

Questioning Bonaventure's Augustinianism?: On the Noetic Effects of Sin

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Abstract

Recent scholarship suggests that Bonaventure breaks with the Augustinian tradition, in part, by affirming that the mind's cognitive powers remain fully activated even after the fall. I suggest that this claim concerning Bonaventure's denial of the noetic effects of sin should be reconsidered. I provide evidence to show that Bonaventure did, indeed, affirm that the intellect was heavily damaged by the fall and that Bonaventure affirmed two at first seemingly paradoxical propositions: (1) the intellect is indeed damaged by the fall, and (2) that God remains the first thing known by the intellect. It is precisely Bonaventure's coupling of these two seemingly paradoxical propositions that have led some to underplay Bonaventure's affirmation of the noetic effects of sin. In other words, Bonaventure's model opens up the possibility of affirming that the results of the noetic effects of sin consists not in ignorance of God simpliciter, but in a paradoxical state of knowing-yet-not-knowing God, akin to Paul's account of Romans 1.

Keywords

Bonaventure, Franciscanism, illumination, noetic effects of sin, Thomism

Though Bonaventure is largely overshadowed by Aquinas in the scholarship, it is long assumed that the Seraphic doctor follows the Augustinian tradition on the doctrine of illumination and the relationship between revelation and reason. Lydia Schumacher's 2011 *Divine Illumination*, however, paved the way for a trajectory that questions this accepted consensus. Instead of situating Bonaventure within the broadly Augustinian tradition, she argues that Bonaventure cites Augustine for his own creative and innovative purposes, appropriating that authority while constructing his own novel

proposal.¹ Bonaventure, in other words, was part and parcel of the medieval tendency to invoke Augustine as a precedent for their own creative and theological agendas, anxious as they were to maintain allegiances to authorities as a badge of perceived orthodoxy. She argues that it is Aquinas, instead, that picks up Augustine's doctrine of illumination rather than Bonaventure. Further, the argument is that while Augustine and Aquinas developed a doctrine of illumination that identified creaturely reason with the divine light, Bonaventure constructed a *concursum* model that distinguished reasoning from the divine light, while construing illumination as an ever-present luminary from God that aids creaturely reason concurrently.

A subordinate argument that Schumacher deploys in support of her thesis is the further claim that Bonaventure denied a potent understanding of sin's noetic effects: 'Unlike Augustine, Bonaventure does not believe that the fall effaced the image of God on the intellect. For him, instead, the cognitive powers remain fully activated after the fall, such that God's existence never ceases to be self-evident to the intellect, through creatures and in itself.'² While it is beyond the scope of this paper fully to evaluate Schumacher's overall proposal, I suggest here that Schumacher's claim concerning Bonaventure's denial of the noetic effects of sin should be reconsidered. While I provide evidence to show that Bonaventure did, indeed, affirm that the intellect was heavily damaged by the fall, I shall also argue that Schumacher's reading seems to presuppose the notion that, for the noetic effects of sin to be held, ignorance of God in the sense of lacking a knowledge of him must be affirmed as the result. Bonaventure, by contrast, affirmed two at first seemingly paradoxical propositions: (1) the intellect is indeed damaged by the fall, and (2) that God remains the first thing known by the intellect. In other words, Bonaventure's model opens up the possibility of affirming that the results of the noetic effects of sin consists not in ignorance of God *simpliciter*, but in a paradoxical state of *knowing-yet-not-knowing* God, akin to Paul's account of Romans 1.

This argument thus suggests that Bonaventure, along with Augustine and Aquinas, does, in fact, hold that the fall impaired the intellect, despite defining that effect rather differently. Hence,

¹ Lydia Schumacher, *Divine Illumination: The History and Future of Augustine's Theory of Knowledge* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011). See also her, 'New Directions in Franciscan Studies', *Theology* 2017 (120): pp. 253-61. In this regard, the argument involves the further claim that Bonaventure was following the trajectory of the earlier Franciscans and their creative appropriations of Augustine. See, in this regard, Lydia Schumacher, 'The Early Franciscan Doctrine of the Knowledge of God: Between Augustine's Authority and Innovation', *The Medieval Journal* 6 (2016): pp. 1-28.

² Lydia Schumacher, *Divine Illumination*, p. 132. Schumacher repeats this same claim in 'Bonaventure's Journey of the Mind into God: A Traditional Augustinian Ascent?'' *Medioevo Romano* 37 (2012): pp. 218-9.

though this paper does not deny that Bonaventure, like his medieval counterparts, does invoke authorities for his own theological purposes, he does so not by rejecting that the fall had disordered the intellect, but in articulating differently the consequences of that disordering.

This paper thus moves in three steps. Firstly, I shall lay out Bonaventure's *concursum* model of illumination, which led Schumacher to interpret that Bonaventure denied the fall's noetic effects. Secondly, I provide a reading of Bonaventure that illustrates his account of sin's noetic effects, and show that, for Bonaventure, the mind is always aware of God not because of the *mind's* innate cognitive powers but because of *God's* faithful action – the intellect is thus rendered blind to the very thing that is most present to it. Thirdly, I show that there is a clear distinction in Bonaventure's writings between God's illumination and the mind's powers, and this explains how he can simultaneously affirm the noetic effects of sin and the creature's non-effaced knowledge of God. I then conclude with some brief summative remarks.

I. On a *concursum* model of illumination

To understand why some might suggest that Bonaventure lacks a robust doctrine of the noetic effects of sin, one needs to attend to his doctrine of illumination. For Bonaventure, rational agents find their end in a unification with their Creator. In a movement to ascend to contemplate and delight in God, the pure being, creatures move from created effects to their principle and cause. However, in this movement of ascent, the contemplative mind begins to recognize that the Being to which they are ascending was the very One who was closest to them. Though Bonaventure discusses this in many texts, an entryway to his doctrine of illumination is in his *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*. There, the mind is instructed to move from external created things, to the internal workings of the mind, and finally to the attributes of God above the mind in a movement toward mystical union with the crucified Christ. In these steps, however, the mind recognizes that such movements already presuppose an intuitive grasp of this Being, such that contemplation exposes the reality that this One is not merely the subject *to* whom one is proceeding, but *through* whom and *in* whom one already sees all things.

Rather than seeing the process of ascent as merely by way of abstracting the unchangeable from the changeable, Bonaventure argues that creatures know changeable objects only because they are first illumined by a grasp of the unchangeable. A key and oft-quoted passage is this:

If a judgment has to be made by means of reason that abstracts from place, time, and change, it takes place through a reason that is immutable, unlimited and unending. But nothing is entirely unchangeable, unlimited, and unending except that which is eternal. But whatever is eternal is either God or in God. Therefore, if all of our more certain judgments are made by virtue of such a reality, then it is clear that this reality itself is the reason for all things and the infallible rule and light of truth in which all things shine forth in a way that is infallible... for this is the Being that sustains the form in all things and the rule that directs all things. And it is through this that our mind comes to judge about all those things which enter into it through the senses.³

If sense perception, which senses mutable external objects, presupposes an internal grasp of the immutable being, the ‘threefold power’ of the soul likewise discloses the presence of God within humans.⁴ Memory retains not merely ‘phantasms from external objects’ but simple forms ‘from above’, along with ‘a changeless light by which it remembers changeless truths’.⁵ Intellective power knows particular things by way of broader definitions, such that ‘if we do not know the meaning of *being per se*, we cannot fully know the definition of any particular substance’.⁶ The intellect grasps both mutable and immutable being, imperfect or perfect being, but that which is lacking or imperfect can only be known by that which is positive. Hence, it follows that ‘our intellect does not come to a full analysis of any particular created being unless it is aided by an understanding of the most pure, most actual, most complete, and absolute being, which is being simply and eternally, in which the principles of all creatures are found in their purity’.⁷ The ‘power of choice’, too, is able to judge what is better or worse by way of a law ‘impressed in the mind’; ‘in making its judgements our deliberative power is in contact with the divine laws when it arrives at a full and complete analysis’.⁸ In a manner consonant with Bonaventure’s argument that all of the arts and sciences stem from a prior divine illumination in his *Reduction of the Arts*, Bonaventure thus emphasizes that the ‘sciences are

³ Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, eds. Philotheus Boehner and Zachary Hayes, trans. Zachary Hayes (St. Bonaventure: The Franciscan Institute, 2002), II, 9. In an explanatory note, the editors observe that these truths ‘are so present to us that they cannot be effaced from our memory or consciousness, since as soon as we apprehend their contingent replicas, the ideal “reasons” shed their light over them... Purely spiritual, eternal, and necessary as they are, they must be in God, in God’s productive mind, the Eternal art.’ *Itinerarium*, II, 9, n.10.

⁴ Bonaventure, *Itinerarium*, III, 1.

⁵ Bonaventure, *Itinerarium*, III, 2.

⁶ Bonaventure, *Itinerarium*, III, 3. Emphasis original.

⁷ Bonaventure, *Itinerarium*, III, 3.

⁸ Bonaventure, *Itinerarium*, III, 4.

governed by certain and infallible laws that are like lights and beams coming down from the eternal law into our mind'.⁹

It follows that, for Bonaventure, one knows all finite and mutable beings by way of knowing pure Being himself:

Therefore, if non-being cannot be known except through being, and potential being cannot be known except through actual being, and if being names the pure actuality of a being, it follows that being is what first comes to the intellect; and it is being which is pure act [*actus purus*]. But this is not a particular being, which is limited because it is mixed with potentiality. Nor is it analogous being, which has the least actuality because it has the least of existence. It remains, therefore, that this being is the divine Being.¹⁰

Commenting on this specific passage, Christopher Cullen observes that, for Bonaventure, 'the intellect could not attain a single concept unless it knew what being is per se, and being cannot be known unless it is grasped together with its essential predicates – simplicity, necessity, absoluteness, and eternity.'¹¹ In short, human beings first know God, and it is through this knowledge of God that they come to know created things.

Bonaventure's doctrine of illumination, therefore, is nothing short of all-encompassing. Every instance of the mind's progress in understanding is by virtue of God's own light, who is wisdom himself.¹² This *concursus* model argues that the divine light is always attending the human mind, concurrent with it and that from which it makes progress. God himself directly aids the human mind from within, never leaving himself without a witness: 'It is [Christ's] light that supplements or concurs with the human cognitive light so that it can truly illumine reality.'¹³ This is so, in contrast to an *influentia* model according to which God illumines us simply by creating within us the light of reason, which Schumacher identifies with the Thomistic account of illumination:

Since Thomas holds that sensible rather than transcendental objects are the mind's first objects, he denies that illumination affords *a priori*

⁹ Bonaventure, *Itinerarium*, III, 7; Bonaventure, *On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology*, trans. Zachary Hayes (New York: The Franciscan Institute, 1996).

¹⁰ Bonaventure, *Itinerarium*, V, 3.

¹¹ Christopher Cullen, *Bonaventure* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 61. Cf. Peter S. Dillard, *A Way Into Scholasticism: A Companion to St. Bonaventure's The Soul's Journey to God* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011), 55-7.

¹² Bonaventure centers the font of illumination, ultimately, in the Son. *Breviloquium*, ed. Dominic Monti (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2006), 1. 8. 2. 'Because of those reasons, the active work of the intellect is a cooperative effort or concursus on the part of the human mind and its "inner teacher", Christ.' Schumacher, *Divine Illumination*, 130.

¹³ Schumacher, *Divine Illumination*, p. 142.

concepts. For Aquinas . . . the divine light is simply the source from which the innate cognitive capacity “flows in” to human persons. What comes from above, in other words, is not the mind’s ideas themselves *but the ability to form ideas on the basis of things below*. Put differently, the divine light is an intrinsic as opposed to extrinsic force . . . Thomas’ tendency to *conflate* illumination with the gift of the (Aristotelian) agent intellect has been regarded as a fundamentally anti-Augustinian one.¹⁴

In an *influentia* account, the noetic effects of sin are rendered pretty straightforwardly and non-paradoxically: the fall had eradicated the knowledge of God and it ‘must therefore be regained’.¹⁵ By faith, human reasoning requires the discipline consciously to evaluate all things such that they lead to God. If a Franciscan model argues that one knows all things because one first knows God, the Thomistic model suggests precisely the reverse order: ‘His existence can only be inferred through efforts to interpret the effects in terms of their cause’.¹⁶ Despite being a representative of the narrative Schumacher is questioning concerning Bonaventure’s Augustinian heritage, Cullen’s description of Bonaventure and Aquinas is identical with Schumacher’s¹⁷:

Bonaventure is trying to maintain that the intellect knows being not only through the species or likenesses abstracted from sensible things by the action of our active intellect, but also through the intuitive grasp of the Divine Being. Thomas Aquinas, by way of contrast, rejects the position that the mind first knows the Divine Being . . . [For Aquinas] The first principles are the ‘instruments’ of the agent intellect, and it is by means of these that the intellect renders other things actually intelligible. Bonaventure thinks that the condition for the possibility of grasping finite being in the first place is that there is an intuitive grasp of infinite and absolute being. God is the light in which the intellect sees.¹⁸

II. On the noetic effects of sin

The preceding analysis could provide a *prima facie* exculpatory explanation for Schumacher’s conclusions. Some significant theological worries may arise from Bonaventure’s doctrine of illumination. A *concursum* model seems to render the knowledge of God so innate

¹⁴ Schumacher, *Divine Illumination*, p. 176. Emphasis mine.

¹⁵ Schumacher, *Divine Illumination*, p. 168.

¹⁶ Schumacher, *Divine Illumination*, p. 168.

¹⁷ Schumacher, *Divine Illumination*, p. 110, 146, and ‘New Directions in Franciscan Studies’, p. 255.

¹⁸ Cullen, *Bonaventure*, p. 62.

to the human mind that one can dispense with a reliance upon the external world for a proper knowledge of God. Revelation, after all, comes from the outside, and the knowing subject ought be docile to the external objects and conditions for knowledge. If knowledge of God is intuitive, and, indeed, *a priori*, would not a form of theological rationalism be legitimized as a consequence?

This is precisely how Schumacher reads Bonaventure's account of illumination. In contrast to Aquinas, who prioritized 'the objective world over the knowing subject', Schumacher argues that Bonaventure 'makes the mind the foundation for all knowledge'.¹⁹ As a consequence of Bonaventure's argument that the mind remembers and is in contact with transcendentals, the powers of the 'human mind' are, for the Seraphic doctor, purportedly 'fully actualized', and this is so in contrast to Augustine, who 'does not affirm the possibility of achieving totalized knowledge of realities at the outset of the act of knowing'.²⁰ Because the mind is always in possession of this knowledge of God, the fall 'could not have been brought about by a defective intellect', but by 'an impaired will'.²¹ Redemption in Christ, therefore, merely 'reawakens the mind to the image of God that was always there'; 'the mind discovers itself as the perfectly adequate foundation of all knowledge'.²²

But the evidence suggests otherwise. Bonaventure makes explicit comments about sin's devastating effects on the will and the intellect, the 'two-fold capacity' of the soul.²³ In no uncertain terms, Bonaventure affirmed the noetic effects of sin just as strongly as he did the pollution of the will:

[T]he entire human race became bent over by original sin which infected human nature in two ways. *It infects the mind with ignorance*, and the flesh with concupiscence. The result is that humans, blind and bent over, sit in darkness and do not see the light of heaven without the aid of grace together with justice to fight concupiscence and without the aid of knowledge together with wisdom to fight ignorance.²⁴

It follows that any movement of the intellect and the activation of its powers of apprehension requires the font of God's grace: 'Therefore, since grace is the foundation of the righteousness of the will and the clear enlightenment of reason, it is necessary first of all to pray.'²⁵ This emphasis on the mind as in need of 'enlightenment' or illuminating is key. Bonaventure's reflections in the *Itinerarium* on

¹⁹ Schumacher, *Divine Illumination*, p. 161.

²⁰ Schumacher, *Divine Illumination*, p. 146.

²¹ Schumacher, *Divine Illumination*, p. 132.

²² Schumacher, *Divine Illumination*, p. 149.

²³ Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, 2. 9. 6.

²⁴ Bonaventure, *Itinerarium*, I. 7. Emphasis mine.

²⁵ Bonaventure, *Itinerarium*, I. 8.

the redeemed image of God begins with questioning why it is that, despite how ‘God is so close to our souls, it is surprising that there are so few who are concerned with speculation on the First Principle within themselves’.²⁶ His answer again involves both the disordering of the will and the clouding of the intellect. Note that the intellect’s deficiency consists precisely in a kind of blindness:

But an explanation for this [lack of speculation on the First Principle] is near at hand. The human mind is distracted by many concerns, and hence does not enter into itself through memory. It is obscured by images of sense objects and therefore does not enter into itself through intelligence. And it is drawn away by disordered desires, and therefore it does not return to itself with a desire for internal sweetness and spiritual joy.²⁷

The intellect, in other words, fails to pierce through its manifold perceptions to the divine light within it. Christ’s redemption thus involves restoring a way for the sinner to ‘return to itself’ in order to attend to the first principle present and revealed within us.²⁸ In other words, a restorative redemption is required to apprehend and contemplate upon that first, primordial illumination. This healing thus consists not simply in the re-ordering of our wills in order to love, or our affections in order to delight, but also the ‘sight that it might consider the splendors of that light’.²⁹ A darkened intellect requires a restorative enlightening from above in order to see that first light that was never taken away. Bonaventure repeats this in the fifth chapter, after another line of reasoning that concluded with God’s being as the light closest to the intellect and through which the intellect advances in knowledge. This passage is worth quoting at length precisely because the twin emphases of the intellect’s blindness and the presence of divine illumination are presented in stark clarity:

How remarkable, then, is the blindness of the intellect which does not take note of that which it sees first, and without which it can know nothing. But just as the eye, when it is concerned with the variety of colors, does not see the light through which it sees other things, or if it sees it, pays no attention to it, so the eye of our mind, intent as it is on particular and universal beings, pays no attention to that being which is beyond every genus even though it is that which first comes to the mind, and it is through this that all other things are known . . . Accustomed as it is to the darkness of things and to the phantasms of sensible objects, when the mind looks upon the light of the highest being, it seems to see nothing. And it does not understand

²⁶ Bonaventure, *Itinerarium*, IV. 1.

²⁷ Bonaventure, *Itinerarium*, IV. 1.

²⁸ Bonaventure, *Itinerarium*, IV. 1.

²⁹ Bonaventure, *Itinerarium*, IV. 3.

that this darkness itself is the highest illumination of our mind, just as when the eye sees pure light it seems to it that it sees nothing.³⁰

These emphases on the noetic effects of sin in the *Itinerarium* is consistent with the *Breviloquium*. The fallen intellect requires the clarifying illumination of the superior light of Scripture: ‘Thus it follows that Holy Scripture, even though it is concerned mainly with the works of restoration, must necessarily also deal with the works of creation, insofar as they lead to the knowledge of the first effective and recreating principle.’³¹ Restorative aid is required for the healing of the intellect: ‘The rational power needs help in considering, choosing, and following the truth: through the gift of understanding it is directed to the consideration of the truth; through the gift of counsel, to choose the truth; and knowledge to carry out what has been chosen.’³² Cullen thus observes that, for Bonaventure, though objectively, the knowledge of God is self-evident and ever-present, subjectively, ‘from the deficiency of reason’, God may be doubted ‘because of a threefold defect in the mind of the knower: in the act of apprehending, in the act of judging, or in the act of analyzing.’³³

Despite presupposing Bonaventure’s broad allegiance to an Augustinian tradition and emphasizing his pessimism regarding the powers of the intellect, Cullen adds more recently the argument that Bonaventure’s pessimism regarding the intellect is indirectly due to his greater pessimism on the powers of the will. In his words: ‘Bonaventure’s “pessimism” about the mind’s ability to avoid error is rooted in the weakness of the will to adhere to a moral life.’³⁴ Cullen’s provides no specific citation here as evidence but simply points to Bonaventure’s confidence in his *Reductio* that the intellect, after all, is still able to trace the arts and sciences back to God.

Two things may be said in response. Firstly, as shown above, Bonaventure maintains a firm insistence on the fact that the intellect itself is impacted by the fall. For Bonaventure, the intellect’s fallenness consists in a kind of blindness, and a failure of apprehension, a veiling that needs to be removed by divine enlightenment. From these claims, one sees that Bonaventure’s pessimism about the

³⁰ Bonaventure, *Itinerarium*, V. 4.

³¹ Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, 2. 5. 2.

³² Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, 5. 5. 4.

³³ Cullen, *Bonaventure*, 64. More on this below; see especially Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, ed., George Marcil, trans. Zachary Hayes (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1979), q. 1 a. 1. conc. There has been considerable debate on the implications of Bonaventure’s emphasis on reason’s deficiency and its need of revelation and infused faith for the relationship between philosophy and theology. On a brief survey of this debate see Christopher Cullen ‘Bonaventure’s Philosophical Method’, in *A Companion to Bonaventure*, eds. Jay M. Hammond, J.A. Wayne Hellman and Jared Goff (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 140-6.

³⁴ Cullen, ‘Bonaventure’s Philosophical Method’, p. 156.

intellect is not the indirect product of his pessimism about the will's fallen condition. Rather, the intellect is fallen in and of itself, just like the will. This does not deny that Bonaventure treats these two faculties of the soul as strongly intertwined, but it does suggest that the unreliability of the intellect is due to the direct effects of the fall, rather than an implication of the fallenness of the will. Secondly, Bonaventure regards divine illumination itself to be what conditions and enables the possibility of reason's proper function. The capacity of the intellect to trace every science back to God's illumination is itself made possible by the God who illumines. As John Webster comments: 'Bonaventure is a positive divine, one for whom the mind's powers are encompassed and accompanied by a gift and light which are not of the mind's invention'.³⁵

Again, this does not deny that Bonaventure treats the will and the intellect as closely intertwined, as they are both functions of the soul. Restoring the intellect thus requires not merely that it receives instruction, but that it honors this instruction. For the intellect to apprehend the first principle and proceed on correct judgments, 'it must make itself subject to the obedience of Christ.'³⁶ Furthermore:

if our intellect is to be well ordered in its belief, it must have a deeper faith in the supreme truth than in itself. . . It must believe, therefore, not only what is in accord with reason, but even what surpasses reason and is contrary to sense experience. Otherwise, the intellect would refuse to honor the highest truth as it should, because it would prefer its own judgments to the command of the eternal light – which necessarily implies the swelling of pride and arrogance.³⁷

The subjection of our intellect and the ability to have a firm apprehension of the light of truth in God are 'realized through infused faith' and 'the weight of Scripture; both of these derive from the supreme truth: through Jesus Christ, who is Splendor and Word, and through the Holy Spirit, who manifests and teaches the truth, and also leads us to believe it.'³⁸ The total reformation of the sinner thus requires the healing of every part of the soul: in the seeing of the soul, the love of the will, and retention of the memory. 'Becoming like God, it sees God clearly through the intellect; it loves God through the will; and it retains God forever through the memory. Thus the soul is fully alive, totally endowed in its three faculties wholly conformed to God, fully united to God, completely at rest in God.'³⁹

³⁵ John Webster, 'Regina atrium: Theology and the Humanities', in *The Domain of the Word: Scripture and Theological Reason* (London: T&T Clark, 2012), p. 174.

³⁶ Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, 5. 7. 4.

³⁷ Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, 5. 7. 4.

³⁸ Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, 5. 7. 5.

³⁹ Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, 7. 7. 3.

With the evidence above at hand, one can now take a look at Schumacher's support for the claim that the intellect remains unaffected by the fall. She cites *Disputed Questions on the Trinity* p. 1. a. 1. and *Breviloquium* 3.1.1. for the claim that, for Bonaventure, the mind's powers remain 'fully activated' after the fall, making it the 'perfectly adequate foundation for the perfect knowledge of beings'.⁴⁰ The texts I've surveyed above should be coordinated with these texts to which she appeals, and I suggest here that a closer reading of these texts present to us a picture consonant with Bonaventure's insistence on the blindness of the human mind above due to the fall.

The section in the *Disputed Questions on the Trinity* to which Schumacher appeals is a broad one, and, encompasses both Bonaventure's (1) argument that the existence of God is indubitable to the human mind, (2) the objections against this to the effect that many do, in fact, doubt God's existence and (3) Bonaventure's response to those objections. The main arguments contend that God's existence is 'naturally implanted in the human mind'⁴¹, and that knowledge of his wisdom, love, eternity and immutability, and so on, are likewise 'implanted'. The objections, on the other hand, observe the myriad of ways in which human beings deny that God exists, whether by explicitly denying that existence or by worshipping false idols instead: 'to think that God is an idol is the same as to think that He does not exist'.⁴² Hence, it seems to be false that God's existence is indubitable and implanted into the human mind.

In response, Bonaventure argues that a 'thing is said to be doubtful in two ways: either because of the process of reasoning or because of a defect in reason itself'.⁴³ With regard to the former, God's existence is indeed indubitable for three reasons. Firstly, the nature of the mind as an image implies that it naturally knows and longs for that which it images. Secondly, in terms of the demonstration, creatures who are finite and deficient cry out the existence of God in whom their beings are perfected and completed. In accordance with his arguments for the indubitability of God's existence, finitude presupposes infinity; deficiency, perfection; contingency, necessity. Thirdly, God's existence is the first and most immediate truth that, in itself, cannot be subject to doubt on pain of contradiction.

However, God's existence can indeed be doubted due to the defects in reason: 'It is possible that someone might doubt the existence of god because of a three-fold defect in the mind of the knower; that is, a defect in the act of apprehending, or in the act of judging, or in the

⁴⁰ Schumacher, *Divine Illumination*, p. 132, and 'Bonaventure's Journey of the Mind into God', p. 219, respectively.

⁴¹ Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, q. 1. a. 1 n. 4.

⁴² Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, q. 1. a. 1. obj. 4.

⁴³ Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, q. 1. a. 1 conc.

act of fully analyzing.⁴⁴ In each of these cases, humanity wrongly attributes features of the Creator unto the creature, as in idolatry, or wrongly infers that God is unjust due to the injustices one encounters in the world. The will impacts the intellect, and God is doubted: ‘it comes from a defect in the knower rather than from a deficiency in the object known’.⁴⁵

Focusing on the plight of the idolatrous gentile who fails to worship God properly, Bonaventure again hones in on the effects of sin to the powers of apprehension in a manner that evokes Romans 1:20:

The gentile considers an idol to be God because his *apprehension of God is defective*. He does not conceive of God as the highest and best, but merely as whatever is capable of doing what man cannot do. From this, deceptive error and vacillating doubt arises in him. He throws himself into his error with stubbornness so that his position becomes wholly inexcusable. And yet, he is not entirely lacking in knowledge of God, because even though in his perversity he desires to worship an idol, yet he has a natural instinct to worship the God against whom he fights by throwing himself into voluntary error.⁴⁶

The effects of sin on the mind results in a failure to apprehend that which is closest to one’s natural knowledge and desires – they consist not so much in lacking the knowledge of God, but in a failure to recognize his primordial presence and to acknowledge it with proper worship. Again, it is simply untrue to argue that Bonaventure views reason as fully activated and unimpaired – far from proving that Bonaventure makes the mind the adequate epistemic foundation, this section of the *Disputed Questions* confirm the thesis of this present essay: Bonaventure affirmed that the mind was impaired by the fall.

To be clear, Bonaventure’s claim that the human mind innately knows God by its intrinsic nature is not a rationalist claim about the fully activated powers of the mind. He grounds this knowledge on the voluntary presence and action of God in it – a theme I’ll flesh out in the next section. The final note of article one makes this clear. Bonaventure argues again that the foundation of God’s existence is ‘innate to the nature of man’, but clarifies by quoting Hugh of St. Victor, who argued that ‘... it was necessary that God present himself even while remaining hidden, lest if He were totally hidden, He should be totally unknown; so that even as he manifests Himself to be known, He remains hidden lest He be totally manifest; this He does so that man’s mind might be stimulated by what is

⁴⁴ Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, q. 1. a. 1 conc.

⁴⁵ Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, q. 1. a. 1 ad. 3.

⁴⁶ Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, q. 1. a. 1 ad. 3. Emphasis mine. Cf. Cullen, *Bonaventure*, pp. 63-5.

known and challenged by what is Hidden.⁴⁷ The natural knowledge of God is, strictly speaking, due to *God's* decision, not humanity *qua* humanity.

Schumacher's appeal to *Breviloquium* 3. 1. 1 can be discussed more briefly – a passage in reference to the first, original, sin. This particular sentence in the paragraph is likely in view: 'What we must maintain concerning this may be summarized as follows: that sin is not any kind of essence, but a defect and corruptive influence, which contaminates measure, form, and order in the created will'.⁴⁸ While that passage was in reference to the origin of sin, Bonaventure also contends that every actual sin has its roots in a corruption of the will: 'Sin is defined as a withdrawal of the will from the First Principle, inasmuch as the will was created to act from that First Principle, according to it, and with it as an end. Therefore every sin is a disorder in the mind, or more precisely in the will, which is the source of both virtue and vice.'⁴⁹

But these texts merely convey the precise and limited point that Bonaventure locates the root of sin, both actual and original, in the human will. It does not follow that therefore the mind remains unaffected by the fall. The will is the entrance point at which sin comes to be actualized, but affirming this does not negate the corrupting effects of the fall on the mind, as I have shown that Bonaventure does affirm in other places. In other words, though Bonaventure traces the *root* of actual and original sin to the will, the *effect* of sin corrupts both the intellect and the will.

III. On illumination and redemption

What accounts, therefore, for the primordial intuitive grasp of the divine by the intellect? It is tempting to suggest that this intuitive grasp is due simply to the make-up of the mind. But this is a temptation to be resisted. As argued above, the soul's primordial knowledge of God is due to *God's* action, rather than the creature's intellectual powers. A single fontal light stands behind all creaturely knowing.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ *I De Sacramentis*, III, c. 2., cited in Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, q. 1. a. 1 ad. 14.

⁴⁸ Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, 3. 1. 1.

⁴⁹ Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, 3. 8. 2.

⁵⁰ Bonaventure, *On the Reduction of the Arts*, §1. So, Monti: 'Without the illumination of the Word, humanity would know nothing of the underlying structures of the universe, and yet sinful human beings have failed to recognize the source of their knowledge and trace it back to its First Principle. As such, they can no longer read 'the book of creation' effectively.' Dominic Monti, "Introduction," in Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, ed. Dominic Monti (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2006), p. xlii.

The intellect is incapable of discerning fixed truths because it is, by its very nature, mutable and subject to error. Hence it requires an illumination from an extrinsic source, an ‘illumination of some other entirely unchangeable light shining through. And it is impossible that such a light would be a changeable creature’.⁵¹ This is the meaning, Bonaventure reckons, of the enlightening of the Logos as revealed in John 1:9. Because it is *God* himself that attends and directly aids creaturely intelligence, flooding it by divine light, Webster is right to contend that Bonaventure could not think that the ‘arts of the mind may be secular’.⁵²

There is, to be sure, an *a priori* structure to Bonaventure’s doctrine of illumination – but this *a priori* structure is not a movement from innate ideas to the outside world, nor is it a rationalist doctrine that allows rational agents to dispense with a dependence on God’s revelation. Efreem Bettoni’s remark concerning the difference between Bonaventure and Kant remains worth heeding:

For St. Bonaventure the ‘a priori’ is merely a human participation in the divine thought which has created things according to the archetypes eternally generated with and in the word. Kant ends in the absolute subjectivity while St. Bonaventure guarantees the objectivity of our thought by basing it on the absolute objectivity of divine knowledge. And thus the abyss between the two thinkers remain intact: the abyss between immanence and transcendence.⁵³

Hence, the ‘soul’s primordial awareness of God’, writes Cullen, belongs to ‘the tradition of Plato and Augustine’, but, rather than rooting this awareness in the soul’s reminiscence like Plato, Bonaventure grounds it in the ‘presence of God to the soul’.⁵⁴ In another place, Cullen likewise emphasizes that this intuitive grasp of ‘pure being’ is due to the ‘intentional presence of God in human reason than as an innate idea (in a somewhat Cartesian sense), a type of theory that Bonaventure explicitly rejects.’⁵⁵ As Schumacher also recognizes: ‘it is His light that supplements or concurs with the human cognitive light so that it can truly illumine reality.’⁵⁶ Far from rendering acute the powers of the human mind, Bonaventure regards it as totally dependent on divine illumination.

⁵¹ Bonaventure, *Itinerarium*, III, 3.

⁵² Webster, ‘*Regina atrium*’, p. 174.

⁵³ Efreem Bottoni, *Saint Bonaventure*, trans. Angelus Gambatese (Westpost: Greenwood Press, 1981), 103, cited in Cullen, *Bonaventure*, 62-3.

⁵⁴ Cullen, *Bonaventure*, 63.

⁵⁵ Christopher Cullen, ‘Bonaventure’s Philosophical Method’, p. 151. See also the discussion in Timothy Noone, ‘Divine Illumination’, in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, vol. 1, ed. Robert Pasnau (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 369-83, esp. p. 377.

⁵⁶ Schumacher, *Divine Illumination*, 142.

The resulting picture is the paradoxical situation in which God's closeness to the human soul is known-yet-not-known by sinful human beings. Human beings know God, clearly seeing him and through him in order to see creation, yet they fail truly to apprehend this God in whose light they see light. If this sounds paradoxical, it appropriately captures the kind of phenomenon in Paul's letter to the Romans concerning the knowledge of God from creation. It was appropriate, therefore, that Bonaventure concludes his reflections on how the changeable world outside us bring us back to the unchanging light within us by invoking Romans 1:20:

From all that has been said above we may conclude that *from the creation of the world the invisible things of God are seen, being understood through those things that are made* so that they are without excuse who do not wish to pay attention to these things, or to know, bless, and love God in all things, since such people do not wish to be lifted from darkness to the marvelous light of God. But *thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord who has lifted us out of the darkness into his marvelous light*, since because of the lights that come to us from outside we might be disposed to re-enter the mirror of our mind in which divine realities shine forth.⁵⁷

In other words, when God restores sinners in Christ, they are brought back to see that this was the God that had been sustaining and illumining them all along. They are not brought to a stranger, but reconciled to a Creator, one who has never deprived them of his presence. Redemption points us back to 're-enter' and acknowledge God's primordial illumination.

What is clear from these passages is that Bonaventure's *concursum* model of illumination did not lead him to deny the noetic effects of sin. God is, indeed, the first thing known and the closest presence to the soul, but Bonaventure affirms this not by sacrificing a pessimistic view of the powers of the human intellect, but rather by highlighting precisely the faithful presence of God. Schumacher herself recognizes that, for Bonaventure, 'the Son intervenes in human cognitive processes', but then infers from this that the mind therefore 'discovers itself as the perfectly adequate foundation for all knowledge.'⁵⁸ But this is a non-sequitur, and is precisely the opposite of Bonaventure's intended argument. The mind does not discover itself as the 'perfectly adequate foundation', but the contrary: it is radically dependent upon Christ to know any object at all.

Hence, it seems to me that Schumacher presupposes the incompatibility of these two propositions: (1) the mind is fallen and (2) God is the first thing known. Hence, one could reason that because

⁵⁷ Bonaventure, *Itinerarium*, II, 13. Emphases original.

⁵⁸ Schumacher, *Divine Illumination*, pages 146 and 149, respectively.

Bonaventure affirmed (2), he must therefore be denying (1). This would, indeed, run against a Thomistic understanding of the noetic effects of sin, according to which creatures regain their effaced natural knowledge of God by way of disciplined reasoning from created effects. But, in Bonaventure's case, interposed between propositions (1) and (2) is a third proposition: (3) God always illumines every creature interiorly. I suggest, then, that there are two ways of construing the effects of sin on the intellect. The first corresponds to the Thomistic *influentia* model, according to which sin so damages the intellect that human beings fail to develop the *habitus* to reason unto God, resulting in their ignorance of God. The second corresponds to Bonaventure's *concursum* model, and argues that the intellect, which cannot be disentangled from the will, is blinded and thus fails to acknowledge that which is always closest to it. God remains the first thing known because God did not leave himself without a witness. As such, the sinner is in a state of knowing-yet-not-knowing God.

In a Bonaventurian model, then, the natural and intuitive knowledge of God that all sinners continue to enjoy is thus not, strictly speaking, 'natural' at all, if by natural here one means an independence of God's voluntary aid, but the result of a free act of illuminating grace.

IV. Conclusion

In the early 20th century, Reformed theologian Herman Bavinck recognized that Bonaventure's 'mysticism' might lead some to misread him as a pre-figure to modern rationalism, since Bonaventure affirmed that the soul can know God apart from sense perception. 'Bonaventure', he wrote, 'opposes the proposition that "all knowledge derives from the senses": the soul knows God and itself without the aid of the senses.'⁵⁹ Bavinck thus warns against reading in a rationalist doctrine of innate ideas into Bonaventure:

Mysticism, in the work of Bonaventure, though disagreeing on this point with Thomas, nevertheless remains within clear boundaries . . . Hence, though Bonaventure also assumes that there are truths we do not obtain by sense perception but by interior contemplation and communion with God, even he does not believe in innate ideas in the strict sense of the term. Scholasticism in its entirety rejected the theory of innate ideas.⁶⁰

Schumacher's interpretation seems to be reading Bonaventure along the lines against which Bavinck warns: that because Bonaventure

⁵⁹ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), p. 64.

⁶⁰ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 64-5.

affirmed that God is present in the interior life of the mind, Bonaventure could thus fit into a philosophical trajectory that accorded to human cognition a foundational epistemic status. This essay has suggested a corrective to this interpretation by arguing that Bonaventure had a robust doctrine of the noetic effects of sin, despite his all-encompassing account of divine illumination.

It is important, however, not to overstate the conclusions of this present essay. It does not contest that Bonaventure was no 'slavish' follower of Augustine, nor does it dislocate Bonaventure from his medieval and early Franciscan milieu, which cited authorities for their own theological and political purposes rather than as a means of merely preserving a straight line of orthodoxy.⁶¹ Schumacher is correct to maintain that the 'much more interesting question to pose to any scholastic text' is not which authorities it is invoking but the precise 'ways [those] scholars employed authorities'.⁶² The early and later Franciscans certainly used Augustine for their own purposes, and Bonaventure is no exception. In this regard, Schumacher's works remain important and they exemplarily pave the way for future study. This argument does, however, challenge the subordinate claim that Bonaventure believed our cognitive powers remain 'fully activated' after the fall. Instead, the Seraphic doctor saw no inconsistency between the twin claims of the intellect being disordered, leading sinners toward ignorant darkness, and that God remains closest to every soul, and, indeed, remains the first thing known.

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⁶¹ Schumacher, 'New Directions in Franciscan Studies', p. 255.

⁶² Schumacher, 'New Directions in Franciscan Studies', p. 255.