

ATRIUM TOUR

OPUS MINUS AND THE “SEVEN SINS IN THE STUDY OF THEOLOGY”

The Opus Minus is an abstract or summary of the main points of Opus Majus, likely intended to make Bacon's ideas more accessible to the Pope. It originally had nine parts, one of which was a treatise on alchemy and another entitled "The Seven Sins in the Study of Theology".

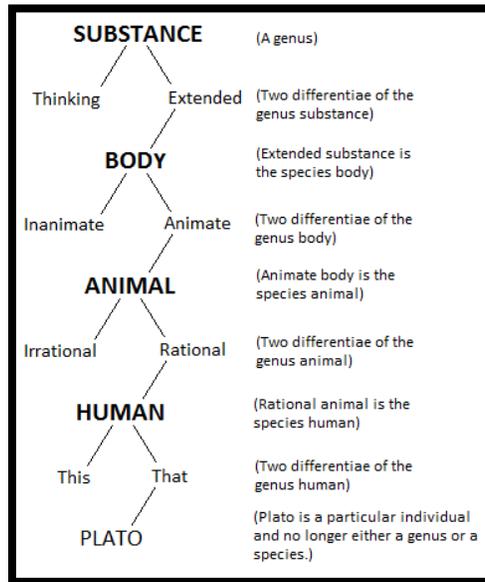
Roger Bacon identified "seven sins" or errors in the study of theology. These "sins" represent flawed approaches to theological inquiry and learning. Bacon believed they hindered a true understanding of God and His creation.

- The first sin was the preponderance of speculative philosophy. Bacon asserts that theology is a divine science; therefore, it must be based on divine principles.
- The second sin was ignorance of the sciences most suitable and necessary to theologians. Theologians of his day studied only Latin grammar, logic, natural philosophy (very superficially) and a part of metaphysics. Bacon believed that other sciences were more necessary: foreign (Oriental) languages, mathematics, alchemy, chemistry, physics, experimental sciences, and moral philosophy.
- The third sin was the defective knowledge of even the four sciences which theologians of his day studied. He believed that their ideas were full of errors and misconceptions, because they had no means to get at the real understanding of the authors from whom they drew all their knowledge, since their writings abounded in Greek, Hebrew, and Arabic expressions and idioms.
- The fourth sin was the preference at the universities to use the "Liber Sententiarum" and disregard the Holy Scripture. (Note: "Liber Sententiarum" refers to Peter Lombard's "Four Books of Sentences," a seminal work in medieval theology. It's a systematic compilation of theological teachings widely used as a textbook in medieval universities.)
- The fifth sin was more disastrous. Bacon insisted that the text of Bible was horribly corrupted, especially the biblical text used at the University of Paris and spread by its students over the whole world. The reasons for this corruption were incorrect translations from the biblical languages.
- The sixth sin, what Bacon considered the "the worst of all sins," was a consequence of the fifth sin. Since the literal translation of the original biblical text was corrupt, the spiritual meaning (which was based upon the literal translation) was also incorrect.
- The seventh sin was a radically false method of preaching. Instead of expounding on the commandments of God, preachers used the teachings of Aristotle.* In Bacon's view, when prelates who during their course of study were

ATRIUM TOUR

not instructed in preaching, when obliged to speak in church, their preaching only served to *"stimulate the hearers to all curiosity of mind, but do not elevate the affection towards good."*

*Around 520 CE, the Roman philosopher Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius was expounding on Greek logic. To assist his students, he drew a diagram that later came to be known as the *arbor porphyriana* or *arbor porphyrii*. It is a branching diagram, starting at its top, which demonstrates a simple system of classification based on the teaching of Aristotle, proceeding from the general to the specific.



Porphyrian Tree