the reality of things that be, and things howsoever existing and subsisting.”⁹¹ Similarly, Dionysius writes: “Wherefore, He is also called the King of the ages, since the whole of being both is, and is sustained, in Him and around Him. And He neither was, nor will be, nor became, nor becomes, nor will become – yea, rather neither is.”⁹² Thus, although God himself is not being or age or life, etc., we may call him being or we may call

⁸⁴ *DN* I.5.

⁸⁵ *DN* V.4.

⁸⁶ *HH* IV.1.

⁸⁷ *DN* V.4.

⁸⁸ It is important to note that here Dionysius uses the infinite verb εἶναι, as opposed to ὄν, making it all the more clear that God is not only beyond *beings* but also beyond the very act of being itself. This clearly indicates that Dionysius does not mean that God is “being beyond being” in the sense that he is perfect or infinite being beyond finite imperfect beings. *DN* V.4.

⁸⁹ This will be explained further in the following two sections.

⁹⁰ *DN* V.4.

⁹¹ *DN* V.4.

⁹² *DN* V.4.

him non-being; we may name him and we may not. God may be celebrated “without name and from every name.”⁹³

To the extent that Dionysius speaks of God as beyond being, he follows the Neoplatonists in using “the good” (or “the beautiful”) as the most proper name of God. Yet, Dionysius is also careful to clarify that being (or age, or life, etc.) is not something different or separate from the good/God:

[It is not] that the good is one thing and being another; and that Life is other than Wisdom; nor that the causes are many and that some deities produce one thing and others another, as superior and inferior; but that the whole good progressions and the Names of God, celebrated by us, are of one God; and that the one epithet [i.e. the good] makes known the complete providence of the one God, but that the others are indicative of His more general and more particular providences.⁹⁴

This understanding of the ways in which we may call God being, life, wisdom, etc. (i.e. all names and no names), will become clearer as we continue to see the causal efficacy of God as being, as wisdom, as life, etc., and to see why the good (i.e. beyond-being) is the most general and most central.

Inasmuch as Dionysius considers God to be not only the good beyond being but also the “being of things which be” (i.e. in a sense, himself the forms), Dionysius can re-conceive Neoplatonic participation as theophany; i.e. for Dionysius, creation is not only an appearance of the forms (in the manner of the “irradiations” posited by Proclus), but also a direct appearance of God. Of theophany Dionysius writes: “Now the all-wise Word of God (*Theologia*) naturally calls Theophany that particular vision which manifests the Divine similitude depicted in itself as a shape [i.e. the appearance] of the shapeless....”⁹⁵

From the first names of God, good and being, as discussed above, we can see that Dionysius is clearly naming God by looking to God’s effects. These names indicate more precisely what Dionysius calls the “providences” of God, each of which specifies a certain range of God’s causality in more specific or more general terms – the most proper name, i.e. the good (or the beautiful), indicating God’s broadest causal efficacy. Following the good and being, Dionysius calls God life inasmuch as he “is extended to all things living,” and wisdom as he is “extended to all the intellectual and rational and sensible.”⁹⁶ Dionysius thus considers that God’s causality stretches from the most specific providence which extends to the highest of creatures up to the broadest providence which extends to all creatures, even, as we shall see, to those which lack existence.

To be clear, none of these providences of God are separate powers. Rather, they are one power expressed in a more or less specific manner and render each creature

⁹³ *DN* I.5.

⁹⁴ *DN* V.2.

⁹⁵ *HH* IV.3.

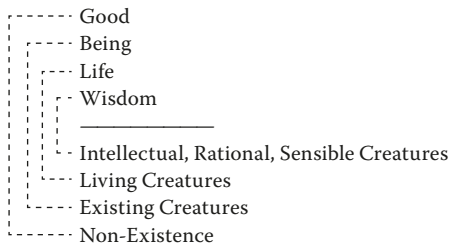
⁹⁶ *DN* V.1. This same thought is repeated again in *HH* IV.1.

as an appearance of God in a way proper to each. The divine providences, then, are seen as distinct and multiple only from the point of view of his creation, i.e. as they appear in creation, while in God there is neither division nor ranking. Thus, of the divine providences, Dionysius writes:

For It is not only cause of sustenance, or life, or perfection, – so that from this or that forethought alone the goodness above Name should be named, but It previously embraced in Itself all things existing, absolutely and without limit, by the complete benefactions of His one and all-creating forethought, and by all created things in joint accord It is celebrated and named.⁹⁷

Accordingly, even the name of the good is not wholly expressive of what God is because it only expresses one of God’s providences, albeit the most all-encompassing. Thus, it is more accurate still to refer to God as the Nameless insofar as “the Nameless” expresses God in himself as beyond his effects: “[T]he ‘Nameless’ befits the cause of all which is also above all.”⁹⁸

To summarize, then, the divine providences and their effects can be viewed in the following way, according to how they appear in the created order:



At the top of this chart, we see the most proper name of God: the good, which extends to things which both exist and things which do not exist.⁹⁹ *Beneath* this is being. While Dionysius calls God the good insofar as he extends to everything as cause, whether his effects be or not be, he calls God “being” insofar as God extends precisely and only to things which *are*: he is “the being of things that be” yet the “Deity beyond being.”¹⁰⁰ As himself “being,” God extends to all existing creation, even to those lacking knowledge, sensation, or even life. Dionysius writes: “All things without life, participate in It by their being.”¹⁰¹

God, named as being, causes not only the mere fact that something exists but also its intelligible nature, its essence. As Dionysius says, just as God is the “being of

⁹⁷ *Divine Names* I.VII.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ This would include matter, which is pure potency, as well as privations found in existing things. This latter point we will discuss in our final chapter on Bonaventure.

¹⁰⁰ *HH* IV.1.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

things which have being,¹⁰² he is “the essence of things that be.”¹⁰³ Here, Dionysius does not stray from that Platonic maxim that being = intelligibility. Yet, as a Christian philosopher, instead of hypostasizing the forms, Dionysius makes them one with God so that it is God himself who directly provides being and intelligibility to the sensible cosmos. However, how does Dionysius explain participation in God via the intelligibility of things, when the intelligibles are a multiplicity and God is one?

On the exact relationship between the forms and God, Dionysius does not say much but gives us a clue in the following: “For It is not only the cause of sustenance, or life, or perfection – so that from this or that forethought alone the goodness above Name should be named, but It previously embraced in Itself all things existing, absolutely and without limit, by the complete benefactions of His one and all creating forethought....”¹⁰⁴ Again, Dionysius writes “the cause of all things ... pre-contained in itself all beings, simply and indeterminately.”¹⁰⁵

In these passages, Dionysius indicates that God himself causes directly the intelligibility of all things, inasmuch as God pre-contains all intelligibility within himself as its cause: “... [God] is the Monad and Unit tri-subistent, sending forth His most kindly forethought to all things being, from the super-heavenly Minds to the lowest of the earth; as super-original Origin and Cause of every essence, and grasping all things super-essentially in a resistless embrace.”¹⁰⁶ Insofar as God is the cause of being, every instance of being, of intelligibility, within the created order is a revelation of God – of a God who is beyond being – and, thus, all of creation is an unfolding and differentiation of what was hidden and simple in God: “[T]he superessential Godhead, having fixed all the essence of things being, brought them into being.”¹⁰⁷ God for Dionysius is the “superunknown Isolation” and “Union” from whom there proceeds “distinctions” among his creation, i.e. “the goodly progressions and the manifestations of the Godhead.”¹⁰⁸ Any being, and with it any intelligibility, which a creature possesses is nothing more than the presence of God within it.

This, then, is the key foundational development which Dionysius makes upon pagan Neoplatonic thought: that one principle, not a series of hypostases, “contains” within itself and can be understood as the cause of all multiplicity. While for the pagan Neoplatonists certainly all multiplicity is caused by that which is itself single and unified, these causes were still themselves multiple insofar as there were three hypostases. Here, Dionysius eliminates the necessity of a three-tiered hierarchy of hypostases, by radicalizing what is perhaps the most foundational maxim in

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ *DN* I.3.

¹⁰⁴ *DN* I.8.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. This will be the foundational concept for Bonaventure in explaining the forms’ relationship to God.

¹⁰⁶ *HH* VII.7.

¹⁰⁷ *HH* IV.1.

¹⁰⁸ *DN* II.4.

Neoplatonic thought: that an effect resides in its cause. Moreover, in collapsing the hypostases more explicitly than we find in earlier Christian Neoplatonists, such as Augustine or Victorinus, Dionysius can provide an understanding of God and his providences which allows for participation both via being and intelligibility to occur immediately in God. For Dionysius, the providences of God do not need to be distinguished from one another as separate hypostases – there is only multiplicity, i.e. among God’s providences, from the point of view of human beings, who see only the effects of God, who see being expressed differently from goodness, and from wisdom, and from beauty, and from life, etc. However, from the point of view of the first cause these are all one – they need not be distinguished out into three. This is, then, precisely how Dionysius is able to collapse the hypostases into one God: by asserting that what the pagan Neoplatonists were seeing as multiple is rather unified, i.e. that they were examining causes in a manner which is rather appropriate to effects – we rank *effects* into hierarchies and see them as number, but in approaching a *first cause*, we have to abandon such a way of thinking. Indeed, this is no cosmetic fix made to appropriate pagan Neoplatonism into Christian monotheism. Rather, Dionysius is drawing out the implications of a metaphysical position already held in pagan Neoplatonism – implications which turn out to be wholly compatible with Christian monotheism.

While Bonaventure is not concerned with the task of synthesizing Neoplatonism with Christianity, as Dionysius is, it is Dionysius’ basic view of the relationship between being and God which will be key for Bonaventure. In building his own ontological hierarchy, in which Aristotle provides the basic claim that it is forms which occupy the rank of being, Bonaventure follows Dionysius and uses him as a key source and authority in then asserting that it is the good which is God’s most proper name and that we call him “being” in only a qualified sense, i.e. in the sense that he is the cause of being. Thus, while Dionysius himself is working almost exclusively with Neoplatonic thought, he comes to a conclusion which Bonaventure sees in neat accordance with his own decidedly Aristotelian ontology – this making Dionysius, often more than Augustine, a useful source for Bonaventure.

3. ARISTOTLE VIA AVICENNA AND THE EARLY FRANCISCAN TRADITION, OR WHAT EXACTLY IS ARISTOTELIANISM?

Bonaventure is far from the first generation of medieval thinkers to have access to the thought of Aristotle – and indeed is not the first even within the Franciscan tradition itself. A fruitful new field of research which has developed over the last fifteen years or so has been a more detailed study of the way in which Aristotle was received by the Franciscans before Bonaventure via their use of Avicenna. A number of scholars have found solid evidence that far from simply being an orthodox reiteration of Augustinian views – which would be philosophically uninteresting

– the earlier Franciscans were actively synthesizing Augustine with Avicenna in ways which indeed often seem much more Avicennian than Augustinian.¹⁰⁹ The characterization of this period as “Avicennizing-Augustinianism” was first made in fact by Etienne Gilson in his aptly titled, “Les source gréco-arabes de l’augustinisme avicennisant” (1929-30).¹¹⁰ More recent scholarship has identified a key set of positions held by these “Avicennized Augustinians,” which are indicative of their general historical and philosophical attitudes: (1) a plurality of substantial forms; (2) a body-soul dualism, resolved with the form of corporeity; and (3) divine illumination, which we will leave aside for our purposes in this chapter.¹¹¹ In addition to this we can add a position which is not found in Avicenna, but which is championed by the Franciscans, (4) spiritual matter – whose inspiration is found rather in the texts of Avicenna. We should also lay on the table for discussion a position which is found in Avicenna but perhaps not so forcefully in the early Franciscans, which is (5) the indifference of essence – a doctrine which is adopted certainly by the Dominican, Thomas Aquinas, in some form or another, but which only perhaps has an echo in the Franciscan *quo/quod est* distinction.

To tackle these topics in the above order, I would like to question first of all the assumption that a doctrine of plurality of substantial forms, in addition to being a “doctrine” at all (particularly in Bonaventure’s thought), is inherently un-Aristotelian. First of all, the claim that Bonaventure held a doctrine of a plurality of forms is based more on the absence of a doctrine than it is on the presence of one. By this I mean that Bonaventure is often said to maintain a plurality doctrine simply because he never endorses a unicity doctrine. However, he never argues for either position or even addresses the question of whether there is one substantial form or many.¹¹² This is in part because during Bonaventure’s time in Paris, the unicity doctrine was not such an issue – and did not become one until the time of John Peckham at Oxford, who then addressed the issue head-on contra the views of Thomas Aquinas.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ For a detailed summary of the history of the reception of Avicenna in scholastic thought see: Amos Bertolacci, “On the Latin Reception of Avicenna’s Metaphysics before Albertus Magnus: An Attempt at Periodization” in *The Arabic, Hebrew and Latin Reception of Avicenna’s Metaphysics* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 197–223.

¹¹⁰ Étienne Gilson, “Les sources gréco-arabes de l’augustinisme avicennisant,” *Archive d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen Age* 4 (1929–30): 5–149.

¹¹¹ Schumacher targets these as the key issues as well, building on Gilson: Lydia Schumacher, “Christian Platonism in the Medieval West,” in *Christian Platonism* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2021), 183–206.

¹¹² For this kind of reconstruction of Bonaventure’s doctrine of a plurality of substantial forms, see: Richard Dales, *The Problem of the Rational Soul in the Thirteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 99–107. To be clear, I ultimately do agree with the view that Bonaventure does endorse a doctrine of a plurality of substantial forms, as I will argue in chapter 6. To the contrary, and in evidence of the relative ambiguity of Bonaventure’s position, some scholars have argued that Bonaventure implicitly endorses a unicity doctrine not a pluralist one. See: John F. Quinn, *The Historical Constitution of St. Bonaventure’s Philosophy* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1973), 236–317.

¹¹³ For a more in-depth history of this debate between Peckham and Aquinas, see the introduction to my book, *An Introduction to the Metaphysical Thought of John Peckham* (Milwaukee, WI: Mar-

The key reason why scholars consider that Bonaventure would (not *did*) endorse a plurality of substantial forms is the fact that he seems to consider light to be the substantial form of all bodies – and since not everything in the world is simply and exclusively a light, this implies that Bonaventure would admit of at least two substantial forms: light and whatever other more specific form it is that makes some particular substance not merely a light, e.g. cat, dog, horse, etc. This, however, is not a great deal of evidence – at least as it has been presented in scholarship. Quite to the contrary, John Francis Quinn makes the argument that Bonaventure actually does implicitly endorse a *unicity* doctrine by attempting to show that Bonaventure does not consider light to be a substantial form at all, thereby pulling the rug out from under the argument that Bonaventure would have to side against his contemporary, Thomas Aquinas, in the debate. We will discuss this issue, of course, in much more detail in chapter 6, but for now it suffices to say that Bonaventure did not come down hard and fast on this issue to such a great extent that it would characterize his view as non-Aristotelian – were the plurality doctrine non-Aristotelian in the first place.

However, it isn't. Aristotle himself makes no mention of something called a "substantial form," and should we take the "substantial predicates" of the *Categories* as being something like what Aristotle would consider a substantial form, it is clear that he admits not only of species but also of genus – i.e. *both* species and genus are secondary *substance*, even though species is perhaps "more" substance than genus. Indeed, the division which Aristotle makes when it comes to substance in the *Categories* is not between species as substantial and genus as non-substantial, but between species *and* genus as substantial and the other nine *Categories* as being non-substantial, i.e. as being accidental. And it is precisely this doctrine from the *Categories* which Bonaventure makes explicit use of in developing his own view of substance and accident – as we will see in chapter 4. Thus, a unicity doctrine is not something which is found in Aristotle, but which is found in some medieval *interpretations* of Aristotle, e.g., in Thomas Aquinas', but not in Bonaventure's – or in Avicenna's.

Now one might say that perhaps because Bonaventure's reading of Aristotle is sometimes in accordance with Avicenna's, we should say that he is influenced by Avicenna. To this, one can only reply with a "perhaps." Insofar as Bonaventure does not make much explicit use of Avicenna, it is indeed difficult to say with certainty one way or another. However, as we will discuss momentarily, Bonaventure's view of form is quite different from Avicenna's, which would perhaps not make Avicenna

quette University Press, 2023). For a more general history of where different figures stood, see: Robert Pasnau, "Form and Matter," in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2014), 635–646. For the discussion of the thinkers who held the pluralist position, see esp. pp. 644–646. Those who maintain the pluralist position: Avicenna, Ibn Gabirol, Henry of Ghent, Duns Scotus, and Ockham. In addition to Aquinas, those who argued in favor of the unicity of substantial form include John Buridan, Albert of Saxony, and Francisco Suárez.

the first place where Bonaventure would look for an interpretation of Aristotle on this point. Thus, if there is an influence from Avicenna, I would say it would not be so formative in Bonaventure's reading of Aristotle, but simply an external affirmation of something which Bonaventure already saw developed in the *Categories*.

The question of a body-soul dualism admits of a similar assessment as the plurality of forms does – it is not something which is inherently Aristotelian, but inherently *Thomistic*. Let's outline the different positions one could have in this debate. First of all, one could be Thomas Aquinas and understand that the soul is the form of the body and thereby, like any form in Aquinas' ontology, the soul is likewise inherent in and dependent upon the matter in which it is instantiated. Thus, without an act of God, it is not possible that the soul exist as separate from the body – or, put differently, the immortality of the soul is not something which can be grasped by philosophy alone. The downside of this position is that it appeals ultimately to a doctrine of faith in order to preserve the immortality of the soul. The upside is that it accounts fully for the unity of soul and body, at least as it is in this life. Alternatively, one could be Avicenna in this debate and maintain that the soul and body are two distinct substances which are only *accidentally* brought together. The soul is utterly simple, and the body is “this particular body” by virtue of a composition of matter and a form of bodily nature – namely, a form of corporeity. This position, while sacrificing the neat unity of soul and body, can maintain philosophically that the soul is immortal. It has the added upshot in a Christian context that it also can resolve another hotly debated theological issue: that Christ's body remains his body in the interim between his dying on the cross and being resurrected, despite the fact his soul has left the body. This view of Avicenna is precisely the view which is then endorsed by the *Summa Halensis*, as it is written by John de la Rochelle,¹¹⁴ as well as by later Franciscans such as John Peckham.¹¹⁵

Where, then, does Aristotle stand? While Schumacher attributes the soul-body dualism of the authors of the *Summa Halensis* to Avicenna, she also does well to point out that John de la Rochelle did not in fact see himself as interpreting Avicenna *per se*, but attributed this view to Aristotle.¹¹⁶ John de la Rochelle here provides quite a creative interpretation of Aristotle's somewhat infamous claim that the soul is the form of the body (which seems to imply “inseparable from the body”) in order to justify that Aristotle still maintains a separable soul, by outlining the different senses in which one could mean “form.” The question one could raise here is whether or not John and Avicenna's interpretations are not actually correct – and perhaps whether it is Aquinas' interpretation which is wrong. Ultimately, in

¹¹⁴ For a summary of John's position, see Lydia Schumacher “Christian Platonism in the Medieval West,” in *Christian Platonism* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2021), 195–7.

¹¹⁵ For Peckham's position, see again my book: *An Introduction to the Metaphysics of John Peckham* (Marquette, WI: Marquette Univ. Press, 2022).

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

response to such a question, I would say: neither is correct. But, to be kinder, both are *understandable* interpretations of Aristotle's emphatically unclear position. In contemporary scholarship, Aristotle's position is indeed far from understood as black and white, as so much of medieval scholarship portrays it.¹¹⁷ Indeed, there are numerous contemporary articles written that assert, rather, that Aristotle does consider at least a "part" of the soul as separable from the body¹¹⁸ – and many scholars have gone so far as to characterize Aristotle himself as a proponent of a strict mind-body dualism.¹¹⁹

The best evidence for the claim that (at least part of) the soul is separable is located at *De Anima* 413b, where Aristotle entertains just this: "The further questions, whether each of these faculties is a soul, or part of a soul, and, if a part, whether a part in the sense that it is only separable in thought or also in fact, are in some cases easy of solution, but in some they involve difficulty." And his response to his proposed difficulty is that certainly the souls of plants and animals, as well as the parts of the human soul which are held in common in plants and animals, do not admit of separation. However, "...in the case of the mind and the thinking faculty nothing is yet clear, but it seems to be a distinct species of soul, and *it alone admits of being separated*, as the immortal from the perishable. But it is quite clear from what we have said that the other parts of the soul are not separable..." Thus, a relatively simple argument on the part of the interpreter takes form: Aristotle may maintain that the soul is inseparable and mortal, but the *intellect* is separable and immortal. However, this is but one comment which Aristotle makes – and he makes it in a work which appears to approach the soul for the most part from a *functionalist* perspective. Thus, we arrive at a paradox – and, at that, one for which there are different approaches in resolving. While some scholars, particularly those who advocate a "developmental" reading of Aristotle's corpus, consider this simply to be a nod to Aristotle's earlier thought or to the traditional theological view that the soul endures after death, there is a great deal of scholarship which takes the view to be authentic – and indeed that it highlights a tension in Aristotle's work which should be, and is, an important topic of study.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ For an obvious example of this treatment of both Aristotle and Plato, see: Etienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1952). For Gilson's treatment of Aristotle's view of being and substance, which he claims himself is self-evident from the texts, see pp. 46–64. Far from it, Aristotle's view of substance is one of the most debated topics in contemporary scholarship. Gilson, clearly, is a scholar of medieval not ancient philosophy, but the point here is that it has been considered valid in medieval scholarship to present Aristotle's positions as if they were entirely evident from the text and not open to a variety of interpretations.

¹¹⁸ Fred D. Miller, "Aristotle on the Separability of Mind," in *The Oxford Handbook of Aristotle*, ed. Christopher Shields (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2012).

¹¹⁹ See, for example, Robert Heineman, "Aristotle and the Mind-Body Problem," *Phronesis* 35, no. 1 (1990): 83–102.

¹²⁰ O'Meara, for example, argues against the view that Aristotle's apparent endorsement of a separable soul (or intellect) in some respect is not merely a religious "relic" which finds its way into Ar-

Moreover, in further opposition to the view that Aristotle does not have room for a separable intellect in his philosophy, there have been studies also of Aristotle's fragments, in which he seems to have developed this view at length – and indeed formulated it in a manner similar to that in *De Anima*.¹²¹ Such a view we find developed by Abraham P. Bos, who addresses head-on the issue of the separability of the intellect in the *Eudemus*, and is also one which would be supported very much by my own work on Aristotle's fragments.¹²²

Thus, while I do have to say I have a dog in this fight, I would agree with the side of the debate which considers the moderate position that while Aristotle treats the soul itself in a kind of proto-functionalist fashion, he nonetheless maintains the intellect is separable. And such a view is neither that which is proposed by Avicenna and John de la Rochelle, nor that which is proposed by Aquinas. It is, however, something which lies in between the two and can easily be seen to lend itself to both interpretations. Given the other alternative – i.e. that my endorsed reading of Aristotle is incorrect and Aristotle is in fact the pure functionalist that much of contemporary literature considers him to be – it is at the very least fair to say that Aristotle's position is very far from clear on this point and could be interpreted in a number of different ways: (1) the contemporary dualist way, (2) the contemporary “only the intellect is separable” way, (3) the functionalist way, (4) Aquinas' way, and (5) Avicenna's way – at the very least.¹²³

If, moreover, we do entertain the view of Aristotle which I am endorsing, it should also be noted that such a view does not have the need of a form of corporeity, insofar as the form of the body is still the soul. Thereby, like Aquinas' interpretation, it avoids the worry of too strict of a soul-body dualism which would threaten the intimate connection between soul and body in this life. On the other hand, it admits of the same criticism that Aquinas' does with respect to the body of Christ – no worry at all for Aristotle, but quite a large one for a medieval interpreter of Aristotle. Thus, it makes sense that the early Franciscans, such as John de la Rochelle, favored greatly the interpretation provided by Avicenna. Moreover, such an interpretation which incorporates a form of bodily nature is also not without some kind of prec-

istotle's mature philosophy, but actually a central view of Aristotle's thought. See: Dominic J. O'Meara, “Remarks on Dualism and the Definition of Soul in Aristotle's *De Anima*,” *Museum Helveticum* 44, no. 3 (1987): 168–174.

¹²¹ Abraham P. Bos, “Aristotle's Doctrine of the Instrumental Body of the Soul,” *Philosophia Reformata* 64 (1999): 37–51.

¹²² Franziska van Buren, “Circular Motion and Circular Thought,” *Apeiron* 56, no. 1 (2023): 15–42.

¹²³ Here, we should also note that there is a bit of an issue regarding terminology: to a great extent what Aristotle is calling “intellect” is more similar to what the medievals are calling soul in this context. What Aristotle is asserting is compounded with the body is the soul considered as capable of sensation, appetite, and all of the lower functions of the embodied soul that we share with animals. These are the kinds of activities for which one needs precisely a body in order to engage in them – and it would be *prima facie* odd to maintain the contrary. However, this does not eliminate that soul, now considered *qua* intellect, is still separable.

edent in Aristotle's own thought – such as we find in recent scholarship attempts made by scholars to show the centrality of Aristotle's theory of body to his physics and hylomorphic theory.¹²⁴ Thus, while I would consider the Avicennian reading certainly to be *highly* interpretive (indeed more interpretive than Aquinas'), it also is not altogether an absurd or *prima facie* incorrect reading.

None of this, however, addresses where Bonaventure himself stands. While it is not my purpose here to give a full exposition of Bonaventure's account of the relationship between the soul and the body – such would require its own study – here, we can sketch out a few points in Bonaventure's view to see on which side of the debate he seems to stand.¹²⁵ First of all – and this should be of great importance to us – Bonaventure, in stark contrast to the earlier Franciscans, and to his student John Peckham, has no account of a form of corporeity. In fact, scholarship has noted it as emphatically absent from Bonaventure's thought.¹²⁶ This should alert us to the fact that Bonaventure is departing from the Avicennian reading of the earlier Franciscans.

Bonaventure proposes instead that soul and body are two distinct substances made into one unity by the form of humanity. Soul without body is not human nor is body without soul – but they are brought together by a further form, humanity.¹²⁷ This does not however preclude that both the soul and the body of the human being can endure after (or exist before) their union. In this way, Bonaventure's view avoids the strict mind-body dualism of the earlier Franciscans insofar as he has one single form which unites soul and body as one substance – and this is the benefit indeed of avoiding a form of corporeity, which would provide us with two distinct substances.

However, this would open Bonaventure's position up to the same criticism as that of Thomas Aquinas regarding the body of Christ. Moreover, Bonaventure, like Aquinas considers that we can say that the soul is the form of the body – but not in the strict hylomorphic sense which Aquinas takes it to mean. Indeed, in the most precise way, the form of this thing that we call “human being” is not “soul” – but simply the form of “human being.” Nonetheless, it is proper for Bonaventure

¹²⁴ See, for example, Christian Pfeiffer, *Aristotle's Theory of Body* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2018).

¹²⁵ For a good study of the relationship between soul and body in Bonaventure and its connection to his doctrine of universal hylomorphism, see: Thomas Osborne, “Unibilitas: The Key to Bonaventure's Understanding of Human Nature,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 37, no. 2 (April 1999): 227–250. See also Magdalena Bieniak's discussion of Osborne, in *The Soul-Body Problem at Paris Ca. 1200-1250: Hugh of St. Cher and his Contemporaries* (Leuven: Leuven Univ. Press, 2010), 38–40.

¹²⁶ See: C. O'Leary, *The Substantial Composition of Man According to St. Bonaventure* (Washington, DC: The Catholic Univ. of America Press, 1931), 70–85.

¹²⁷ For Bonaventure's views, see: *In Sent.* II, d. 25, a. u, q. 6, p. 622a-b; *In Sent.* II, d. 1, p. 2, a. 3. q. 2, p. 50b; *In Sent.* III, d. 2, a. 2, q. 3, p. 48b; *In Sent.* III, d. 21, art. 1, q. 3, p. 441a-b. For an explanation of Bonaventure's position, see: Richard Dales, *The Problem of the Rational Soul in the Thirteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 99–107; Philotheus Boehner, *The History of the Franciscan School: John of Rupella and Saint Bonaventure* (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1943), 68–69.

to call the soul the “form of the body” in the sense that it is the cause, principle, and actuality of the body:

For since the soul is capable of beatitude and is immortal, but nevertheless is united with a mortal body and therefore can be separated from it, it is not only the form of this body, but also a substance in itself, and hence it is not only the perfection (entelecheia or form or act) of a body, but also its mover. Hence the soul not only perfects or brings to completion a human body by its essence, but also moves it by its power. Brev. II, 9; t. V, p. 227.¹²⁸

Without sounding anything like the justification which John de la Rochelle gives in the *Summa Halensis*, Bonaventure’s understanding of how the soul is the cause and act of the body does sound very much like Aristotle’s explanation: “But the soul is equally the cause in each of the three senses to which we have referred; for it is the cause in the sense of being that from which motion is derived, in the sense of the purpose or final cause, and as being the substance of all bodies that have souls” (*De An.* 514b10-14).

The benefits of Bonaventure’s view are that, first of all, he avoids the mind-body dualism of the Avicennian view by avoiding the form of corporeity and instead positing one single form which unites soul and body into one substance: the form of humanity. Secondly, now in contrast with Aquinas, because Bonaventure also seems to admit of a plurality of substantial forms, he can say both that the soul has a form (i.e. the soul, as a composite of form and matter, is an individual instance of the universal form of soul in general), and that it also takes on the substantial form of “humanity” (i.e. by virtue of its connexion with the body in this life, it is also an individual instance of the universal form of humanity in general). Aquinas, on the other hand, cannot do this and is forced to choose one single substantial form, namely, the soul, which is then inseparable from its substrate – except by an act of God. Thus, we can characterize Bonaventure’s view on the union of soul and body as indeed an interpretation of Aristotelian positions which strikes a middle ground between that of Aquinas and that of Avicenna. To a great extent, then, Bonaventure is approximating more closely the contemporary reading of Aristotle which, as I mentioned earlier, is likewise a middle ground between the two opposing positions of Aquinas and Avicenna/the early Franciscan school.

Moreover, Bonaventure’s view, as I have presented it, should call to any medievalist’s mind the account of the relationship between soul and body developed by Duns Scotus. Scotus, like Bonaventure, seeks to achieve a unified view of body and soul precisely by utilizing a doctrine of a plurality of forms (or in Bonaventure’s case, simply an account of forms inspired by the *Categories*), while abandoning the form of corporeity. Thus, it seems quite clear that Bonaventure on this issue is not

¹²⁸ For a very good explanation of Bonaventure’s view of the composition of soul and body, see: Philotheus Boehner, *The History of the Franciscan School, Part 2: John of Rupella and St. Bonaventure* (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1944), 68–72.

adhering to the Avicennianism of his forerunners – yet, nor is he using Aristotle in a manner similar to Aquinas. Rather, on this front as well, he is defining a third option for this period of scholasticism, and one which anticipates rather the view of later Franciscans.

However, I do not wish to reduce Bonaventure’s position to that of Duns Scotus. Indeed, there is one very important difference between the two: universal hylomorphism. And this brings us to our penultimate topic. Duns Scotus, unlike Bonaventure, does not maintain universal hylomorphism – and so in this context, while he maintains, very much like Bonaventure, that the soul is a substance which can exist without the body, his understanding of what this substance is differs from Bonaventure’s. For Scotus, the soul is a *forma individualis*, which does not need matter to exist. For Bonaventure, such a notion of an individual form which is prior to any combination with matter is an absurdity – as we will discuss in chapter 6.

For Bonaventure – and this is indeed in agreement with the earlier Franciscan tradition – the soul is a combination of a form and matter, but of precisely *spiritual* matter.¹²⁹ This is indeed a view which Bonaventure is taking up from Avicenna, and which likewise was endorsed in the *Summa Halensis*.¹³⁰ Thus, I am not here going to attempt at all to say that Bonaventure derives his view of spiritual matter from Aristotle – he emphatically does not. However, I’d like to point out that it is not a view without precedent in Aristotle (as I will discuss momentarily), and one which could be understood as fitting in with some of Aristotle’s views regarding the soul.

Regardless of such a precedent, however, as we saw above, there is a certain tension in Aristotle’s thought regarding the immortality of the soul – which he seems to endorse but not explain in great detail. Indeed, Scotus and Aquinas’ views, which attempt to say that it is the form alone which endures after death, both ultimately appeal to faith to resolve the issue, i.e. both say that philosophy does not provide a real account of how and why the soul could exist without the body. One could make this criticism of Aristotle – indeed, this is how it has been formulated in contemporary scholarship, i.e. that Aristotle in saying that the soul is immortal is expressing simply a theological conviction (perhaps a vestige from the “Platonic years” of his youth, as Jaeger considers)¹³¹ or making a nod to traditional Greek religion instead of substantiating the view philosophically. Thus, in contemporary scholarship, there have been – as we discussed above – different ways of trying to resolve this tension in Aristotle.

One such way was to look at Aristotle’s fragments. In the fragments, Aristotle seems to endorse not only that the intellect is immortal, but also that it is composed

¹²⁹ For how Bonaventure develops his view of spiritual matter, see: *In Sent.* II, d. 3, p. 1, a. 1, q. 1, pp. 89–91; *In Sent.* II, d. 3, p. 1, a. 1, q. 3, pp. 95–98.

¹³⁰ *SH* II, n. 60, p. 75.

¹³¹ Werner Jaeger, *Aristoteles: Grundlegung einer Geschichte seiner Entwicklung* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1923).

of some kind of “fifth element” – “the unnamed” (ἀκατονόμαστον) or ἐνδελέχεια (“continuous-ness”) – or simply, “aether.” This being the case, then Aristotle, very much like Bonaventure, also maintained a composition of form and a quasi-material principle – not in the soul per se – but in that part of the soul which both the fragments of the *Eudemus* and the (supposedly) later *De Anima* consider to be separable: the intellect. Study of Aristotle’s fragments has only recently in scholarship received renewed interest,¹³² so one hopes further research on this question will occur, but nonetheless it suffices to say that contemporary scholarship has arrived at a solution to a paradox in Aristotle not dissimilar to Bonaventure’s. Bonaventure likewise sees something missing from Aristotle’s account of the soul – insofar as he has no access to the fragments – and so he used Avicenna’s account of spiritual matter to resolve such a paradox. Likewise, contemporary scholarship in its attempts to resolve this very same paradox has looked to the fragments to find an answer, and they came upon a strikingly similar one: aether. Thus, while spiritual matter is not something which Bonaventure would have found in Aristotle’s corpus, it is quite a fitting concept to bring into play with Aristotle’s theory of the soul – surprisingly fitting insofar as something akin to spiritual matter seems to have been endorsed by Aristotle at one point or another with his view of the fifth element. Moreover, I think this point highlights a comment I made in the introduction to this book, where I characterized Bonaventure’s use of non-Aristotelian ideas as being a kind of picking and choosing of ideas of Platonic sources which would fit in with or complement the basic ontology which Bonaventure pulls out of Aristotle first and foremost. While we will certainly see other instances of Bonaventure utilizing this method, I think this issue concerning spiritual matter already highlights a good example of how Bonaventure uses non-Aristotelian sources to resolve tensions found in Aristotle’s texts.

The final topic I would like to discuss is now the question of whether Bonaventure’s view of form is strictly Aristotelian or perhaps is influenced also by Avicenna. This is, in fact, the point on which I consider Avicenna and Bonaventure to be most different, and this will be covered in detail in chapter 4 of the present book. Thus, I do not want to go into all of the intricacies of Bonaventure’s view here, but only to discuss Avicenna’s position and outline the main thrust of Bonaventure’s point of departure from such a view.

Avicenna maintains, as it is commonly called, a notion of the “indifference of essence” – captured by the English maxim “quiddity is only quiddity.”¹³³ By this notion, Avicenna means that being a quiddity, or an essence, does not equate with

¹³² For example, the recent edited volume: António Pedro Mesquita, Simon Noriega-Olmos and Christopher John Ignatius Shields, eds. *Revisiting Aristotle’s Fragments: New Essays on the Fragments of Aristotle’s Lost Works* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020).

¹³³ Avicenna, *Ilāhiyyāt* V.1.2.: “fa-l-farasiyya fi nafsi-hā farasiyya faqat” or as it is rendered in Latin “equinitas ergo in se est equinitas tantum.”

“having existence” – thus leading to Avicenna’s view being called a doctrine of “pure essence” insofar as essence is essence “before” it acquires existence. Or, as it is taken up particularly by Aquinas, it is known as a “distinction between essence and existence.” While contemporary scholarship has brought into question whether Avicenna intended his distinction between essence and existence to be real or conceptual (or something in between), as it is received by Aquinas, it is certainly a real distinction – and it seemed so generally to the scholastic mind. The existence which essences acquire is either existence in a sensible thing or in the mind – in the sensible thing, the essence is particular, and in the mind it is (abstracted as a) universal. This is moreover the position emphatically endorsed by Thomas Aquinas, as we will discuss in detail in chapter 2 – and it is the view which Bonaventure explicitly addresses and rejects. Thus, here I would say that it is Aquinas who is the Avicennian in this debate, not Bonaventure, insofar as Bonaventure quite adamantly opposes a view such as Avicenna’s as having an ontological weight. Further, even if we are to take Avicenna’s view as being not quite so radical as Aquinas’, Bonaventure’s emphatic equation between being and essence, as well as his development of two distinct types of extra-mental forms, rules out the characterization of his ontology of form as “Avicennian.”

For Bonaventure, being and (universal) form are intrinsically linked. Indeed, without positing an extra-mental universal which has existence in itself, for Bonaventure, there is no way to provide a grounding for human knowledge. On this point, he argues against the view that maintains that essence exists whenever it exists in a particular thing and that from this existing in the particular, the mind can abstract to the universal essence, which thereby exists only in the mind. Rather, for Bonaventure, the extra-mental existing thing is the universal essence, to which the mind conforms when it knows any universal kind.

To a great extent, and particularly to a contemporary reader, the view which Bonaventure presents as his opposition, i.e. one which we could characterize as “conceptualist,” brings to mind not only the theory of universals in Avicenna, but also that in Aristotle. While Aristotle does not go so far as to posit a doctrine of “pure essence,” as Avicenna does, or a real distinction between essence and existence, as Aquinas does, for Aristotle, forms also seem to exist qua particulars in particular sensible things, and this is sufficient for the mind to abstract, via the agent intellect, to a universal.

First of all, this is but *a* reading of Aristotle – far from being *the* reading. Yet, we do find some medieval scholars equating a Thomistic (or, in this case, also an Avicennian) reading of Aristotle with what Aristotle is actually saying. In the realm of contemporary scholarship in ancient philosophy, however, if one were to try to single out the most hotly debated question in Aristotle’s texts, his theory of forms certainly would be a contender. Indeed, essentially every possibility for the ontological status of forms is maintained by one scholar or another: (1) that forms are

universals, not particulars;¹³⁴ (2) that forms are particulars, not universals;¹³⁵ (3) that there is one kind of form which is particular and one kind which is universal;¹³⁶ and (4) that each form is both (or indeterminately) universal and particular.¹³⁷

Now, to map these readings onto their medieval counterparts, we can see that Avicenna's view, if we take "forms" in this context to be "extra-mental forms," would be most similar to option (2). Forms outside of the mind only exist in sensible particulars and therefore are particular. When it comes to Aquinas now, I should be more precise in noting that Aquinas is in fact not himself so precise – at least not as precise as Avicenna. For Aquinas, here rather like Aristotle, it is somewhat unclear whether the extra-mental form is universal or particular – essentially falling best into position (4). We will discuss this, of course, in much more detail in the chapter on Aquinas, but here we can make a few preliminary comments. If one maintains that the extra-mental form is universal and is inherent in the particular thing – and this applies to Aristotle as much as to Aquinas – then one opens oneself up to the objection raised in the *Parmenides*, which we mentioned earlier. If one universal term is (literally) *in* the many, it is thereby made into many and is no longer one. Thus, a kinder reading of Aquinas would not attribute such a view to him. Aquinas could also very well have maintained position (4), that the extra-mental form is indeterminately universal and particular, but this is even more emphatically a bad position to maintain insofar as it is essentially self-contradictory, as the charge has been laid against Aristotle. It seems that Aquinas probably maintained a position most similar to (2), but he is not entirely clear on this point himself.

Bonaventure maintains, not surprisingly, none of these positions. At most, we can say he is a combination of positions (1) and (3). Since we have often taken recourse in our parallels to Duns Scotus, we can say that Duns Scotus would maintain the view more similar to a "pure" position (3), insofar as he maintains both a common nature and an individual form. Bonaventure likewise maintains a universal

¹³⁴ See, for example, G.E.L. Owen, "The Platonism of Aristotle," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 51 (1965): 136–137; and his "Particular and General," *PAS* (1978–79).

¹³⁵ Gail Fin, "Plato and Aristotle on Form and Substance," *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philosophical Society* 29 (1983): 23–47; and Jennifer Whiting, "Form and Individuation in Aristotle," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (1986): 359–377.

¹³⁶ According to this reading, Aristotle uses form sometimes to refer to a universal species and sometimes to refer to an individual essence. See: J. Driscoll, "Eide in Aristotle's Earlier and Later Theories of Substance," in *Studies in Aristotle*, ed. D.J. O'Meara (Washington, DC: The Catholic Univ. of America Press, 1981), 129–59; Michael Loux, "Form Species and Predication in *Metaphysics Z, H, and Θ*," *Mind* 88 (1979), 1–23; Charlotte Witt, *Aristotle on Substance* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1990); Alan Code, "The Aporematic Approach to Primary Being in *Metaphysics Z*," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Suppl. 10 (1984): 1–20.

¹³⁷ R.D. Sykes, "Form in Aristotle: Universal or Particular," *Philosophy* 50, no. 193 (1975): 311–331; and Charlotte Witt, *Aristotle on Substance* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1990); as well as Michael Woods, "Form, Species, and Predication in Aristotle," *Synthese* 96, no. 3 (1993): 399–415. While Woods sees this position as a positive in Aristotle and uses it to respond to Loux, Sykes uses this reading to come to the conclusion that Aristotle's position is self-contradictory. Bonaventure comes to the conclusion that such a reading of Aristotle is incorrect precisely because it is self-contradictory.

and singular form, but he – unlike Scotus – explicitly says that the singular form is not really a form. Rather, only the universal is really a form. Thus, Bonaventure is introducing for the contemporary scholar of Aristotle a fifth option: Aristotle maintains that only universals are forms, but in order to resolve the issues raised against Platonic separate forms, he also posits a further principle, a particular “form.” The particularities of how Bonaventure draws this view out of Aristotle will, of course, be spelled out in chapters 4 and 6.

The question of which of these (now five) different, and indeed possible, views attributed to Aristotle is in fact the correct view is not mine to answer in this book. This discussion, however, should serve to highlight the great nuance to Aristotle’s own views, which lend themselves to such a wide variety of diverse (and *completely contradictory*) interpretations, such that it is difficult to say what in the history of philosophy, particularly what in the history of medieval philosophy, is and is not Aristotelian. Indeed, as we have seen, a strict mind-body dualism both is and isn’t Aristotelian; conceptualism both is and isn’t Aristotelian; a real distinction between essence and existence both is and isn’t Aristotelian; a plurality doctrine both is and isn’t Aristotelian; a unicity doctrine both is and isn’t Aristotelian, etc. Indeed, perhaps one of the few positive statements one can make about Aristotle is this: the set of texts which have come down to us and have been attributed to this “Aristotle” are certainly not a set of dogmatic views, to which one adheres and is thereby called “Aristotelian,” or to which one dissents and is thereby not called Aristotelian. Indeed, Avicenna, John de la Rochelle, Thomas Aquinas, and Bonaventure are all essentially Aristotelians – but they are Aristotelians of different kinds. My purpose in the coming chapters will be to highlight how Bonaventure makes use of Aristotle in a manner which is unique among his fellow medievals, not able to be reduced to that of Aquinas or of his Franciscan predecessors. Moreover, in doing so, I also wish to show how his interpretation and appropriation of Aristotle’s ontology is of particular importance – not only for its role in the development of medieval thought, but also for its potential import for contemporary efforts in interpreting these texts of Aristotle which, quite clearly from what we have seen above, have remained paradox-riddled from the Middle Ages up until today.

To bring now this section to a close, I would like to outline briefly the points which I think highlight Bonaventure’s philosophical thought as distinct from the thinkers which came before him in the Franciscan tradition and mark his thought primarily as Aristotelian instead of Avicennian – since that is our main alternative in this section.

1. Bonaventure’s view of substantial forms, which we can loosely characterize as a “plurality” of substantial forms, is supported by Aristotle’s texts – nowhere does Aristotle argue for a unicity doctrine. Thus, while being in accordance with Avicenna, Bonaventure’s view is developed by using Aristotle’s texts, not

Avicenna's. The view is thereby best characterized by the thought which informed it: Aristotle's.

2. Bonaventure's view of the unity of soul and body is emphatically different from Avicenna's, and from the earlier Franciscan thinkers, insofar as Bonaventure (a) does not maintain the strict soul-body dualism of Avicenna and (b) does not maintain a form of corporeity. Instead, he strikes a balance between Avicenna's and Aquinas' differing views, which is likewise proposed as being in fact a most likely view of Aristotle in contemporary scholarship. Thus, insofar as Bonaventure likewise is explicitly utilizing the thought of Aristotle in this context, there is no reason not to call it authentically an "Aristotelian" position.
3. Bonaventure's view of spiritual matter is utilized to resolve a problem in Aristotle's view of the soul and is used in a manner similar to contemporary scholarship on Aristotle. Thus, while the idea of "spiritual matter" is not per se Aristotelian, it is incorporated into an account of the soul which ultimately is Aristotelian.
4. Bonaventure's view of the ontological status of universal forms is developed, to a great extent, in response to the Avicennian indifference of essence. It is thereby emphatically not Avicennian, and insofar as it is indeed developed with references almost exclusively to Aristotle, there is, again, no reason not to characterize it as Aristotelian.

