

❧ Chapter One ❧

Bonaventure's Threefold Way into God

St. Bonaventure's *The Soul's Journey into God* describes three forms of contemplation corresponding to three aspects of God, three ways in which God is manifested to *mens*, the human soul or mind. This tripartite division is a recurrent one in medieval mystical and theological writings and is based primarily on a threefold distinction between the objects with which the mind may be concerned. It is drawn by Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173), among others, in the *Benjamin Minor*, where he speaks of three "days" of knowledge, which constitute three ways of apprehending God: through physical objects, through the mind, and above the mind.¹ The ultimate object of knowledge here, however, is only one, and the mode of cognition is also fundamentally one. Since it is possible to know or to think about physical things, mental things, and even transcendent things without encountering God in the way both Richard and Bonaventure describe, the three types of knowledge must have something in common to distinguish them as a whole from other cognitive modes. They can all be placed under the general title of "contemplation." "Contemplation," Richard says in the *Benjamin Major*, "is the free, more penetrating gaze of a mind suspended with wonder concerning manifestations of wisdom."² It differs from other ways of knowing in being unified ("diffuses itself to innumerable things under one ray of vision"),³ nondiscursive, and accompanied by a sense of the miraculous, a sense of *admiratione* or "wonder."⁴

The first two chapters of the *Soul's Journey* attempt to demonstrate how the soul, in this contemplative mode, is capable of grasping God in and through the things of the material or "sensible" world. The vision of God by means of this world is, for Bonaventure, the first rung of the spiritual ladder by which the mind ascends into God (*It.* 1.9, 299/63). However, this process of ascent

does not occur of necessity. Rather, the ladder presents an invitation, and the soul has the power to accept by presenting the world to itself in a certain way, namely, as a mirror reflecting God in which God is visible. Thus, the world is itself not necessarily but only potentially a mirror of God, where its potentiality to appear in this way corresponds to the potentiality of the soul to present it to itself as such, to see it in a particular light. Whether or not the world manifests God in its appearance, therefore, rests to some extent upon a decision on the part of *mens*.

The "material world," according to Bonaventure, manifests God in a number of ways. For one thing, from the attributes of this world, Bonaventure claims, from the order it manifests in its internal division, arrangement, and motion, the attributes of its creator, which are the attributes not of matter but of mind, are visible to the human mind through intellectual contemplation. The structure of reality is here understood as corresponding precisely to the structure of the mind in terms of its powers of apprehension and understanding. In comprehending the rational order of things, the "immense power, wisdom and goodness" (I.11, 299–300/64) of the mind which conceives and creates them is supposed to be evident to the mind which apprehends them.

Second, in "believing faithfully," the intellect represents another kind of order to itself, the order of the origin and course of things for the believer, history as understood by Christian faith. For faithful belief, the "supreme principle" of the world (I.12, 300/64) is the cause which effects the transition from nothing to being in the act of creation. The intellect represents to itself the power (*potentia*) of this supreme principle, the creator, in considering the power required to effect such a transition.

The rectitude of the concept of creation itself and, consequently, the appropriateness of the language of creation for representing the nature of the world's origin (where this representation, in determining the relation between what is and what brings it into being, also determines the fundamental nature of what is as a whole), are not, for Bonaventure, subjects for question but matters of faith. It is evident from some of his other works, however, that he believes philosophy can trace a ratiocinative route to a first cause (Aristotle), to exemplary ideas (Plato), and to the location of

these ideas in the divine mind (Neoplatonists).⁵ Thus, reason unaided by faith can know: (1) that all that is, taken together, has a cause or origin; (2) that it is ordered in that origin in a "logical" way, so that its inception is a conception like to the formation of ideas in the human mind, which asserts by implication that, in its origin, reality has a structure like the structure of human thought and language; and (3) that it is conceived and generated by a mind to which the human mind bears a resemblance of analogy. To the notion of the Christian creator-God, however, to the belief "that the world was fashioned by the Word of life" (I.12, 300/64), also belongs the idea of creation out of nothing by means of the Word as Christ, and this must be held by faith.

In then considering the course of history through time, faithful belief sees an orderly progress of ages manifesting the providence of the same ordering mind that conceives all that will unfold in time at the beginning of time. For Christian faith, the essential nature of this unfolding, the way it is to be divided and organized, is no more subject to question than is the essential nature of the beginning. History, for Bonaventure, manifests three ages: nature, scripture, and grace. Each has its own law, and each succeeds the other in an orderly and ascending fashion (I.12, 300/64).

The logic of this history, the history revealed to Christian faith and manifesting the logic of the Christian God in time, culminates and ends with the final judgement. Because the world of faith is, in its development through time, ordered to this end, the logic of its history is visible only by reference to this event at the end of it. Although the full truth of this history, therefore, the understanding that sees face to face, can become manifest only at its end—with the result that the full meaning of the time of faith can be known only at the still awaited end of this time—the basic nature of the *eschaton*, like that of the origin and progress of the world, is already revealed to faith. Faith sees the end of the world as *just*, and, in so doing, it sees justice as the ultimate principle according to which the structure of the world's temporal progress is determined. The justice of the end of the world necessarily reveals the justice of the supreme principle commanding its history, but the fact that this end is just, so that the world, in the end, is just, is held not by any necessity of reason but by the free decision of faith.

A necessity of reason is claimed, on the other hand, for the process in which the intellect (having seen, on the basis of information conveyed to it by the senses, that the visible world exhibits degrees of perfection) moves from this to a being which has the ultimate degree of perfection with respect to the various forms of perfection apprehended (I.13, 300/64). It moves from the world to God by way of gradation. Discussing this point, Bonaventure posits a particular hierarchy or chain of being, with God at the top. As in any hierarchical ordering, a system of valuation is presupposed. For Bonaventure, intelligence, spirituality, and incorruptibility have the maximum value, and the degree of perfection accorded to an entity is directly proportional to the degree to which it possesses these attributes in its mode of existence. Moreover, truth and goodness are directly proportional to one another, and truth is equivalent to degree of being. Thus, the highest reality, the mode of existence which is most "true" and has the greatest degree of being, is that which is most perfect, where perfection is determined with respect to the aforementioned attributes. The true world is therefore the realm of intelligence, spirit, and immutability, realized absolutely in God, and the false world, the world of appearance as opposed to truth, is the realm of ignorance, matter, and corruptibility.

The being which Bonaventure sees via the physical world is represented as a principle which not only created all that is but which continues to create it, in that it constantly gives rise to and sustains the being of all that remains in being. It is an immanent principle. In Augustine's words, "God created all things, not by letting them come about and then going on his way, rather he remained in them."⁶ Because of this immanence, Bonaventure can say that created things manifest the God "who by his power, presence and essence exists uncircumscribed in all things" (I.14, 301/65).

Chapter 2 of the *Soul's Journey* deals mainly with the apprehension of this immanent principle. Here, Bonaventure turns to the contemplation of God *in* rather than *through* the sensible world, claiming that,

Concerning the mirror of things perceived through sensation, we can see God not only through them as through his ves-

tiges, but also in them as he is in them by his essence, power and presence. This type of consideration is higher than the previous one. (II.1, 303/69)

The God who resides within the "sensible mirror" in terms of *essentia, potentia et praesentia* forms the answer to the "limiting questions" about the being, motion, and presence of the things that make up the world of sense-perception. God is the being of beings in that God is the being from whose infinite being the finite being of all creatures is derived and by which that finite being is sustained. God is also the absolute power behind the limited and dependent power of creatures, the prime mover originating the motion of beings. And finally, God is the ultimate presence within all present beings. The sensible mirror reflects this immanent God insofar as the mirror of *mens* reflects God to itself in reflecting the world. The essence, power, and presence of God are always existent in the world of creation, but they shine through this world—*are truly reflected or manifest in it*—only when *mens* mirrors the world in such a way as to mirror the God within it, which means in such a way as to discover the world itself as a mirror of God.

It is, for Bonaventure, the senses that provide the most basic information by means of which the God within the world is known. Through their mediation, the elements that make up the greater world, the *macrocosmos*, are reconstituted within its reflection in the lesser world, the *minor mundus* of the soul. The "sense world" enters into the soul "through apprehension" (II.4, 305/71), Bonaventure says, and while apprehension is not itself sense-perception but consists in an interior activity, its achievement is dependent upon the information supplied to it by the senses.

If what is encountered by apprehension is "agreeable" (*conveniens*), in a quite literal sense, to the one who apprehends, the result is pleasure and delight, whether delight in beauty or in smell and sound or in taste and touch. In "Bonaventure's Delight in Sensation," Helen S. Lang claims that "the notion of delight . . . appears at each moment of Bonaventure's account of sensation."⁸ Delight, then, is not, in this case, a subjectivizing mood, not a "color" of the subject which colors the nature of the object, but a response to the ultimate and sacred nature of the object. It is based, moreover, on

proportions, and Lang points out that “since proportions are nothing other than the presence of God in things through number,” as Bonaventure further maintains (II.10/312/75), “delight is but our natural response to the presence of God” (p. 88). It is this delight that motivates the question, why? Seeking the answer to this question, the reason for delight, is an indirect way of seeking God (p. 90).

Germain Kopaczynski describes the role of wonder in St. Francis’s thought in similar terms:

Where St. Thomas makes a distinction—wonder begins naturally but ends beyond the natural—St. Francis sees with a unitary vision . . . Here the vision and the wonder remarkably dovetail, and we have a hard time distinguishing the two. If God is the ultimate source of wonder as well as its ultimate end, the very phenomenon of wondering itself is really at bottom a pining for God.⁹

Bonaventure himself retains this sense, so important to the founder of his order, that wonderment in the face of the world reveals the presence of God. Contemplation is in fact, for Bonaventure as for Richard of St. Victor, a rapt wondering that discloses God.

The power which wonders about the reason for delight, and finds it in “the proportion of harmony” (*proportio aequalitatis*) (II.6, 307–8/72), is “judgement.” Judgement uncovers the *ratio* which is the basis of all harmony, the reason-principle lying behind or within the objective properties that cause the various forms of delight. It is important to keep in mind here the ontological status of this *ratio*, the object of judgement. A reason-principle or *ratio* is, for Bonaventure, a constitutive feature of the world and not the product of a human faculty. It is not a mental model bearing some form of structural or analogical similarity to what is the case in the world, but is itself a component in the structure of that world—not a physical component, of course, since a *ratio* is not a physical entity, but a metaphysical or “spiritual” component.

This aspect of the world leads the mind back, ultimately, to the “rational” source of the world. It leads the mind to the Word, the “spiritual image” generated by God and representing God. The Word, a

kind of divine logical space in which the archetypal ideas, the *rationes*, of all things actual and possible are contained, then functions as a mediator between *mens* and the primal mind which generates these ideas. God is thus the "fountain source and object" of all ideas (*rationes*), as the physical object is of sense-percepts (*sensibilia*) (II.7, 308–9/72–3).

Although the *rationes* of creation, contained in the supreme *ratio* of the Word, are, in a sense, remote from both the *sensibilia* and the *delectabilia* of the particular entities that make up the created world, they are also intimately conjoined to and manifested by these. The distance between the "uncreated" *rationes* and these "created" properties must, of course, be understood metaphysically. They inhabit different regions of being, regions that are brought together and yet held apart in the multifaceted things of the created world, *creatura*.

Given this relationship between the *ratio* and that of which it is the *ratio*, and given that the *ratio*, as the Word, is consubstantial with God and is God, it follows that God is actually the ultimate *ratio* of creation. As such, God is the *ratio* of the pleasurable properties of creatures, the proportion and harmony from which all delight arises and in which it is contained (*It.* II.8, 309/73). Therefore, "it is obvious that in God alone there is primordial and true delight and that in all of our delights we are led to seek this delight" (II.8, 309/73).

The fact that Bonaventure's consideration of all of these aspects of the God known in and through creatures is worked out and presented in the language of philosophical theology should not lead one to conclude that the points he makes are remote from common experience, or that the God of which he speaks, the so-called God of the philosophers, is only a very distant relative of the God encountered by religious experience. Bonaventure's reflections do not describe a speculative God but articulate the ways in which a "real" God (meant here, not in the sense of objectively existing, but in the sense of present to, or within, a certain experience of things) is encountered in and through the world. They can therefore function as a partial survey of the experience of the world in regard to which the word *God* is spoken. They must not, on the other hand, be taken as proofs, if by 'proof' is meant not the articulation of the

content of experience but the establishment of this content outside the experience itself.

As George Boas points out, knowledge, for Bonaventure, and that includes knowledge of God, is ultimately based not upon rational argumentation but upon direct experience or vision:

Throughout the *Itinerarium* Saint Bonaventure emphasizes that knowledge in the last analysis comes down to seeing, to contemplation, to a kind of experience in which we know certain things to be true without further argument or demonstration. On the lowest level, this occurs in sensory observation, on the highest in the mystic vision.¹⁰

The natural theology in the first chapter of the *Soul's Journey*, for instance, describes a God who is seen in the world, and not inferred from it or proven on the basis of it, in contrast with, say, the God of Aquinas's demonstrations in the *Summa Theologiae*. For this reason, Boas remarks that "Saint Bonaventure seems to have as his purpose a demonstration of God's existence and of His traits which is not irrational but nonrational" (p. xvi).

If Bonaventure's account of the contemplation of God in and through creatures is viewed from this perspective, it indicates a number of apprehensions of the natural world which may evoke the word *God* and, in so doing, determine the experiential content or meaning of that term. They indicate, for instance, that 'God' may be evoked by the apprehension of order in the world, by the sense that the internal distinction, arrangement, and activity of what is as a whole, which the human mind does not invent but discovers, manifests a logic or *ratio* and, through this, the activity of an originating mind. They indicate, too, that this sense of order is also felt with respect to the history of the world, its beginning, progress, and end, and that the logic of the same originating mind is thereby thought to be manifested through the structure of what is as a whole considered in its temporal extension.

The sense of this mind is especially, for Bonaventure, felt in the movement of the human mind to the knowledge of the deep structure of reality where the ideas of things and the principles of the world's structure—proportion, number, and harmony—are pres-

ent. Bonaventure demonstrates this harmony at the basis of the world through a series of logical steps, but this does not mean that it is itself known only at the end of a chain of reasoning. Rather, he sets out systematically the way in which such a harmony shines out through the world, in beauty, sweetness, and wholesomeness, in natural things, music, and art. The sense of whatever is contained in this concept of God, whatever is meant by God here, is associated, then, with these phenomena.

It is also associated with the passage of the mind from the degrees of imperfection it sees in the world to the notion of perfect being, and with the sense of an ultimate object of delight as well as of reason. Behind all of these experiences of God within the world lies the assumption, and this assumption is itself *part* of the experience and revealed within it, that *mens*, the totality of the human mind or soul, mirrors the real in such a way as to be the place where the truth of things is manifested. In all of its passages from the world to God, the mind experiences itself as being drawn towards an objective truth which is nonetheless revealed inwardly to it. This sense of the objectivity of the transcendent mind as it presents itself to the human mind in logic, history, beauty, and so forth, which Bonaventure sets out most clearly and systematically in his analysis of how God is known in pleasure and reason, is fundamental to his experience and descriptions; it is part of the grammar of what Bonaventure calls "God."

The fundamental nature of the relation between God and the physical world, as *mens* apprehends it, is expressed in condensed form near the end of this chapter of the *Itinerarium*, in a passage rich in Platonic metaphors (II.11, 312/76). All of these have in common the idea of something that imitates or indicates a reality in which it therefore participates but which is also other from it. With the exception of "echoes" (*resonantiae*), the metaphors are at root visual. Creatures are "shadows," "pictures," "vestiges," "representations," "spectacles," "signs," and "exemplifications." Insofar as these metaphors express the fundamental nature of physical entities, their essential being, that nature is conceived as constituted by a relation to God. The epistemological consequence of this ontological condition will be that the mind can be said to comprehend the fundamental nature of a physical entity only when it understands that

entity in its relation to God. For Bonaventure, this amounts to seeing it as a *creatura*.

The divine, considered in its creative aspect, is what gives rise to these entities. God the creator is the first principle or Word, the *logos* that incarnates itself in and rules over all that is. Bonaventure's description of God's creative aspect as "light," another originally Platonic metaphor and one much favored by Bonaventure, is related to this concept of *logos* via the Gospel of St. John. The divine nature "shines forth in all creatures" (III.1, 314/79), and to see this light with which they are resplendent is to be "enlightened" by the "splendor of created things" (I.13, 302/67). According to the Platonic metaphysics, this means apprehending things by the light of their forms, a light immanent in the mind but also transcending it. God, then, as the principle of all forms, is both the light shining through all things and the light in the mind by means of which all things appear to the eyes of the understanding, the metaphysical interpretation of the Johannine "Light that lighteth every man that cometh into this world."

God is also the "source" or "eternal origin" of all creation and has absolute priority. And God is the creator as artist, with creation as the divine art. In this case, Bonaventure mingles the Platonic idea of creation according to an ideal form or exemplar with the language of Aristotelian causality, so that creatures are the result of the "efficient, exemplary, and ordering art" of the creator.

As effects of a cause and exemplifications of an exemplar, creatures are signs. When the mind sees through them to what is signified, it reads God in the book of creation. This requires a shift on the part of the observing mind from the type of comprehension that constitutes the "worldly" world, the world of things considered as independent, to that which constitutes creation, the world related to God. It requires that the mind learn to read, as it were, that it learn the signification of the signs in this book and so come to see all *res as vestigia dei*.

However, as noted near the beginning of this chapter, the world is only potentially a mirror of God for Bonaventure, and whether it appears as such depends upon a decision on the part of *mens*. The decision to look with the gaze for which the world manifests God is not primarily, for Bonaventure, a matter of holding this or that

belief. It requires, rather, that *mens* hold itself in a certain way in and before the world, that it achieve a certain stance with respect to things. For this stance, creatures are allowed to manifest themselves in their relation to the transcendent source of themselves, thereby mediating that source itself.

"Rightness" with respect to the world means achieving this stance, this form of *noesis* for which the *noema* is the creature mediately manifesting God as its source. Because how the world appears is a function of this stance, and because the stance itself, as a way of determining and being determined by the things of the world, is a possibility that can be chosen or not, Bonaventure can attribute fault to a person who does not see what the stance reveals. The state of ignorance that results is not just pitiable but reprehensible, because it is a condition of spiritual blindness arising out of a refusal to see.

Spiritual vision, on the other hand, consists in the ascent that moves from the thing to its transcendent referent. In this ascent, the nature of the world receives its full metaphysical explanation, an explanation consisting not in the production of a rational account, although it may also be so expressed, but in the seeing in which heart, will, and intellect are united. The referent that *mens* catches sight of in this vision, however, is unlike any other in that it is not an object within the world but a light shining through the things of the world, in which these things themselves shine forth. The referent is never clearly visible, conceivable, or expressible as it is in itself. The pointing of creatures to it is an indication grasped not clearly and distinctly but in an obscure manner.

Moreover, what is indicated in this pointing can never be subject to empirical demonstration or proof, since it lies outside the empirical world. This does not mean that it is never present to experience. On the contrary, the root of all that Bonaventure says concerning the immanent God lies in an intuition which is in some way supposed to undergo the experience of the transcendent, the presence of the absent. This may not be immediately apparent, given the intellectual and rational nature of Bonaventure's formulations. But his basic sense of the objectivity of reason and order, which goes hand in hand with a sense of the presence of mind and spirit in the world, is itself not a function of ratiocination—if that

means "giving a ground for" so that the rational is what is grounded, that is, understood in terms of something else that serves as its ground and, in so doing, provides its justification. The presence which, for Bonaventure, is grasped in and by the light shining both in the world and in the mind, the presence which is this light, is justified by nothing but itself, in its own appearance. What is primarily intellectual and rational is this light, since it is light of all understanding, the light that enables understanding and is its source. The manifestation of this light, for a person who not only sees within it, which any creature of a rational nature must do, but who also *sees* it, constitutes the original apprehension of divinity.

The metaphor of seeing a light, however, is just that—a metaphor. With respect to the things of the world, the essence of such a vision perhaps consists in the intuition which Evelyn Underhill once described as finding "an added significance and reality in the phenomenal world," involving not "the forsaking of the Many in order to find the One," but "the discovery of the Perfect One ablaze in the Many."¹¹ It is the sense of a presence within the empirical which is yet *not* the empirical, "the glimpse," to quote another classic work on mysticism, "of an Eternal, in and beyond the temporal and penetrating it, the apprehension of a ground and meaning of things in and beyond the empirical and transcending it."¹² To this apprehension, the phenomenal world appears invested with a sense of the "numinous" or "holy," a sense of a divinity that is in one sense wholly other, as the noumenal reality behind phenomena, but in another sense wholly near, an immanent reality revealed in phenomena. Such an apprehension and what it reveals cannot be tested by a different kind of apprehension having a different kind of object. Its truth can be known only from within it, since the reality of that to which it testifies is present only to it.

The third chapter of the *Soul's Journey* begins by introducing that stage in the mind's ascent at which, having been led into God through creatures as *vestigia*, it is next led into itself, "where the divine image shines forth" (III.1, 314/79). The imagery of light and shining is once more all pervasive, and again suggests the correlative immediacy of presence and vision. Bonaventure sees the movement of withdrawal to interiority in self-contemplation as a move-

ment to a higher, because more immediate, apprehension of God. As an *imago dei*, *mens* is a sign whose relationship to God is different from that of other creatures. In terms of the theistic conception of God as the creator and artist of all that is, all creatures are products or effects, but the soul is also an image of this creative artist and so a mirror of creator and creation alike. Reflecting the mind of the artist, *mens* reflects as well all that the artist conceives and brings into being. The human mind is a mirror of the divine mind and, by virtue of this likeness, is capable of revealing, through reflection, what the divine mind has thought and created. The various faculties of the human mind—the categories into which the processes of reflection can be divided—discover and preserve the truth of things in that they mirror, at a number of levels, the structure of reality. And they mirror that structure because they mirror the mind which, *plene resolvens*, “by a full analysis” or in the final analysis, is the efficient and structuring cause of all that is.

Following Augustine's *De Trinitate*, Bonaventure divides the processes of reflection belong to *mens* into a trinity of powers mirroring the divine Trinity. Clearly, human subjectivity is in some sense the starting point for the conclusion that “if, then, God is a perfect spirit, he has memory, understanding and will” (*It.* III.5, 321–2/84). However, for Bonaventure, while this starting point is the initial immanent point of departure for the reflection that moves to the transcendent powers of God, it is not genuinely initial in the sense of originative. Rather, reflection upon the powers of the mind is supposed to lead to consideration of the powers of God, because the former are discovered to be derived from and dependent upon the latter.

To begin with, the fact that the mind has three powers or capabilities (*potentia*) is not simply taken as the corollary to an article of faith. It is instead, according to Bonaventure and Augustine, something that makes itself evident to rational observation. For an observation without any Christian presuppositions, this tripartite division is certainly not the only possible one. However, it is not merely arbitrary, either. Following book IX, chapters. 2–4 of *De Trinitate*, Bonaventure makes the not terribly contentious claim that *mens* loves itself. But while love, according to Augustine,

draws the soul towards what is loved so that it acts as a motor for the realization or fulfilment of knowledge, it also presupposes some prior grasp of the thing intended. It follows, then, that the mind could not love itself if it were not in some fashion already disclosed to itself. Only something "remembered," however, can be disclosed to knowledge; that is to say, only what is present to the mind can be known by it. *Memoria* in this instance is not exclusively a faculty of recall but that power by which the mind presents something to itself and retains it in presence. That the mind remembers itself then means that it is present to itself. It can know itself only because of this original self-presence, and it can intend itself only because of that knowledge. Therefore, the soul has "a threefold power," consisting of memory, knowledge, and love (III.1, 314/80).

In the operations and relations of these three powers, Bonaventure claims, the mind is an inferior image of God. As such, it refers to and reflects God, but darkly, *per speculum in aenigmate* (III.1, 314-5/80). For instance, the activities of the first power, memory, are said to refer to eternity, simplicity and immutability (III.2, 315-6/80-1). The first activity of memory which Bonaventure mentions, the retention of all things past, present, and future, has its source in the *Confessions*, XI, 20, where Augustine speaks of "three times" existing in the mind. These are actually, according to Augustine, three modes of the present: a present of past things (memory), a present of present things (direct perception), and a present of future things (expectation). For Bonaventure, the memory, in its capacity for retaining these three times, bears an image of eternity, conceived as an omnipresence extending across all time and times, without mode or division. This is the temporal extension of the being of God, as opposed to and yet reflected in the *distensio animi* constituting the time proper to human beings.¹³

The second activity attributed to memory is the retention of "simple forms" like "the point, the instant and unity." These "simple forms" cannot, according to Bonaventure, be gained empirically. They are then *a priori*, which means, for Bonaventure, received and maintained *a superiori*. The more fundamental assumption is that the binding conditions of subject and object, the conditions that necessarily bind being and thinking and bind them to one another, are not only transcendental but transcendent. They regulate

subject and object from above and beyond both and not merely from "within" the subject.

This applies as well to "the principles and axioms of the sciences," by which Bonaventure means the laws of logic. These also cannot be derived empirically, but are "remembered" in "an unchangeable light." They are recollected by the mind as apodictically certain, and the light that grants this certainty is present to the mind in an unchanging way.

Thus, eternal presence, simple forms, and immutable truths are reflected in memory, present to it primordially and innately. They are remembered *in principio*, and the remembrance of them constitutes the enigmatic memory of the absolute, grasped antecedently, although not in the first instance explicitly. This original memory enables the true revelation of the things of time, space, and number, so that the mind discovers the truth of particular instantiations through its prior apprehension, its innate memory, of their ordinary principles. *Innate* in this instance does not mean lying within the powers of the subject, nor does it mean that a priori principles are actually present in the mind before any contact with particular things. It means that these principles are realized upon contact with particular things without yet being derived from them. What grants and maintains the subject's capabilities by bestowing these principles is immanent in the sense that its power is constantly present to the subject, but it is also transcendent in the sense that the subject's own powers depend upon it without having power over it, and in the sense that it cannot be seen clearly in itself.

The situation of the intellective power is similar. Its function consists in "understanding the meaning of terms, propositions and inferences" (III.3, 316/81). To understand the signification of a term means to comprehend that term in a definition; but definitions are constructed by using more and more universal terms. The highest and most universal of these, Bonaventure says, is *ens per se*. The intellect actually has an antecedent comprehension of being *per se*, and only on the basis of this prior understanding can it comprehend the manifold forms of being that it encounters. Some understanding of this highest and most general term is then presupposed in the delimitation of any particular substance, although the

intellect only realizes this presupposition in the process of resolving the nature of that substance (III.3, 316–7/81).

The idea of *ens per se* is also, Bonaventure claims, the idea of unlimited and perfect being, and it is according to this idea that the intellect grasps limited and imperfect forms of being. It then cannot be derived from those finite forms of being by way of abstraction, because its presence to the mind is a prior condition for recognizing them. This means that the mind understands negations of being, “privations and defects,” on the basis of purely positive being, “which is unqualified and eternal being.” Negations are understood through this wholly pure, actual, complete, and absolute being (III.3, 317–8/81–2). Since all created particular beings are “defective,” not wholly pure or actual and not fully complete or absolute, the knowledge of being without any defect is a prerequisite for understanding them.

Bonaventure goes on to say that the intellect’s certitude about the truth of propositions is granted by an unchangeable light (III.3, 318/82) and that its grasp of necessary logical inferences reflects the original logic of things, the way they are in principle and that means as represented in the “eternal art” of God (III.3, 319/83). Bonaventure never tries to prove that what appears to be certainly true is so, but assumes this and asks instead about the source of this certainty. What is clear and distinct cannot, for Bonaventure, be doubted nor does it need to be proven. The notion that certitude is granted by a “light” is neither a proof nor an argument but only, originally, a poetic description of the fact of clarity and distinctness itself.

This does not mean that Bonaventure never confronts any question of a sceptical nature, however, and the examples he gives of certain truths are of the same sort that Augustine gives in arguing against scepticism.¹⁴ But he does not confront the possibility of a radically sceptical relativism or subjectivism—there is for him no principle that could make what is universally indubitable in truth false. The fact that there is certainty, the fact that anyone strives for truth, simply demonstrates to Bonaventure the reality of truth itself as the directing principle of the intellect in its quest for understanding (III.3, 319/83). In making this point, Bonaventure refers to a chapter in Augustine’s *On the True Religion*, where Au-

gustine argues that everything is open to doubt except truth itself, since:

Everyone who knows that he doubts knows with certainty something that is true, namely that he doubts. He is certain, therefore, about *a* truth. Therefore, everyone who doubts whether there be such a thing as *the* truth has at least *a* truth to set a limit to his doubt . . .¹⁵

The self that doubts cannot itself be doubted, so that the existence of that doubting self necessarily entails the concept of truth.

Bonaventure is also in accord with Augustine on the point that, to find such truth, the mind must return to itself, must go so deeply within itself that it transcends itself. To find immutable truth, Augustine claims, the mind must go beyond its own changeable nature; to find the ultimate object of reason, it must transcend reason. For Augustine, reasoning is a form of appetite. It is a hunger for truth, and truth itself is its beginning and end. Truth both fires the appetite of reason and is what that appetite seeks to consume. But it does not follow that "the" truth, absolute truth or truth in itself, can actually be attained by reason. Rather, such truth transcends reason precisely because reason is always stretched out towards it. "Seeing" this truth then means catching sight of, becoming aware of, that to which reason necessarily refers insofar as it functions as reason. Truth is the transcendent *telos* of reason, and the nature of reason is granted only in reference to this *telos*.

Just as this transcendental reference on the part of reason makes complete sceptical doubt impossible, so, given a similar reference on the part of the will, there can also be no question, Bonaventure believes, of total scepticism with respect to matters of evaluation. The will, the power of choice (*virtus electiva*) is seen to operate in "deliberation, judgement and desire." Bonaventure argues that the ultimate measure to which the will refers when it orders the world axiologically through deliberation is no more under the control of *mens* than is the one to which the intellect refers when ordering the world logically. Like the idea by which it understands, the ideal by which *mens* evaluates, namely, "the notion of

the highest good," is not posited by itself (III.4, 320/83). It follows that this ideal cannot itself be evaluated, since there is nothing by means of which or in reference to which such an evaluation could proceed. The idea of the highest good thus provides the ground of every act of evaluation, just as the idea of being grounds every act of understanding.

Bonaventure argues further that the law according to which *mens* passes judgements concerning value must transcend *mens* itself, since *mens* judges itself and it cannot judge about the law through which it judges (III.4, 320–1/83). Thus, *mens* is no more a law unto itself in the sphere of the good than in the sphere of the true. However much specific judgements may change, the formal point remains that even in the most radical questioning of values, where the values one holds are overturned or transvalued, there has to be an examination or evaluation of those values, and this evaluation has a logic that cannot itself be interrogated as to its value if it is that which makes all such interrogations possible in the first place. The logic of evaluation is simply unquestionable, then, as the laws that determine judgement are themselves, in a quite literal sense, just beyond question.

Since choice is contingent upon evaluation, and evaluation is itself determined in reference to a standard that transcends *mens* and according to laws which, like the laws of logic, are other to and beyond *mens*, the movement of the will in its desire for happiness is ultimately based upon a category no less imperative than the one that originates and provides the end for the movement of the intellect in understanding. This is the category of the highest good, the optimal and final end of desire. It is said to provide the will with its ultimate motivation, because this category, transcendental, and inaccessible per se, is found at the limit of all analyses of that on account of which desire, as a function of the will, is stirred and so of that which stirs it (III.4, 321/84). Since action is initiated by choice or desire, by the movement of the will, this category also establishes the limit of any analysis of that for the sake of which action is performed.

This way of talking about these two categories is not entirely adequate, however, as the distinction between the highest good and being in itself is not a distinction of substance. Being in itself is,

after all, perfect being, which is dimly recollected when anything is judged to be less than perfect. As perfect being, being in itself is then also the highest good. It is what the soul seeks in the end, and its complete realization would constitute the absolute fulfilment of the soul's desire. "Inquietum cor est nostrum donec requiescat in te," says Augustine, and the *te* that is wanted is a single being. *Ens* and *bonum*, along with *verum* and *unum*, are convertible names for that being.

The validity and convertibility of these terms does not depend on whether or not the being named by them is an actually existing entity. For Bonaventure, perfect being is God, who *is* in some sense. But in the drive towards fulfilment, the realization of the highest good still means the realization of the uttermost possibility of being or perfect being even if this perfect being does not "exist." The drive towards this being is still the absolute drive upon which all finite drives, all limited potentialities for being, are grounded. What moves to act or motivates the drive is what reduces these potentialities to act, that is, brings them into actual being. The drive towards the good is therefore the drive towards the actualization of being itself, and the achievement of the highest good is then equivalent to the realization of absolute being. Because this being comprehends all possibilities, it is also absolute truth, and because it is complete in itself without movement or division, it is perfect unity as well. It is, in short, ideal being, and insofar as human beings refer to it and are related to it, it "is" in some way, although *what* way remains a question.

To summarize, when the mind turns to contemplate itself, it finds that it functions in reference to: eternity, simple forms, and immutable truths (memory); being per se, the unchanging light of certitude, and the laws of logic (intellect); the highest good, the laws of evaluation, and the ultimate end of desire (will). These are the categories and laws delimiting the finite apprehension proper to *mens*, in that they determine and name the limits beyond which it cannot pass by means of its own faculties. They are in some way properties of the ground supporting the processes appropriate to *mens*, but, as that ground is per se utterly transcendent to *mens*, any attempt to produce grounds for these limiting laws and categories, any attempt to justify them rationally by referring them to a

visible ground, must lead ultimately to an abyss because it leads beyond reason. To reflect upon the ground out of which reason emerges requires that reason be transcended because it cannot penetrate the ground that supports it. For Bonaventure, only in and through this unfathomable ground, only with its support at every step, is it possible for thinking to occur at all.

Upon reflective self-examination, then, *mens* finds that the categories and laws according to which it understands are of another order than the one in which it usually discovers itself and upon which it generally bases its interpretation of itself, namely, the order of things within the world and concepts derived from them. This suggests that the soul always stands between these two orders, between the temporal and the eternal, between beings and being, between creatures and God. An adequate analysis of understanding must then point out both of these orders. Although *mens*, in thinking, necessarily refers to something that transcends it and to which it has primordial access, it must also, in understanding particular things, have contact with them. Consequently, its knowledge is to an extent innate and to an extent adventitious.¹⁶ In the event of understanding, *mens* touches both the particular thing and the light in which that thing is comprehended, so that each time understanding occurs, both the "earthly" and the "divine" realms are manifest. Since this twofold disclosure is of the essence of understanding in the intellectual as well as the moral sphere, it follows that *mens* can produce only a proper account of its own functioning, and thereby derive a proper definition of itself, on the basis of a self-interpretation that recognizes its intermediary position between these two dimensions or orders.

Bonaventure's analysis does not establish any specific criteria for judgement, nor does it offer any definite answer to conflicts of opinion. What it does help to establish is the indispensability of basic metaphysical categories—such as being, truth, goodness, and unity—wherever answers are sought. Thinking, it suggests, cannot help but presuppose these. If truth is called "error," that statement is nonetheless supposed to be true. If all moral systems are judged to be degenerate, that judgement still presupposes a principle of value. Truth and value, moreover, are intrinsically related to one another, and they are both related to being; the true is *ontos on*,