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- ❖ this recovery is only possible if we carefully reflect on the logical framework in which those insights were articulated, given the paradigmatic differences between medieval and modern logical theories.

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If you are interested in joining, please contact Gyula Klima (Philosophy, Fordham University) by e-mail at: klima@fordham.edu

Note of the editor

This volume collects papers from two sessions sponsored by the SMLM. The papers of the first session, devoted to the issue of intellectual cognition in Avicenna, Averroes and Aquinas, were presented at the *Fordham International Conference on Ancient and Medieval Philosophy*, on October 15, 2005, at Fordham University, New York, NY. The papers of the second session, on the medieval problem of the principle of individuation, were presented at the regular meeting of our Society at the *2005 Annual Meeting of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, held at the University of Notre Dame, on October 29, 2005. Some of the papers are reproduced here basically unchanged, as they were presented, while others were expanded and revised by their authors for this volume.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Max Herrera: Understanding Similitudes in Aquinas with the Help of Avicenna and Averroes.....	4
Richard C. Taylor: The Agent Intellect as “form for us” and Averroes’s Critique of al-Fârâbî	18
Gyula Klima: Intentional Transfer in Averroes, Indifference of Nature in Avicenna, and the Representationalism of Aquinas	33
Martin Pickavé: Henry of Ghent on Individuation	38
Giorgio Pini: Scotus on Individuation	50
Gyula Klima: Thomas Sutton on Individuation.....	70

Max Herrera:

Understanding Similitudes in Aquinas with the Help of Avicenna and Averroes¹

In an article entitled *Aquinas on Intellectual Representation*, Claude Panaccio says:

Many recent commentators on Thomas Aquinas have insisted that his theory of intellectual cognition should not be seen as a brand of representationalism. [...] And, of course, several scholars have labeled Aquinas as a 'direct realist' in epistemology. [...] I will endeavor to show [...] a perfectly acceptable sense in which his [Aquinas's] theory of intellectual intentionality is basically representationalist.²

Pannaccio then defines what he means by *representationalism*:

[...] any theory of cognition which attributes a crucial and indispensable role to some sort of mental representation. And by *mental representation*, I will mean any symbolic token existing in some individual mind and endowed within this mind with a semantic content. A mental representation, in this vocabulary, is a mental token referring to something *else*, something extramental in most cases. [...] Aquinas's theory does attribute a crucial and indispensable role to such intermediate entities in the very process of understanding.³

After defining his terms, Pannaccio claims that there are texts in Aquinas that support a direct realist position, and there are texts in Aquinas that support a representationalist position. He says: "I will explore ways of reconciling these two opposite trends in Aquinas's thought. My point, then, will be that the representationalist aspect of the theory must prevail in the last analysis."⁴ Pannaccio then proceeds to demonstrate that the intelligible species is not the nature of the thing known, and that the concept produced by the mind is not the nature of the thing known either. Instead, the intelligible species and the concept are mental tokens, which are likenesses of the nature, but they are not identical with the quiddity or nature.⁵ Thus, the relation between the knower and the known is not one of identity; instead, the relationship is one of likeness.⁶ Finally, Panaccio ends by saying "no external thing, for him [Aquinas], can be cognized without a mental

¹ This paper was presented at the *Ancient and Medieval Conference* in October 2005 at Fordham University and is a result of the "Aquinas and the Arabs" project at Marquette University.

² Claude Pannaccio, "Aquinas on Intellectual Representation," in *Ancient and Medieval Theories of Intentionality* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2001), 185.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., 185-86.

⁵ Ibid., 186-200.

⁶ Ibid., 200.

concept—or mental word—being formed as an *intermediate object of intellection*. Aquinas’s representationalism thus turns out to be incompatible with direct realism after all.”⁷

In this paper, I will argue that the relationship between the knower and the known is one of identity in one sense, *and* yet the relationship *must* be one of similitude in another sense. Consequently, the intelligible species and the concept can be simultaneously understood as identical with the nature of the thing and as similitudes of the nature. In order to argue my point, section one briefly examines Aquinas’s metaphysics and its epistemological consequences; section two examines Avicenna’s metaphysics; section three examines Averroes’s long commentary (on Aristotle’s *On the Soul*); section four examines Aquinas’ epistemology in light of the aforementioned sections, and section five concludes the paper.

Aquinas’s metaphysics

In this section, I briefly look at three important aspects of Aquinas’s metaphysics: (1) What constitutes the essences of material things; (2) What are the constitutive roles of form and matter; (3) How do the constitutive roles of form and matter set up the problem of representationalism.

For Aquinas, form and matter constitute the essence of a material thing. Thomas says:

In things composed from matter and form, the nature of a thing, which is called quiddity or essence, results from the conjunction of form and matter as for example humanity results from the conjunction of the soul and the body.⁸

Aquinas also mentions that form and matter should not be thought of as created things, because form, matter, accidents and the like do not subsist; instead, they coexist within created things. Therefore, one ought to say that form and matter are co-created, whereas the form-matter composite is created.⁹

In the form-matter composite, form and matter play different constitutive roles. Matter is the principle of individuation of forms,¹⁰ and it is indifferent to the reception of all natural forms.¹¹ In addition, prime matter is the pure potency, and as such, prime matter cannot exist without form, which communicates actuality to prime matter.¹² Form, on the other hand, not only

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum Super Sententiis Magistri Petri Lombardi*, Edited by Mandonnet (Paris: Lethielleux, 1929), Bk 1 d. 3 q. 1 a. 1 resp. In rebus ex materia et forma compositis, natura rei, quae quidditas vel essentia dicitur, ex conjunctione formae ad materiam resultat, ut humanitas ex conjunctione animae et corporis.

⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (Ottawa, Canada: Studii Generalis O. PR, 1941), I^a q. 45 a. 4 resp.

¹⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I^a q. 75 a. 5 resp.

¹¹ Aquinas, *Scriptum Super Sententiis Magistri Petri Lombardi*, Bk 1 d. 43 q. 1 a. 1 resp. materia prima, quae de se est indifferens ad omnes formas (unde et infinita dicitur) finitur per formam;

¹² Thomas Aquinas, *De Ente et Essentia*, Opusculum (Turin: Marietti, 1957), Cap 3. Talis autem invenitur habitudo materiae et formae, quia forma dat esse materiae. Et ideo impossibile est esse materiam sine aliqua forma. Tamen non est impossibile esse aliquam formam sine materia.

communicates actuality to prime matter, but it also specifies and determines matter.¹³ Because of their different constitutive roles, form and matter play different epistemological roles.

According to Aquinas, whatever is intelligible is intelligible insofar as it is actual, not insofar as it is in potency.¹⁴ Yet, prime matter is pure potency; hence, it is not the principle for cognition.¹⁵ Nevertheless, matter is intelligible insofar as it is proportioned to some form.¹⁶ That is to say, insofar as it has received a form.¹⁷ If one reflects on what has been said, one sees that if the essence of a thing is to be known, it will be by virtue of its form, which specifies, determines and actualizes the matter.¹⁸ The essence of a thing will not be known by virtue of its matter because matter precludes something from being intelligible. Accordingly, Aquinas states that all cognition is according to some form, which is principle of cognition in the knower,¹⁹ but he also states that the form in the form-matter composite cannot be the principle of intellectual cognition.²⁰ Hence, the form that is the principle of cognition is numerically distinct from the form in the form-matter composite.

Numerically distinct forms are problematic because Aquinas wants to maintain that the form of the known is in the knower (Pannacio refers to the identity between the knower and the known as intentional identity),²¹ yet, he says that the relationship between the nature in the intellect and the

¹³ Aquinas, *De Ente et Essentia*, Cap. 1.

¹⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I^a q.87 a. 1 resp. Respondeo dicendum quod unumquodque cognoscibile est secundum quod est in actu, et non secundum quod est in potentia.

¹⁵ Aquinas, *De Ente et Essentia*, Cap 1. Sed materia neque cognitionis principium est, neque secundum eam aliquid ad genus vel speciem determinatur, sed secundum id quod aliquid actu est.

¹⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I^a q. 87 a. 1 resp. Respondeo dicendum quod unumquodque cognoscibile est secundum quod est in actu, et non secundum quod est in potentia, ut dicitur in IX metaphys., sic enim aliquid est ens et verum, quod sub cognitione cadit, prout actu est. Et hoc quidem manifeste apparet in rebus sensibilibus, non enim visus percipit coloratum in potentia, sed solum coloratum in actu. Et similiter intellectus manifestum est quod, inquantum est cognoscitivus rerum materialium, non cognoscit nisi quod est actu, et inde est quod non cognoscit materiam primam nisi secundum proportionem ad formam, ut dicitur in I physic.

¹⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae De Veritate* (Rome: Leonine Commission, 1972), q. 10 a. 4 resp. Ex cognitione ergo formarum quae nullam sibi materiam determinant, non relinquitur aliqua cognitio de materia; sed ex cognitione formarum quae determinant sibi materiam, cognoscitur etiam ipsa materia aliquo modo, scilicet secundum habitudinem quam habet ad formam; et propter hoc dicit philosophus in I physic., quod materia prima est scibilis secundum analogiam. Et sic per similitudinem formae ipsa res materialis cognoscitur, sicut aliquis ex hoc ipso quod cognoscit similitatem, cognosceret nasum simum.

¹⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, q. 86 a. 1 r 3.

¹⁹ Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae De Veritate*, q. 10 a. 4 resp. omnis cognitio est secundum aliquam formam, quae est in cognoscente principium cognitionis.

²⁰ Aquinas, *Scriptum Super Sententiis Magistri Petri Lombardi*, Bk 4. d. 49 q. 2 a. 2. Ad quartum dicendum, quod omnis cognitio fit per aliquam abstractionem a materia; et ideo quanto forma corporalis magis abstrahitur a materia, magis est cognitionis principium; et inde est quod forma in materia existens nullo modo est cognitionis principium; in sensu autem aliquo modo, prout a materia separatur; et in intellectu nostro adhuc melius.

²¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I^a q. 14 a. 1 resp. quia non cognoscentia nihil habent nisi formam suam tantum; sed cognoscens natum est habere formam etiam rei alterius, nam species cogniti est in cognoscente.

nature of a thing is a relationship of a similitude.²² Instead of reducing intentional identity to representationalism as Pannacio has done, let us look to Avicenna to help us understand how the relationships of identity and similitude are to be reconciled.

Avicenna's doctrine of the indifference of essence/nature

Avicenna is well known for his doctrines of essence/existence and indifference of nature, which are doctrines that he uses to resolve both logical problems and metaphysical problems.²³ In this section, I will examine a text from Avicenna's *Liber de Philosophia Prima* in order to explain Avicenna's doctrine of the indifference of nature and its epistemological importance.

In the following text, Avicenna states:

Animal understood with its accidents is a natural thing, but understood *per se*, it is a nature of which it is said that its being is prior to its natural being, just as the simple is prior to the composite, and this is that whose being is properly called divine being, since the cause of its being inasmuch as it is animal is in the intention of God. But its existing with matter and accidents and its being this individual thing, although it is a divine intention, is nevertheless attributed to a particular nature. Hence, just as animal in [real] being is in many ways, so also it is in the intellect. For in the intellect it is the form of animal abstracted according to the abstraction of which we had previously spoken, and [existing] in this manner, it is called an intelligible form. However, in the intellect, the form of animal [existing in this manner] is of such a kind that one and the same definition [it has] in the intellect befits many particular things. Hence, one form in the intellect will be related to many particulars, and it is in this respect that it is universal, because it is *one intention* in the intellect, whose relation [to the particulars] does not vary no matter which particular animal you take, since it does not matter which one of those it was whose form you first represented in the imagination if the intellect subsequently denuded (*expoliaverit*) its intention from the accidents, for then this exact same form is acquired in the intellect.²⁴

²² Aquinas, *De Ente et Essentia*, Cap. 2. Ipsa enim natura humana in intellectu habet esse abstractum ab omnibus individuans, et ideo habet rationem uniformem ad omnia individua, quae sunt extra animam, prout aequalit est similitudo omnium.

²³ Problem 1 (logical): If animality includes universality in its very definition, then we cannot predicate it of a particular animal. If, on the other hand, particularity is included in the definition of animality, then this would not only exclude its predication of a universal subject, but also of any individual other than the one specified in the quiddity's definition. Problem 2 (metaphysical): How can the same quiddity be "found in many" and not be many? His answer is that a quiddity considered in itself is neither one nor many, for considered in itself, it is itself alone. Cf. Michael Marmura, *Probing in Islamic Philosophy* (Binghamton, New York: Global Academic Publishing, 2005), 24-25.

²⁴ Avicenna, *Liber de Philosophia Prima Sive Scientia Divinia*, Critical ed., Simone Van Riet (Louvain: E. Peeters, 1980), V, I. p.237-38. Animal ergo acceptum cum accidentibus suis est res naturalis; acceptum vero per se est natura, de qua dicitur quod esse eius prius est quam esse naturale, sicut simplex prius est composito, et hoc est cuius esse proprie dicitur divinum esse, quoniam causa sui esse ex hoc quod est animal est Dei intentione. Ipsum vero esse cum materia et accidentibus et ipsum esse hoc individuum, quamvis sit divina intentio, attribuitur tamen naturae particulari. Unde, sicut animal in esse habet plures modos, sic etiam et in intellectu. In intellectu etenim est forma animalis abstracta secundum abstractionem quam praediximus, et dicitur ipsum hoc modo forma intelligibilis. In intellectu autem forma animalis taliter est quod in intellectu convenit ex una et eadem definitione multis particularibus. Quapropter una forma apud intellectum erit relata ad multitudinem, et secundum hunc respectum est universale, quia ipsum est una intentio in intellectu, cuius comparatio non variatur ad quodcumque acceperis animalium, videlicet quoniam, cuiusque eorum primum repraesentaveris formam in imaginatione, si postea expoliaverit intellectus intentionem eius ab accidentibus, acquiratur in intellectu haec ipsa forma.

In other words, a nature can be understood in three modalities: *in re*, *in se*, *in mente*. In the first modality, *in re*, a nature is found existing with its accidents. Although Avicenna does not mention what he means by accidents in this text, he mentions it earlier in the same chapter. Avicenna extends or reinterprets here Aristotle's nine categories of accidents in a striking manner, so that universality, particularity, oneness, multiplicity, existing in actuality and existing in potency all become accidents in this extended sense.²⁵ So, any natural thing (i.e., a particular thing) is constituted of its nature and these accidents. For example, if one considers Fido, a dog, living in New York, then (1) existing in actuality, (2) living, (3) being in New York, (3) being named Fido, (4) being one thing, and (5) being a particular thing are all accidents extrinsic to the essence of dog.

In the second modality, *in se*, a nature is understood *per se*, and Avicenna emphasizes three aspects of a nature in this modality. First, he says that the nature exists prior to its natural being. Second, he qualifies what he means by a nature existing *prior* to its natural being, for he says that the nature exists in the same manner as the simple exists prior to the composite, and earlier in the chapter, he uses the analogy of the part existing prior to the whole.²⁶ Although it may seem that Avicenna is espousing some form of Platonism, he vehemently denies that a nature understood *per se* is a subsisting Platonic form.²⁷ Instead, he says that a nature in this modality is said to have divine being because the cause of the nature insofar as it is a nature is the *intention* of God. It is important to note that Avicenna uses the word intention to denote a formal principle in reality existing in things or in minds.²⁸ Third, he says that even when a nature is found existing with matter, it is still a divine *intention*, although it is attributed to a particular thing. Thus, a *per se* nature, does not change in intention when it is particularized.

In the third modality, *in mente*, a nature can be found existing in the human intellect. Under this modality, four things should be noted. First, all material accidents that were conjoined to the nature are removed from it. Second, the nature is called an *intelligible form*, and it no longer resides in a body, but in an immaterial intellect. Third, the form (or nature) in the intellect agrees with many particular things because the *intention* in the intellect is the same *intention* that is found in the many particulars, and hence, the form or nature in the intellect is universal. Fourth, the form in the imagination has the same *intention* as that which is found in the intellect.

In sum, for Avicenna, a nature can be considered in one of three modalities—*in re*, *in se*, and *in mente*. In the first modality, a nature exists with matter and its accompanying accidents and is manifested as a natural thing. In the second modality, a nature has no accidents conjoined to it,

²⁵ Avicenna, *Liber de Philosophia Prima Sive Scientia Divinia*, V, I. p. 233. Et hoc est quiddam quod est animal vel homo consideratum in seipso secundum hoc quod est ipsum, non accepto cum eo hoc quod est sibi admixtum, sine conditione communis aut propii aut unius aut multi nec in effectu nec in respectu etiam potentiae secundum quod est aliquid in potentia.

²⁶ Avicenna, *Liber de Philosophia Prima Sive Scientia Divinia*, V, I. p. 234.

²⁷ Avicenna, *Liber de Philosophia Prima Sive Scientia Divinia*, V, I. p. 237. Si autem esset hic animal separatum per se, quemadmodum putaverunt illi, tunc non esset hoc animal quod inquirimus et de quo loquimur. Nos enim inquirimus animal quod praedicetur de multis quorum unumquodque sit ipsum. Separatum vero non praedicatur de his, quoniam nullum eorum est ipsum : unde non est opus eo ad id ad quod intendimus.

²⁸ Andrew S.J. Hayen, *L'Intentionnel dans la Philosophie de Saint Thomas* (Paris: Desclee de Brouwer, 1942), 50.

and it said to exist prior to a natural thing. In addition, the source of its being is the intention of God. In the third modality, a nature exists in the mind, and it is universal because it has the same *intention* as those found in the particular things existing outside of the mind. In addition, the intention that was found in the intellect existed in the imagination before it existed in the intellect. Thus, what is common to the nature regardless of its mode of being is the intention. *The notion of intention* is crucial for understanding of Aquinas's doctrine of intelligible species; in order to understand the relationship between the intention in the imagination and the intention in the intellect, we now turn to Averroes.

Averroes and intentional transfer

In this section, I will examine a text in which Averroes explicates what he means by abstraction so that later in the paper, we can see how it contributes to Aquinas's understanding of similitude, intelligible species, and concept. Speaking about the agent intellect and material intellect, which for Averroes are separated subsisting entities, he says:

For we cannot say that the relation of the agent intellect in the soul to the generated intelligible is just as the relation of the artistry to the art's product in every way. For art imposes the form on the whole matter without it being the case that there was something of the intention of the form existing in the matter before the artistry has made it. It is not so in the case of the intellect, for if it were so in the case of the intellect, then a human being would not need sense or imagination for apprehending intelligibles. Rather, the intelligibles would enter into the material intellect from the agent intellect, without the material intellect needing to behold sensible forms. And neither can we even say that the imagined intentions are solely what move the material intellect and draw it out from potency into act. For if it were so, then there would be no difference between the universal and the individual, and then the intellect would be of the genus of the imaginative power. Hence, in view of our having asserted that the relation of the imagined intentions to the material intellect is just as the relation of the sensibles to the senses (as Aristotle will say later), it is necessary to suppose that there is another mover which makes [the intentions] move the material intellect in act (and this is nothing but to make [the intentions] intelligible in act by separating them from matter). Because this intention, which forces the assertion of an agent intellect different from the material intellect and different from the forms of things which the material intellect apprehends, is similar to the intention on account of which sight needs light, in view of the fact that the agent and the recipient are different from light, he was content to make this way known by means of this example. It is as if he says: and the way which forced us to suppose the agent intellect is the same as the way on account of which sight needs light. For just as sight is not moved by colors except when they are in act, which is not realized unless light is present since it is what draws them from potency into act, so too the imagined intentions do not move the material intellect except when the intelligibles are in act, because it is not actualized by these unless something else is present, namely, the intellect in act. It was necessary to ascribe these two activities to the soul in us, namely, to receive the intelligible and to make it, although the agent and the recipient are eternal substances, on account of the fact that these two activities are reduced to our will, namely, to abstract intelligibles and to understand them. For to abstract is nothing other than to make imagined intentions intelligible in act after they were [intelligible] in potency. But to understand is nothing other than to receive these intentions. For when we found the same thing, namely, the imagined intention is transferred in its being from one order to another, we said that

this must be from an agent cause and a recipient cause. The recipient, however, is the material [intellect] and the agent is [the intellect] which brings [this] about.²⁹

Before examining this text, one should understand that the word *intention* as it is used in this context will be synonymous with what Aquinas will later denominate as *ratio*,³⁰ the intelligible aspect of a thing as grasped by the mind.³¹

There are three points that are noteworthy in this text. First, the *intentions* or formal aspects that enter the material intellect, a subsisting separated entity, do not have their origin in the agent intellect, for if they did have their origin in the agent intellect, then imagination and sensation would not be necessary. Averroes, who follows Aristotle, affirms that sensation and imagination are necessary for understanding, so the source of the intentions is not the agent intellect. Second, the *intentions* in the imagination (i.e., imagined intentions) cannot move the material intellect from potency to actuality, for if they could, there would be no distinction between universals and individuals, and intellection would be relegated to the level of imagination. Consequently, the agent intellect is necessary but not sufficient to move the material intellect from potency to actuality because it lacks the *intentions* that will specify and determine the material intellect. Also, the imagined intentions are necessary but not sufficient to move the material intellect from potency to actuality because, although it has the intention that can potentially specify and determine the material intellect, nevertheless, it is at a lower ontological level, and it cannot actually specify and determine that which is at a higher ontological level, the material intellect. The consequences of the first two points lead us to point three: in order for the material intellect to go from potency to actuality, the intention that is intelligible in potency has to be made an intention that is intelligible in actuality. That is to say, the intention has to be transferred from one order of being (i.e., sensible, individual) to another order of being (i.e., intelligible, universal). Thus, one finds one and the same *intention* existing under two modalities. As an intelligible in potency, the intention exists in the imagination, and as an intelligible in actuality, the intention exists in the material intellect.

In sum, for Averroes, the agent intellect does not contain *intentions* or forms for it would render sensation and imagination superfluous, nor can the intentions in imagination affect the intellect. Consequently, the role of the agent intellect is to transfer the intentions found in the imagination from one mode of being to another mode of being in order for the material intellect to go from potentiality to actuality. Having looked at Avicenna's indifference of nature and *common intention*, and having looked at Averroes's notion of intentional transference, we are in a better position to understand Aquinas's epistemology.

²⁹ Averroes, *Long Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima*, Translated by Richard Taylor (Forthcoming, 2006), p. 91-92.

³⁰ Hayen, *L'Intentionnel dans la Philosophie de Saint Thomas*, 51.

³¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Thomas Aquinas on Being and Essence*, Second Revised, trans. and ed. Armand Maurer (Toronto, Canada: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1968), 45.

Aquinas's epistemology

In this section, I will sketch Aquinas's epistemology by (1) looking at the philosophical problems that give rise to the notion of species; (2) examining what a species is and examining its function; (3) examining in what sense the relationships between the known and knower is one of similitude and one of identity.

The assimilation of the known into the knower, and the incommensurability between the world and the intellect give rise to the notion of species. For Aquinas, knowing is the assimilation of the known into the knower.³² That is to say, there is an identity between the knower and the known where the known exists in the knower. Yet, the assimilation of the known into the knower seems impossible given the incommensurability between the world and the intellect.

For Aquinas, the agent intellect, an active potency, and the possible intellect, a passive potency, reside in each human soul, which is immaterial.³³ The external world, on the other hand, is material. Given the ontological gap between the material world and the immaterial intellect, neither the intellect nor the world can directly causally act upon each other. Hence, they are incommensurable. Aquinas himself says that "our intellect is not able to directly and primarily know the singular in material things. The reason for this is that the principle of singularity in material things is individual matter."³⁴ In addition, Aquinas says, "unless one goes through some medium one may not pass from one extreme (i.e., material) to another (i.e., immaterial)."³⁵ In order to resolve these difficulties Aquinas relies on the notion of species and the notion of grades of abstraction.

A species is a type of form that intentionally specifies and determines its subject by communicating a *ratio*, also known as *intentio*, to its subject. The *ratio* or *intentio* is a formal characteristic that *intentionally* specifies and determines its subject. The notion of intentionally specifying and determining a subject is abstruse and may be best understood when contrasted with a non-intentional form (i.e., a natural form). For example, the form of fire is a natural form, and as such it communicates fire. Thus, the heat that is found in the fire is also found in the thing that is set on fire, the subject. In contradistinction, a species of fire that is received in the air will not make the air hot, nor will a species of fire received into a sense organ make the sense organ hot, nor will a species of fire received into the intellect make the intellect hot. Having looked at what species are, let us examine how they bridge the gap between the material and immaterial.

According to Aquinas, visible bodies multiply their species in the medium.³⁶ In other words, composites of matter and form emit species into the medium (e.g., air or water). Consequently,

³² Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I^a q.14 a. 1 r.3. scientia est secundum modum cognoscentis, scitum enim est in sciente secundum modum scientis.

³³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Caramello (Marietti: Taurini-Romae, 1961), Liber 2, cap. 76, n. 2.

³⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I^a q. 86 a. 1 resp. Respondeo dicendum quod singulare in rebus materialibus intellectus noster directe et primo cognoscere non potest. Cuius ratio est, quia principium singularitatis in rebus materialibus est materia individualis."

³⁵ Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae De Veritate*, q. 19 a. 1 resp.

³⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Potentia*, 8th ed., edited by Marietti (Taurini-Rome, 1953), q. 5 a. 8 resp. corpora visibilia multiplicant suas species in medio, virtute luminis, cuius fons est in caelesti corpore.

the medium is in potentiality to species; when a species is emitted from a visible body, the medium goes from potentially having a species to actually having a species. These species that exist in the air are called *species in medio*, and they communicate the *intentio* or *ratio* that is present in the form-matter composite.³⁷ In addition, because the *species in medio* is not in the form-matter composite, the *ratio* is less material. Hence, the *species in medio* has been abstracted from matter in some sense. For example, a stone emits a species that is received in the air. That *species* not only causes the air to go from potentially having a species to actually having a species, it also causes the air to go from potentially having a species of a stone to actually having a species of a stone.

In turn the *species in medio*, communicates the *ratio* that is in the medium to the sense organ. That is to say, the sense organ is in potentiality to receiving the formality that is in the *species in medio*. When the *species in medio* communicates its formality to the sense organ, the sense organ goes from potentially having the species to actually having the species. When the species is received into the sense organ, it is called a *sensible species*. The sensible species cause the sense organ to go from potentially sensing to actually sensing. In addition, not only does the sense organ go from potentially sensing to actually sensing, but it goes from potentially sensing some specific thing. For example, when the species of the stone is received in the sense organ, the sense organ senses the stone. In addition, since the *ratio* of the stone exists in the sense organ without the matter of the stone, the form of the stone is said to exist in a more immaterial fashion.³⁸

The sense organ in turn communicates the formality (i.e., the *ratio* or *intentio*) that is in the sense to the common sense, the unifying sense. The unifying sense is responsible for taking the species from multiple senses and creating a unified percept, which contains the formalities (i.e., *rationes* or *intentiones*) communicated by the senses.³⁹ The common sense in turn communicates the percept to the imagination. In the imagination, the percept is called a phantasm, which is a similitude of a particular thing.⁴⁰ Thus, what began by the multiplication of species by visible bodies terminates in the production of a phantasm.

By reflecting on the process, one can see that the role of the species is to communicate the *ratio* from one ontological level to the ontological level above it. Aquinas says “The species in the sensible thing has the most material being, and the species in the intellect as the most spiritual

³⁷ Robert Pasnau, *Theories of Cognition in the Later Middle Ages* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 14. Alfred Wilder, “On the Knowing Species in St. Thomas: Their Necessity and Epistemological Innocence,” *Angelicum* 68, no. 1 (1991): 2-32. John P. O’ Callaghan, *Thomistic Realism and the Linguistic Turn: Toward a More Perfect Form of Existence* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame, Press, 2003), 177

³⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia De Anima* (Rome: Leonine Commission, 1984), Liber 2 Lectio 24. Et per hunc modum, sensus recipit formam sine materia, quia alterius modi esse habet forma in sensu, et in re sensibili. Nam in re sensibili habet esse naturale, in sensu autem habet esse intentionale et spirituale.

³⁹ Aquinas, *Sententia De Anima*, Liber 3 Lectio 3. Considerandum est etiam, quod licet hoc principium commune immutetur a sensu proprio, quia ad sensum communem perveniunt immutationes omnium sensuum propriorum, sicut ad communem terminum; non tamen sensus proprius est nobilior quam sensus communis, licet movens sit nobilior moto, et agens patiente; sicut nec sensibile exterius est nobilior quam sensus proprius, licet moveat ipsum.

⁴⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, S.T. ^{1a} q. 84 a.7 r. 2. Ad secundum dicendum quod etiam ipsum phantasma est similitudo rei particularis.

(i.e., immaterial) being. Hence, it is necessary that it transitions into this spirituality (i.e., immateriality) by some mediating degrees, inasmuch as in the sense it has a more spiritual being than in the sensible thing, and in the imagination a more spiritual [being] than in the sense, thus ascending one after the other.”⁴¹

However, the phantasm cannot affect the human intellect, which has an ontologically higher mode of being.⁴² For Aquinas, an ontologically higher entity (i.e., more spiritual or immaterial entity) can affect an ontologically lower entity (i.e., a material thing), but an ontologically lower entity cannot affect an ontologically higher entity.⁴³ Consequently, an interesting problem arises. Namely, the phantasm contains the intentions that can “fertilize” (i.e., provide intelligible content for) the human intellect, but the phantasm cannot raise itself to a higher ontological level; on the other hand, the agent intellect is at a higher ontological level, but in and of itself it lacks the intentions that can “fertilize” the human intellect. Thus, neither the phantasm nor the agent intellect in and of itself is a sufficient condition to move the human intellect from potentially knowing to actually knowing. This is the very same problem that Averroes faced, and not surprisingly Aquinas’s solution is similar to that of Averroes, except that for Aquinas the agent intellect and the possible intellect are potencies in each human soul. Aquinas states:

The power of the agent intellect produces some similitude in the possible intellect by the agent intellect’s reverting upon the phantasms. This similitude is representative of the things whose phantasms these are only in regard to the nature of the species. And it is in this manner that the intelligible species are said to be abstracted from phantasms, not that numerically the form, which previously was in the phantasms, afterwards comes to be in the possible intellect, in the manner in which a body is taken from one location and transferred to another.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae De Veritate*, q. 19 a. 1 resp. Quidam enim dicunt, quod sicut nunc a sensibilibus rebus species accipit mediantibus sensibus, ita tunc accipere poterit nullo sensu interveniente. Sed hoc videtur impossibile, quia ab extremo in extremum non fit transitus nisi per media. Species autem in ipsa re sensibili habet esse maxime materiale, in intellectu autem summe spirituale; unde oportet quod in hanc spiritualitatem transeat mediantibus quibusdam gradibus, utpote quod in sensu habet spiritualius esse quam in re sensibili, in imaginatione autem adhuc spiritualius quam in sensu, et sic deinceps ascendendo.

⁴² Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, q. 84 a. 6 resp. Nihil autem corporeum imprimere potest in rem incorpoream. Et ideo ad causandam intellectualem operationem, secundum Aristotelem, non sufficit sola impressio sensibilibus corporum, sed requiritur aliquid nobilius, quia agens est honorabilius patiente, ut ipse dicit. Non tamen ita quod intellectualis operatio causetur in nobis ex sola impressione aliquarum rerum superiorum, ut Plato posuit, sed illud superius et nobilius agens quod vocat intellectum agentem, de quo iam supra diximus, facit phantasmata a sensibus accepta intelligibilia in actu, per modum abstractionis cuiusdam. Secundum hoc ergo, ex parte phantasmatum intellectualis operatio a sensu causatur. Sed quia phantasmata non sufficiunt immutare intellectum possibilem, sed oportet quod fiant intelligibilia actu per intellectum agentem; non potest dici quod sensibilis cognitio sit totalis et perfecta causa intellectualis cognitionis, sed magis quodammodo est materia causae.

⁴³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, q. 84 a. 1 r. 2. Ad secundum dicendum quod, sicut Augustinus dicit XXII de Civit. Dei, non est dicendum quod, sicut sensus cognoscit sola corporalia, ita intellectus cognoscit sola spiritualia, quia sequeretur quod deus et Angeli corporalia non cognoscerent. Huius autem diversitatis ratio est, quia inferior virtus non se extendit ad ea quae sunt superioris virtutis; sed virtus superior ea quae sunt inferioris virtutis, excellentiori modo operatur.

⁴⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I^a q. 85 a. 1 ad. 3. Sed virtute intellectus agentis resultat quaedam similitudo in intellectu possibili ex conversione intellectus agentis supra phantasmata, quae quidem est repraesentativa eorum quorum sunt phantasmata, solum quantum ad naturam speciei. Et per hunc modum dicitur abstrahi species

Aquinas, like Averroes, is denying that the phantasm is able to come to be in the possible intellect. That is to say, it is clear that the form in the phantasm cannot move the possible intellect from potentiality to actuality; nevertheless, it is unclear what he means that the intelligible species are abstracted from phantasms. In another text, however, Aquinas explains what he means when he states that the intelligible species are abstracted from phantasms. Aquinas writes:

The agent intellect abstracts the intelligible species from phantasms insofar as by the power of the agent intellect we are able to receive in our consideration the natures of species, the similitudes of which inform the possible intellect, without their individuating conditions.⁴⁵

Like in Averroes, here as well, it is the *intentions* in the phantasms that are transferred from one order of being to another. Whereas previously the *intentions* existed sensibly within the phantasms, the same *intentions* now exist immaterially and intelligibly in the intelligible species, and subsequently in the concept. So are the intelligible species and concepts *likenesses of* the nature or are they *identical with* the nature? Before, answering the question, let us look at Avicenna's influence on the early Aquinas.

Remember that for Avicenna a nature could be considered in one of three ways - in itself, in a thing, and in the mind. In *De Ente et Essentia*, Aquinas follows Avicenna regarding the indifference of the nature, when he says:

If one inquires whether the nature thus considered is able to be called one or many, neither ought to be conceded because each is outside the understanding of humanity and each is able to pertain to it. For if plurality belonged to its understanding, then it could never be one; although it is one inasmuch as it is in Socrates. Likewise, if unity belonged to its understanding, then it would be one and the same in Socrates and in Plato and it could not be multiplied in several things. [...] However, this nature has a twofold existence: one in singular things and another in the soul; and the above-mentioned nature acquires accidents according to each. In singular things it has multiple [acts of] being according to the diversity of the singular things. Nevertheless, the same nature according to its primary consideration, namely absolutely, demands none of these [...] It remains that the [logical] notion of species accrues to human nature according to that being which it has in the intellect. For the same human nature in the intellect has being abstracted from all individuating conditions, and for this reason it has a uniform *ratio* in relation to all individuals that exist outside the soul, inasmuch as [this *ratio*] is equally a likeness of all [individual humans], leading to cognition of all [men] insofar as they are men. Thus, because it has such a relationship to all individuals, the intellect forms the [logical] notion of species and attributes it to the nature. Hence, the Commentator [i.e., Averroes] in the beginning of his *Metaphysics* says that it is the intellect that causes universality in things. Avicenna also makes the same point in his *Metaphysics*.⁴⁶

intelligibilis a phantasmatis, non quod aliqua eadem numero forma, quae prius fuit in phantasmatis, postmodum fiat in intellectu possibili, ad modum quo corpus accipitur ab uno loco et transfertur ad alterum.

⁴⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I^a q. 85 a. 1 ad. 4. Abstrahit autem intellectus agens species intelligibiles a phantasmatis, in quantum per virtutem intellectus agentis accipere possumus in nostra consideratione naturas specierum sine individualibus conditionibus, secundum quarum similitudines intellectus possibilis informatur.

⁴⁶ Aquinas, *De Ente et Essentia*, Cap 2. Unde si quaeratur utrum ista natura sic considerata possit dici una vel plures, neutrum concedendum est, quia utrumque est extra intellectum humanitatis et utrumque potest sibi accidere. Si enim pluralitas esset de intellectu eius, nunquam posset esse una, cum tamen una sit secundum quod est in Socrate. Similiter si unitas esset de ratione eius, tunc esset una et eadem socratis et Platonis nec posset in pluribus plurificari. Alio modo consideratur secundum esse quod habet in hoc vel in illo, et sic de ipsa aliquid praedicatur per accidens

Suffice it to say that Aquinas was familiar with the notion of the indifference of nature, and it seems to me that Aquinas realized that the *ratio*, which Avicenna called an *intentio*, is that which is common to the nature *in se, in mente, and in re*. It is the *ratio* that allows Aquinas to say that there is a uniformity of *ratio* between the intellect and all the individuals existing outside the mind with the same *ratio*. In addition, having distinguished between the *ratio* and its mode of being, Aquinas can have the same *ratio* existing in various modes of being: in the form-matter composite, in the species *in medio*, in the sensible species, in the phantasm, in the intellect as intelligible species, and in the concept. So, if one considers the intelligible species or the concept according to the same *ratio*, one may rightly say that there is an identity between the form in the form-matter composite and the intellect, for the *ratio* is identical. However, if one considers intelligible species, the concept, the phantasm, the sensible species, and the species *in medio* according to their mode of being, one must say that they are similitudes, for they vary in their mode of being in relation to the form-matter composite. In addition, the species *in medio*, the sensible species, and the phantasm also vary in their mode of being in relation to each other: the former are more material and the latter less material. Thus, the intelligible species and the concept *are formally identical* with the nature in the form-matter composite because they have the same *ratio*, and yet they are also similitudes for the *ratio* exists immaterially in the intellect and materially in the form-matter composite. However, this should not be surprising, for Aquinas repeatedly states: “What is received is in the receiver in the way of the recipient.”⁴⁷ In addition, in the *Sentences* Aquinas adds, “. . . and not in the way of what gives it.”⁴⁸ Thus, in a form-matter composite, the form must be received according to its mode of being, materially,⁴⁹ and in an intellect the form that communicates the *ratio* must be received immaterially.⁵⁰

In sum, the incommensurability of the intellect and the material world and the assimilation of the known to the knower present problems in medieval epistemology. Aquinas uses species (both intelligible and sensible) in order to bridge the gap from the material world to an immaterial intellect. In addition, species communicate a *ratio* that can exist under various modes of being; thus, Aquinas safeguards the objectivity of sense and intellectual cognition, for if the *ratio* were not indifferent to its mode of existence, then whenever its mode of existence would change, the

ratione eius, in quo est, sicut dicitur quod homo est albus, quia socrates est albus, quamvis hoc non conveniat homini in eo quod homo. Haec autem natura duplex habet esse, unum in singularibus et aliud in anima, et secundum utrumque consequuntur dictam naturam accidentia. Et in singularibus etiam habet multiplex esse secundum singularium diversitatem et tamen ipsi naturae secundum suam primam considerationem, scilicet absolutam, nullum istorum esse debet. . . . Relinquitur ergo quod ratio speciei accadat naturae humanae secundum illud esse quod habet in intellectu. Ipsa enim natura humana in intellectu habet esse abstractum ab omnibus individuantibus, et ideo habet rationem uniformem ad omnia individua, quae sunt extra animam, prout aequaliter est similitudo omnium et ducens in omnium cognitionem in quantum sunt homines. Et ex hoc quod talem relationem habet ad omnia individua intellectus adinvenit rationem speciei et attribuit sibi. Unde dicit Commentator in principio de anima quod intellectus est qui agit universalitatem in rebus. Hoc etiam Avicenna dicit in sua metaphysica.

⁴⁷ Aquinas, *Scriptum Super Sententiis Magistri Petri Lombardi*, Bk 4. d. 36 a.4 resp. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I^a q. 84 a. 1 resp. Receptum est in recipiente per modum recipientis.

⁴⁸ Aquinas, *Scriptum Super Sententiis Magistri Petri Lombardi*, Bk 4. d. 36 a. 4 resp. . . . et non per modum dantis.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I^a q. 85 a.1 resp.

ratio would also change. If one considers the form-matter composite and the subsequent species from the point of view of *ratio*, one can say that the *ratio is identical*. However, if one considers the *ratio* along with its mode of being, then species and phantasms are similitudes of the forms of things. The distinction of the *ratio* and its mode of being are doctrines that Aquinas seems to have adopted from Avicenna. The notion of transferring the intention in the imagination seems to have been adopted from Averroes. These two Arab doctrines help Aquinas safeguard the objectivity of cognition at the sensitive and the intellectual level.

Conclusion

Aquinas's metaphysics entails that form as such is the principle of cognition, but form in form-matter composites is not the principle of cognition. Thus, if there is going to be intellectual cognition, the form in the knower must be numerically distinct from the form in the form-matter composite. As a result, some say that Aquinas is a representationalist. The incommensurability of the intellect and the material world and the assimilation of the known into the knower are problems that give rise to the notion of species, which is intended to bridge the ontological gap between the material world and the immaterial intellect. In addition, species are intended to communicate a *ratio*, a formal characteristic that intentionally specifies and determines its subject. Avicenna's doctrine of the indifference of a nature allows Aquinas to assert that there is a relationship of identity *and* similitude between the knower and the known. The indifference of *ratio* to its mode of being also allows the same *ratio* to be communicated via species, thus safeguarding the objectivity of sense and intellectual cognition. Averroes's doctrine of intentional transference allows Aquinas to claim that the same *ratio* or *intentio* that is found in the imagination and in particular things is found in the intellect. Having learned from Avicenna and Averroes, Aquinas can say "[...] the intelligible species is a likeness of the essence of a thing *and*, in some manner, it is the very quiddity and nature of the thing according to intelligible being, not according to natural being inasmuch as it is found in things."⁵¹

⁵¹ Aquinas, *Quaestiones Quodlibetales* 8, q. 2, a. 2, resp.: "Unde species intelligibilis est similitudo ipsius essentiae rei, *et* est quodammodo ipsa quidditas et natura rei secundum esse intelligibile, non secundum esse naturale, prout est in rebus."

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Richard C. Taylor:

The Agent Intellect as “form for us” and Averroes’s Critique of al-Fârâbî¹

In his discussions of the nature of intellect in the *Long Commentary on the De Anima* Averroes sets forth his novel and controversial doctrine of the material intellect as a separately existing substance shared by all human beings for the sake of intellectual thought and understanding.² That teaching drew the attention of thinkers in the Latin West where it was the source of great controversy, especially concerning the nature of the individual human person in reference to such matters as personal immortality and personal moral responsibility, issues of great importance in Medieval European Christianity.³ However, concerns with that contentious teaching have eclipsed Averroes’s important views on the agent intellect, views developed in conjunction with the doctrine of the material intellect but in fact much more positively received in the Latin West. That conception of the agent intellect and of the role it plays in human understanding was developed out of explicit intellectual dialogue with the interpretations of Aristotle by Alexander of Aphrodisias, Theophrastus, Themistius, al-Fârâbî, and Ibn Bâjjah.⁴ From that dialogue Averroes emerged in the *Long Commentary*

¹ This article was first published in *Topicos* 29 (2005) 29-51 (Universidad Panamericana, Mexico City). It is published here with permission of the editors of *Topicos*. Some corrections have been introduced in the present version.

² For discussion of that doctrine, see Richard C. Taylor, “Separate Material Intellect in Averroes’ Mature Philosophy,” in *Words, Texts and Concepts Cruising the Mediterranean Sea. Studies on the sources, contents and influences of Islamic civilization and Arabic philosophy and science, dedicated to Gerhard Endress on his sixty-fifth birthday*, Ruediger Arnzen and Joern Thielmann, eds., pp.289-309. [Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta series] (Leuven: Peeters, 2004).

³ See Zdzislaw Kuksewicz, *De Siger de Brabant à Jacques de Plaisance. La théorie de l’intellect chez les averroïstes latins des XIIIe et XIVe siècles*. Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1968; “The Latin Averroism of the late thirteenth Century,” in *Averroismus im Mittelalter und in der Renaissance*, Friedrich Niewöhner and Loris Sturlese (eds.), (Zürich: Spur, 1994) pp.101-113. For a short account of Latin Averroism, see Sten Ebbesen, “Averroism” in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. London: Routledge, 1998. Retrieved July 16, 2004, from <http://www.rep.routledge.com.libus.csd.mu.edu:80/article/B012>

⁴ Of course, Avicenna played a role but Averroes has little explicit discussion of his teachings. In the *Long Commentary on the De Anima*, Avicenna is mentioned only twice. At {441-2} he is cited as holding the material intellect must be a power unmixed with the body. At {470} Averroes ridicules Avicenna for not holding to proper Aristotelian teachings when he writes that Avicenna “followed Aristotle only in dialectics, but in other things he erred, and chiefly in the case of metaphysics...because he began, as it were, from his own perspective.” All citations of the *Long Commentary on the De Anima* are to *Averrois Cordubensis Commentarium Magnum in Aristotelis De Anima Libros*, F. Stuart Crawford (ed.) (Cambridge: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1953). This text is cited hereafter as LCDA with page

on the *De Anima* with the teaching that the only proper understanding of the agent intellect necessarily involves the agent intellect being “form for us” as “the final form for us” and “the final form belonging to us” in such a way as “to assert the agent intelligence to be in the soul”.⁵ What is more, Averroes came to view his own teaching on the agent intellect to be radically at variance with that of al-Fârâbî whom Averroes understood to hold the unacceptable doctrine of the agent intellect as agent cause only and not formal cause.

Agent intellect in the *Short* and *Middle Commentaries on De Anima*

The views of Averroes on the nature of human intellectual powers changed several times as he worked carefully and thoughtfully through the issues before reaching his final position in the *Long Commentary on the De Anima*. All three of his commentaries on the *De Anima* evidence intensive study of the works of philosophical psychology by Alexander of Aphrodisias and Themistius.⁶ In the *Short Commentary* Averroes was guided by Ibn Bâjjah in his understanding of the nature of intellect and conceived of the material intellect as a power for reception of intelligibles attached to the forms of the imagination as its subject.⁷ On the understanding of Averroes each human being

numbers to this Latin text given in brackets. All translations are mine unless indicated otherwise. Averroes was aware of Avicenna’s teaching on the separate agent intellect as “giver of forms” (*wâhib al-Buwar, dator formarum*) in the case of substantial change in the natural world. See *Averroès Tafsîr mâ ba’d at-ḥabîṭat*, Maurice Bouyges (ed.), in 4 vols (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1938-1952) pp. 882, 1496-1498; and *Aristotelis Metaphysicorum Libri XIII cum Averrois Cordubensis in eosdem commentariis et epitome in Aristotelis Opera Cum Averrois Commentariis*. Venetiis Apud Iunctas, 1574, v. 8, 181rA, 304rA-vG; *Ibn Rushd’s Metaphysics. A Translation with Introduction of Ibn Rushd’s Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics, Book Lâm* by Charles Genequand (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1984) pp.107-109. Also see Herbert A. Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) p.245.

⁵ LCDA{445} and {485}; {485} and {490}; and {438} respectively.

⁶ Averroes had the *De Anima* and the *De Intellectu* of Alexander, of which only the second is extant in Arabic. For the Arabic see J. Finnegan, S.J., (ed.) in "Texte arabe du PERI NOU d’Alexandre d’Aphrodise," *Mélanges de l’Université Saint Joseph* (Beirut) 33 (1956) pp.159-202; and Abdurrahman Badawi, (ed.), pp.31-42 in *Commentaires sur Aristote perdus en grec et autres épîtres*, (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 1971). For the Greek versions, see Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De Anima Liber Cum Mantissa*, Ivo Bruns (ed.). Berlin: Typis et Impensis Georgii Reimer, 1887. [Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca, Suppl. II, pt.1]; and *De Anima Liber Cum Mantissa*, ed. Ivo Bruns (Berlin 1887) [Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca, Suppl. II, pt.1] pp.106-113. He also had the Paraphrase of the *De Anima* by Themistius which is only partially extant in Arabic today. See *An Arabic Translation of Themistius’ Commentary on Aristotle’s De Anima*, M. C. Lyons (ed.). Columbia, South Carolina, and Oxford, England: Bruno Cassirer Publishers Ltd., 1973. For the Greek, see Themistius, *In Libros Aristotelis De Anima Paraphrasis*, R. Heinze (ed.). Berlin: G. Reimeri, 1899) [Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca, 5.3].

⁷ The material intellect “is a form having as its matter the intermediate spiritual forms of the imagination.” Ibn Bâjjah, *Risâlat Ittiṣâl al-ʿAql bi-l-Insân*, Miguel Asín Palacios (ed. and trans.) in "Tratado de Avempace sobre la Union del Intelecto con el Hombre," *al-Andalus* 7 (1942) pp. 1-47. Arabic p. 13, Spanish p. 30; *Risâ’il Ibn Bâjjah al-Ilâhiyah (Ibn Bâjjah (Avempace). Opera Metaphysica)*, Majid Fakhry (ed.) p.160; Vincent Lagardère, tr. “L’Épître d’Ibn Bâjja sur la conjonction de l’intellect avec l’esprit

possesses this receptive power called material intellect individually and each is responsible for supplying the content of the imagination through individual efforts at understanding the world. That is, in this work Averroes holds for a plurality of material intellects, one for each human being, by which the intelligibles of human understanding are apprehended in some fashion by human beings. “With this disposition which exists for human beings in the forms belonging to the imagination, the imaginative soul of human beings is distinguished from the imagination of animals....”⁸ In the *Short Commentary* the material intellect, not a substance in itself but a disposition attached to the forms held in the imagination of the individual human being, is described as “the disposition which is in the forms of the imagination for receiving intelligibles”⁹ The sensed intentional forms from the world received into the internal senses and provided to the imagination remain intelligibles in potency and require a mover to make them go from potency into act, from being potential intelligibles to being intelligibles in act. “For the material intellect, insofar as it is material, necessarily needs in its existence that there be here an intellect existing in act eternally, even when the material [intellect] does not exist.”¹⁰

In contrast to that material intellect which is multiple in number and is only a disposition of the forms in the imagination, the agent intellect in the *Short Commentary* is a unique entity with its own existence independent of things of the world. Averroes writes that “it is apparent that this agent intellect is more noble than the material [intellect] and that it is in itself existing in act as an eternal intellect, whether or not we have intellectual understanding of it.”¹¹ The agent intellect is both intellect and also intelligible in every way, since it is a form and it is an agent, writes Averroes. Yet, while the agent intellect must be ontologically separate from individual human material intellects, the actualization of intelligibles in potency in the forms of the imagination and the realization of those intelligibles in the individual human in another higher mode of being in the material intellect for intellectual understanding require that the agent intellect somehow be present in us. Hence, Averroes writes,

humain,” *Revue des Etudes Islamiques* 49 (1981) pp. 175-196, see p.185. For an explanation of the doctrine, see p. 194 of Arthur Hyman, “Averroes’ Theory of the Intellect and the Ancient Commentators” in *Averroes and the Aristotelian Tradition. Sources, Constitution and Reception of the Philosophy of Ibn Rushd (1126-1198). Proceedings of the Fourth Symposium Averroicum* (Cologne, 1996), Gerhard Endress and Jan A. Aertsen with the assistance of Klaus Braun (eds.) (Leiden: Brill, 1999) pp.188-198.

⁸ *Talkhis Kitāb al-Nafs*, Ahmed Fouad El-Ahwani (ed.) (Cairo: Imprimerie Misr, 1950) p.87. Hereafter this text will be referred to as SCDA (*Short Commentary on the De Anima*). Another edition is found in *Epitome de Anima*, Salvador Gómez Nogales (ed.). Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas Instituto “Miguel Asín” Instituto Hispano-Arabe de Cultura, 1985. Also see *La Psicología de Averroes. Comentario al libro sobre el alma de Aristóteles*, Salvador Gómez Nogales (trans.). Madrid: Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, 1987. For an account of the contents of the *Short Commentary*, see Alfred L. Ivry, “Averroes’ *Short Commentary* on Aristotle’s *De anima*,” *Documenti e Studi sulla Tradizione filosofica medievale* 8 (1997) pp. 511-549.

⁹ SCDA p.86.

¹⁰ SCDA p.88.

¹¹ SCDA pp.88-89.

For this reason it is clear that its intellect can belong to us ultimately (*bi-âkhirah*). I mean insofar as it is form for us (*ṣûrah li-nâ*) and it is such that it has generated for us as necessary an eternal intelligible. Since it is itself an intellect whether or not we have intellectual understanding of it, it is not the case that its existence as intellect is from our activity as is the case in regard to material intelligibles.¹²

Thus, in intellectual understanding or theoretical knowing, the agent intellect has to become in some sense a form belonging to us in the ultimate or complete act of knowing since it is we who come to be knowers. As such it provides to the individual human being the formal perfection of the intelligibles in potency present in the forms of the imagination such that those intelligibles now known in act in the human being's mind are themselves the realization of a disposition connected to the forms of the imagination. Averroes is not altogether unambiguous in his description. Still, it seems fair to say that this disposition, the material intellect, which is described by him as a disposition of the forms of the imagination, allows for an apprehension *in us* of the intelligibles at the level of universals characteristic of knowledge at the highest level. It is for this reason that Averroes states that "This state is what is known as union (*al-ittiḥâd*) and conjoining (*al-ittiṣâ*)." ¹³ This, however, is not language used in the sense that mystics use, but rather language dependent on Alexander's account of the union of the agent intellect with us in intellectual understanding yielding the acquired intellect. Our conjoining and union with the agent intellect is nothing but the extraction of forms from material subjects and the generation of intelligibles, the very perfection of the human material intellect.¹⁴ In themselves, the intelligibles in potency and the material intellect are insufficient for the generation of intelligibles in act belonging to human conceptualization: "When this has come about, this conceptualization is the ultimate perfection of man and the end sought."¹⁵ The end of human beings, then, is highest intellectual conceptualization which is attained by a uniting and conjoining of the individual human being providing intelligibles in potency with the agent intellect so as to realize in the individual human material intellect intelligibles in act as conceptualized.¹⁶

With the appearance of the *Middle Commentary* (ca.1174-1180) Averroes had substantially rethought his views on the nature of imagination as a power transcending the body. Earlier in the *Short Commentary* Averroes did not conceive the material intellect as a power directly in a body insofar as it was not imagination – a bodily power – but rather a disposition having the forms of the imagination as its subject. Yet now imagination seems to be conceived as a power too mixed with the body to permit it to

¹² SCDA p.89.

¹³ SCDA p.89.

¹⁴ SCDA pp.88-89.

¹⁵ SCDA p.90.

¹⁶ As indicated below, in the *Long Commentary* Averroes asserts this emphasizing the difference between his view and that of Ibn Bâjjah whom he describes as holding that conceptualization and intellectual knowing are not the end but the means to a higher unity and conjoining with the separate agent intellect.

be subject for a disposition which must be so unmixed as to be open to the reception of any and all intelligibles without distortion or interference. Averroes has conceived a new model for understanding the relation of the material intellect to the human soul. As completely unmixed, the material intellect cannot properly be considered to have a subject which is a body or a power in a body. Apparently using the celestial bodies, souls and intellects as his model, Averroes now conceives the material intellect as a disposition with the soul as subject but with the special understanding that it is in its subject without being in a composed union with it, not involving the sort of composition found in the being of material substances or accidents. Instead the material intellect is made by the agent intellect to exist in association with each individual after the manner of the celestial soul which has an association with a celestial body but exists separately. In this sense, then,

...the material intellect is something composed of the disposition found in us and of an intellect conjoined to this disposition. As conjoined to the disposition, it is a disposed intellect, not an intellect in act; though, as not conjoined to this disposition, it is an intellect in act; while, in itself, this intellect is the Agent Intellect, the existence of which will be shown later. As conjoined to this disposition, it is necessarily an intellect in potentiality which cannot think itself but which can think other than itself (that is, material things), while, as not conjoined to the disposition, it is necessarily an intellect in act which thinks itself and not that which is here (that is, it does not think material things).¹⁷

Thus, in the *Middle Commentary* the material intellect is a power made to exist in immaterial association with individual human beings by the separate agent intellect. This allows for sensed intentions intelligible in potency to be transformed by the intellectual power of the agent intellect and deposited in individual and immaterial receptive intellects belonging to distinct human beings. Again, as with the *Short Commentary*, Averroes is concerned with the issue of materiality and so separates the human receptive intellect from body and powers of the soul existing in the body as in a subject. What is more, Averroes avoids what he calls here in the *Middle Commentary* an absurd position of locating the “material intellect” in the nature of a separately existing intellectual substance, a position absurd for two reasons. First, it would mean that disposition and potentiality, characteristics of material things, would be said to exist in separate, immaterial intellectual substances which are as such fully active in their being. Secondly, it would mean that our first actuality and perfection as human beings qua rational animals, namely our capacity for intellectual development called “material intellect,” would be something eternal, while our realization of this capacity would be generable and corruptible, taking place through time. That is to say, the fulfillment of an eternal entity would be through temporal and generated activities, something which is unacceptable because these entities are not in the same genus.¹⁸ Still, it is this “absurd” position that Averroes will later adopt in his *Long Commentary*.

¹⁷ Averroes. *Middle Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima. A Critical Edition of the Arabic Text with English Translation, Notes and Introduction*, by Alfred L. Ivry. (Provo, Utah 2002) pp. 111-112. Hereafter this will be cited as MCDA, Ivry tr. Translation slightly modified.

¹⁸ MCDA, Ivry tr. p.111.

The agent intellect in the *Middle Commentary* is again conceived as an entity ontologically separate from and independent of the physical world and individual human material intellects. Yet, on this account it is the agent intellect which provides all human beings at birth with the initial capability for intellectual understanding, that is, the power called material intellect, and it is also the agent intellect which provides the actuality for the realization of intelligibles in the material intellects of human beings. This leads Averroes to hold that these “two functions [or activities] exist in our souls”¹⁹ and that “there will be an intellect in us which is intellect with respect to [its ability to] receive every intelligible, and an intellect in us with respect to [its ability] to actualize every intelligible.”²⁰ Hence, he can conclude,

It is clear that, in one respect, this intellect is an agent and, in another, it is form for us (*ṣūrah li-nā*), since the generation of intelligibles is a product of our will. When we want to think something, we do so, our thinking it being nothing other than, first, bringing the intelligible forth and, second, receiving it. The individual intentions in the imaginative faculty are they that stand in relation to the intellect as potential colors do to light. That is, this intellect renders them actual intelligibles after their having been intelligible in potentiality. It is clear, from the nature of this intellect – which, in one respect, is form for us (*ṣūrah li-nā*) and, in another, is the agent for the intelligibles – that it is separable and neither generable nor corruptible, for that which acts is always superior to that which is acted upon, and the principle is superior to the matter. The intelligent and intelligible aspects of this intellect are essentially the same thing, since it does not think anything external to its essence. There must be an Agent Intellect here, since that which actualizes the intellect has to be an intellect, the agent endowing only that which resembles what is in its substance.²¹

Insofar as the activity of the actualization of intelligibles in potency comes to be in the soul of the individual human being in a realization of the individual material intellect as containing intelligibles in act and insofar as this activity requires individual human will and effort, Averroes finds it appropriate to say that the agent intellect is “form for us” (*ṣūrah li-nā*), just as he had in the *Short Commentary*. Again, similar to what is found in the *Short Commentary*, Averroes views the generation of these intelligibles in individual human material intellects to take place thanks to the provision of individual intentions in the human imagination consequent to sense perception. The content intelligible in potency in the human imagination is then made to be intelligible in act by the power of the agent intellect acting to bring about that content now on another level, the level of intellectual understanding, in the material intellect. It does this insofar as it is itself an intellect in act and intelligible in act, since only what possesses such intellectual actuality can bring to intellectual actuality both the intelligibles in potency provided by the individual’s imagination and the individual’s material intellect in potency to receive those generated intelligibles in act. In this sense, then, the agent intellect not only must be an agent raising intelligibles in potency in the imagination to intelligibles in act in the material intellect but also must be “form for us” since it is a

¹⁹ MCDA, Ivry tr. p. 112.

²⁰ MCDA, Ivry tr. p.116

²¹ *ibid.*

power acting intrinsically to the human soul which both provides intelligibles in potency and receives intelligibles in act. For this reason Averroes can then say in the *Middle Commentary* that the ontologically separate agent intellect is nevertheless an essential part of human intellectual understanding and its ultimate fulfillment: “This Agent Intellect, our final form (*al-ṣūrah al-akhirah li-nā*) does not think at one time and not at another, nor does it exist at one time and not at another; it is, rather, unceasing, and will not cease. Thus, when separated from the body, it is immortal, necessarily.”²²

Agent intellect in the *Long Commentary on De Anima* and Averroes’s critique of al-Fârâbî

The *Long Commentary on the De Anima* which contains Averroes’s most mature and influential teaching on the nature of human intellect sets forth the famous account of the material intellect as a unique entity shared by all human beings who attain intellectual understanding. As I have argued elsewhere,²³ this doctrine is the consequence of a new consideration by Averroes of the requirements of intelligibles in act now based on two foundational principles of a metaphysical sort. The first concerns the material intellect which must be such as to receive and contain intelligibles in act insofar as the material intellect is “that which is in potency all the intentions of universal material forms and is not any of the beings in act before it understands any of them.”²⁴ It is not possible for the material intellect itself to be a particular or definite individual entity since the received intelligibles would then be contracted to the particular nature of their subject, the material intellect. The material intellect then must not be a particular entity as a member of a species but rather must be a unique entity which constitutes its own distinct species. As such it can be an existing immaterial intellect yet it must also be receptive in nature without contracting what it receives into particularity. Averroes marks the unusual nature of the material intellect by calling it “a fourth kind of being,”²⁵ other than matter, form or a composite of these. The second principle concerns the requirements of the intelligibles in act themselves. The problem with the accounts of the earlier commentaries was that their plurality of immaterial receptive intellects meant a plurality of intelligibles in act without the same intelligible being understood by each human being. If two humans are thinking of the same intelligible, for example, a teacher and a student, then they cannot be thinking about two different intelligibles. Indeed a third intelligible, over and above those in their individual intellects, would be required to explain why they are in fact thinking about the same intelligible. Consequently, it is necessary that the intelligible in act exist separately from particular or definite

²² MCDA, Ivry tr. pp. 116-117.

²³ See Richard C. Taylor, “Cogitatio, Cogitativus and Cogitare: Remarks on the Cogitative Power in Averroes,” in *L’elaboration du vocabulaire philosophique au Moyen Age*, ed. J. Hamesse et C. Steel (Turnhout, Brepols, 2000) pp. 111-146. (Rencontres de philosophie Medievale Vol. 8.)

²⁴ LCDA {387}.

²⁵ LCDA {409}.

individual entities in the single transcendent material intellect shared by all human beings.

As with the earlier commentaries, the agent intellect here again functions as what moves intelligibles in potency in the forms of the imagination to becoming intelligibles in act in the receptive material intellect now viewed as shared by all human beings. What was indicated in the earlier commentaries is now made more evident by Averroes, namely, that his account of Aristotelian intellection is an unambiguous doctrine of the abstraction of intelligibles from the content of human experience. In contrast to Avicenna who held that human intellectual understanding involved the preparation of the individual human intellect for the ‘reception’ of the content of intellectual understanding from the agent intellect which contains in itself all forms,²⁶ Averroes makes explicit his doctrine of intentional transference by which the intention in the imagination derived from sense is, by the intellectual power of the agent intellect, “transferred” in “being from one order into another,”²⁷ from intelligible in potency to intelligible in act. In this natural process of conjoining the agent intellect and material intellect are united with the knower such that the agent intellect is “the final form belonging to us,”²⁸ that is, our formal cause and perfection, and the material intellect is our intellect. Again, as seen in the earlier commentaries, in this process the agent intellect is “form for us”²⁹ both because we are the ones who individually initiate the process of knowing and also because in knowing the agent intellect is intrinsic to us, not something external emanating intelligibles out of itself. In the formation of knowledge from experience, the agent intellect does not give intelligibles from its own nature to some distinct entity but only functions as an abstractive and imprinting power, actualized as such only in the presence of denuded intelligibles provided by individual human beings. Since humans are deliberate initiators of the process of knowing, the separate agent intellect belongs to them as formal cause and the separate material intellect also belongs to them as the receptive power as shared human intellect actualized in abstraction.

²⁶ Dimitri Gutas and Dag Hasse rightly argue against the traditional notion that forms are literally emanated from the agent intellect into human intellectual souls in Dimitri Gutas, “Intuition and Thinking: The Evolving Structure of Avicenna’s Epistemology,” in *Aspects of Avicenna*, Robert Wisnovsky (ed.) (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2001; Reprinted from *Princeton Papers: Interdisciplinary Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. IX), pp. 1-38; and Dag Nikolaus Hasse, “Avicenna on Abstraction,” *ibidem*, pp. 39-72. Nevertheless, Avicenna does not hold that intelligibles are abstracted from experience of the world. See Meryem Sebtı, “Le Statut ontologique de l’image dans la doctrine avicennienne de la perception,” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 15 (2005) pp. 109–140.

²⁷ ... invenimus idem transferri in suo esse de ordine in ordinem, scilicet intentiones ymaginatas.... LCDA {439}

²⁸ ...forma postrema nobis.... LCDA {490}; ... ultima forma nobis.... LCDA {485}.

²⁹ ...forma nobis.... LCDA {485}. Averroes finds this notion present in both Alexander and Themistius. See LCDA {489} and {445} respectively.

For the central notion in this doctrine, intentional transference, Averroes relies on considerations raised by al-Fârâbî in his *Letter on the Intellect*.³⁰ In that work al-Fârâbî sets forth a doctrine which gives every appearance of being a form of abstraction of intelligibles from sense experience.

... [W]hen there come to be in it the intelligibles which it abstracts (*intaza'at*) from the matters, then those intelligibles become intelligibles in actuality. Before they were abstracted from their matters they were intelligibles in potentiality, but when they were abstracted, they became intelligibles in actuality, because they became forms for that essence... The intelligibles which are intelligibles in potentiality are, before they become intelligible in actuality, forms in matter outside the soul (*khârij al-nafs*).³¹

Al-Fârâbî's further remarks on this abstraction and the nature of the intelligibles in act would seem to have him in accord with what we have seen for Averroes, namely, that abstraction is genuinely grounded fully in sensory experience. He writes,

But when they become intelligibles in actuality, then their existence (*wujûdu-hâ*), insofar as they are intelligibles in actuality, is not the same as their existence insofar as they are forms in matters. And their existence in themselves [as forms in matters] is not the same as their existence insofar as they are intelligibles in actuality. Now, their existence in themselves [as forms in matters] follows the rest of that which is joined to them, namely sometimes place, sometimes time, sometimes position, at times quantity, at times being qualified by corporeal qualities, at times acting and at times undergoing action. But when these forms become intelligibles in actuality, many of those other categories are removed from them, so that their existence becomes another existence, different from this existence.³²

For al-Fârâbî, this difference in existence means a difference in the intellect between the intelligibles as first thought and abstracted from matter and the intelligibles

as thought a second time in such a way that their existence is not that previous existence, but their existence is separate from their matters, according as they are forms which are not in their matters and according as they are intelligibles in actuality. When the intellect in actuality thinks the intelligibles which are forms in it, insofar as they are intelligibles in actuality, then the intellect of which it was first said that it is the intellect in actuality, becomes now the acquired intellect.³³

At the stage of acquired intellect, the human intellect leaves behind the body and the soul's external and internal senses and also the stage of intellect in actuality which came

³⁰ al-Fârâbî. *Alfarabi. Risâlah fî al-'aql*, ed. Maurice Bouyges, S.J. (Beyrouth: Dar el-Machreq Sarl, 1983²). There is a partial English translation by Arthur Hayman in *Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, ed. Arthur Hyman and James J. Walsh (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1973) pp. 215-221. On the dependence of this work on al-Fârâbî's study of Alexander rather than on a direct reading of the Aristotle's *De Anima*, see the careful and insightful study of Marc Geoffroy in "La tradition arabe du *Peri nou* d'Alexandre d'Aphrodise et les origines de la théorie farabienne des quatre degrés de l'intellect," in *Aristotele e Alessandro di Afrodisia nella Tradizione Araba*, Cristina D'Ancona and Giuseppe Serra (eds.) [Subsidia Mediaevalia Patavina 3] (Padova: Il Poligrafo casa editrice s.r.l., 2002) pp. 191-231.

³¹ *Risâlah fî al-'aql*, Arabic pp.15-16; English p. 216.

³² *Risâlah fî al-'aql*, Arabic pp. 16-17; English p.216.

³³ *Risâlah fî al-'aql*, Arabic pp. 19-20; English p. 217.

about in the initial abstraction of intelligibles simply because, as intellect contemplating immaterial intelligibles, it no longer has need of abstraction. The intellect ascends above the body and beyond intellect in actuality, becoming acquired intellect and finally reaching the point of associating with the agent intellect itself.

But if one ascends from prime matter step by step, then one ascends to the nature which is the corporeal forms in hylic matters until one ascends to that essence [the intellect in potentiality], afterwards to that which is above until, when one has reached the acquired intellect, one will have reached that which is like the stars and one will have reached the limit to which those things which are related to hyle and matter ascend. When one ascends from this, then one will have ascended to the first stage of existing things which are immaterial, and the first stage is the stage of the agent intellect.³⁴

For al-Fârâbî at this stage ultimate human perfection is reached with a transformation into an intellectual substance which is understood as the meaning of the afterlife, although the agent intellect does not affect human beings only by enabling the formation of intelligibles in act but also by being an emanative cause for natural forms of the world.³⁵

And the agent intellect thinks first the most perfect of existing things. The forms which here are forms in matters are in the agent intellect abstract forms, but not such that they at first existed in matter and then were abstracted, but those forms never cease in it in actuality. And it [the agent intellect] is imitated in the realm of first matter and of other matters, because they [the matters] were given in actuality the forms which are in the agent intellect. And the existing things whose coming into being was first intended are, according to our view, those forms, except that, inasmuch as their coming into being here [below] was not possible except in matters, there came into existence these matters.³⁶

In the *Long Commentary on the De Anima*, however, Averroes reads the work of al-Fârâbî as fatally flawed because al-Fârâbî conceived of the agent intellect only as an agent cause extrinsic to the human soul and not as form for us. Averroes writes that in

³⁴ *Risâlah fî al-ʿaql*, Arabic pp. 23-24; English p.218.

³⁵ The views of al-Fârâbî in various works are succinctly summarized by Herbert A. Davidson as follows: “The *Risâlah fî al-ʿaql* portrays the emanation of the translunar universe as *al-Madîna al-Fâdîla* and *al-Siyâsa al-Madaniyya* did. It differs from those two works in ascribing to the active intellect the emanation of a range of natural forms above the level of the four elements. Alfarabi’s *Philosophy of Aristotle*, which maintained that a supernal incorporeal source must be assumed for species as a whole although not for individuals, occupies an intermediate position on the issue, standing between *al-Madîna al-Fâdîla* and *al-Siyâsa al-Madaniyya*, which know nothing about a source of natural forms in the incorporeal realm, and the *Risâla*, which has the active intellect emanate the natural forms of individual sublunary objects.

“In the *Risâla*, the active intellect is still the cause of actual human thought. Alfarabi now explains, however, that the analogue of light emitted by the active intellect renders potential concepts actual and hence enables the human intellect to grasp concepts. In *al-Madîna, al-Fâdîla, al-Siyâsa al-Madaniyya*, and the *Philosophy of Aristotle*, the analogue of light emitted by the active intellect enables the human intellect to grasp not concepts but the propositions embodying the first principles of thought and science.” Herbert A. Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p.70.

³⁶ *Risâlah fî al-ʿaql*, Arabic pp. 28-29; English p.219.

the *Letter on the Intellect* al-Fârâbî “said that it is possible for the material intellect to understand separate things” and identifies this also as “the opinion of Ibn Bâjjah.”³⁷ That is, as indicated above, the perishable human material intellect in select human beings able to attain the stage of actual intellect and then the stage of acquired intellect can become immaterial and eternal thereby achieving ultimate human happiness. According to Averroes, al-Fârâbî derived this notion from his reading of Alexander³⁸ who held contradictory views on the perfection of the material intellect. In his *De Anima* Alexander holds that the material intellect is subject to corruption with the natural corruption of the soul at death. Averroes quotes the text of Alexander on this:

[T]he material intellect is corrupted in virtue of the corruption of the soul, because it is one power belonging to the soul; and when that intellect is corrupted, its power and its actuality will be corrupted. Next, after he had explained that it is necessary for the intellect which is in us and which understands the separate forms to be neither generable nor corruptible, he recounted that this intellect is the acquired intellect according to the account of Aristotle, and [Alexander] said: *The intellect, therefore, which is not corrupted is that intellect which is in us as separate {483} which Aristotle calls acquired because it is in us from outside, not a power which is in the soul nor a disposition in virtue of which we understand different things and also understand that intellect.*³⁹

In this case what makes thought and abstraction possible is the temporary presence of the extrinsic power of the agent intellect operating in the perishable human material intellect. At the death of the subject, the material intellect and the human soul in which it exists, human thought simply ceases while the eternal agent intellect continues in its separate existence. This is altogether different from what is found in Alexander’s *De intellectu*, indicates Averroes:

But what he said in a treatise which he composed, entitled *On the intellect according to the account of Aristotle*, seems to contradict what he said in his book on the soul. These are his words: *When the intellect which is in potency is complete and fulfilled, then it will understand the agent intellect. For, just as the potency for walking which a human being has at birth becomes actual in time when that in virtue of which walking comes about is actualized, so too when the intellect is actualized, it will understand these things which are intrinsically intelligible and it will make sensibles into intelligibles, because it is the agent.*⁴⁰

In his *Letter on the Intellect*, al-Fârâbî develops this second view into the doctrine that certain human beings are able to develop their perishable material intellects so as to move through the stage of the intellectually realized actual intellect to the stage of acquired intellect which no longer has association with the body, maintains Averroes.⁴¹

³⁷ LCDA {486}.

³⁸ See the article by Geoffroy cited in note 29 above for the view that al-Fârâbî’s thought is dependent on a particular reading of Alexander and not on direct study of the *De Anima* of Aristotle.

³⁹ LCDA {482-483}. The quoted text is from Alexander *De Anima* (1887) pp. 90.23-91.4.

⁴⁰ LCDA {483}. The quoted text is from Alexander, *De Anima Liber Cum Mantissa* (1887) pp.110.30-111.2.

⁴¹ LCDA {483}.

Yet this entails, first, the impossible doctrine that a generated substance, the material intellect in the perishable human being, be transformed into an immaterial and eternal substance: “it will happen that something generated receives something eternal and is made like it, and in this way what is generated will become eternal, which is impossible.”⁴² Second, since the intelligibles in this new immaterial acquired intellect are not ontologically identical in existence to the intelligibles in the agent intellect in every way, the Aristotelian Third Man argument (originally proposed by Plato in his *Parmenides*) would require that there be another set of intelligibles over and above these two sets and so forth into infinity.⁴³ Third, even if al-Fârâbî maintains that this acquired intellect is perishable and its perfection only involves its receiving intelligibles without a conjoining with the agent intellect, a view Averroes reports al-Fârâbî held in his lost *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*,⁴⁴ then the “relation [of the agent intellect] to a human being will be only the relation of the agent to the human being, not a relation of form.”⁴⁵ That is, in this case the agent intellect will be the agent impressing abstracted forms on the distinct human material intellect and will not be ‘form for us’ in the sense of intrinsically operating within us. While this is certainly problematic for putting in jeopardy the understanding of human beings as essentially rational, Averroes is particularly concerned since, as agent cause only, the agent intellect cannot, properly speaking, be understood to conjoin or unite with human intellect.⁴⁶ Without that

⁴² LCDA {485}.

⁴³ LCDA {493}.

⁴⁴ For the source of this in Ibn Bâjjah, see Steven Harvey, “The Place of the Philosopher in the City According to Ibn Bâjjah,” in *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy. Essays in Honor of Muhsin S. Mahdi*, Charles E. Butterworth (ed.), (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992) pp.199-233, precisely p.225 note 56. Also see Davidson (1992) 70-73. At LCDA {433} Averroes writes, “[I]n his *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics* he seems to deny that there is conjoining with the separate intelligences. He says that this is the opinion of Alexander and that it should not be held that the human end is anything but theoretical perfection.”

⁴⁵ LCDA {502}.

⁴⁶ “It is also evident that, when we assert that the material intellect is generable and corruptible, we will then find no way in which the agent intellect will be properly conjoined with the intellect which is in a positive disposition, namely, with a coupling similar to the uniting of forms with matters... In this way its relation to a human being will be only the relation of the agent to the human being, not a relation of form, and the question of al-Fârâbî which he voiced in his *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics* arises. For assurance of the possibility of the conjoining of the intellect with us lies in explaining that its relation to a human being is a relation of form and agent, not a relation of agent alone.” {LCDA {502}} In a work probably written just before the *Long Commentary, Epistle #1 On Conjunction* extant only Hebrew, Averroes writes, “It is clear...that the agent intellect is not cause of the material intellect in as much as it is agent cause alone but in a way such that it is also its final perfection according to the mode of formal and final [cause], as is the case for sense in relation to what is sensed. This is one of the things which deceived al-Fârâbî, when he thought that [the agent intellect] was only the agent cause, as are material movers.” Averroès. *La Béatitude de l'Âme. Éditions, traductions et études*, Marc Geoffroy and Carlos Steel (eds. and trans.) (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2001), p. 216. My translation of their French.

conjoining or uniting, the issue mentioned second in the present paragraph again arises as also would the issue of the unity of intelligible thought.

For Averroes the agent intellect must be both agent cause of our intellection and also our formal cause as “form for us” and as the ultimately perfecting final cause of human intellection, a view found in all three of his commentaries on the *De Anima*. This is also the proper understanding of the nature of conjoining and uniting or coupling with the agent intellect:

when the theoretical intelligibles are joined with us through forms of the imagination and the agent intellect is joined with the theoretical intelligibles (for that which apprehends [theoretical intelligibles] is the same, namely, the material intellect), it is necessary that the agent intellect be coupled with us through the conjoining of the theoretical intelligibles.⁴⁷

For Averroes this conjoining in the activity of abstraction of intelligibles in potency and of impressing those intelligibles on the single receptive eternal and shared material intellect explains the teleology of sense and imagination in providing intentions from experience of the world. Sense and imagination valuably provide particular intentions as intelligibles in potency but cannot effect the intentional transference required for the existence of intelligibles in act. For that the agent intellect must be present to move the intentions to a new level of existence in the material intellect. It also explains how we are able to come to have intellectual knowledge by our will and voluntary effort.⁴⁸ Averroes makes this clear when he writes,

For, because that in virtue of which something carries out its proper activity is the form, while we carry out our proper activity in virtue of the agent intellect, it is necessary that the agent intellect be form in us...[I]t is necessary that a human being understand all the intelligibles through the intellect proper to him and that he carry out the activity proper to him in regard to all beings, just as he understands by his proper intellection all the beings through the dispositional intellect (*intellectus in habitu*), when it has been conjoined with forms of the imagination.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ LCDA {500}.

⁴⁸ “It was necessary to ascribe these two activities to the soul in us, namely, to receive the intelligible and to make it, although the agent and the recipient are eternal substances, on account of the fact that these two activities are reduced to our will, namely, to abstract intelligibles and to understand them.” LCDA {439}. Cf. LCDA {390}, {490}, and {495}.

⁴⁹ LCDA {499-500}. Interestingly, the same principle is used by Thomas Aquinas in his arguments against the notion of the material and agent intellects existing as unique separate entities shared by human beings: “[I]n any given thing acting, there must be some formal principle by which it formally acts. For something cannot formally act in virtue of what is separate in being from it. Even if what is separate is a moving principle for acting, still there must be something intrinsic by which it formally acts, whether that [principle] be a form or some sort of impression. Therefore there must be in us some formal principle by which we receive intelligibles and another by which we abstract them.” *Oportet autem in unoquoque operante esse aliquod formale principium quo formaliter operetur. Non enim potest aliquid formaliter operari per id quod est secundum esse separatum ab ipso, set etsi id quod est separatum sit principium motuum ad operandum, nichilominus oportet esse aliquod intrinsecum quo formaliter operetur, siue illud sit forma siue qualiscumque impressio. Oportet igitur esse in nobis aliquod principium formale quo recipiamus intelligibilia et aliud quo abstrahamus ea.* Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae De Anima* q. 5,

For Averroes this conjoining and uniting with the agent intellect and the subsequent human link with the material intellect where intelligibles in act are received is simply the action of knowing the intelligibles of theoretical science. And that is nothing but the very end of human beings, as he indicates in his late *Commentary on the Republic of Plato*: “The purpose of man, inasmuch as he is a natural being, is that he ascend to...the intelligibles of the theoretical sciences,”⁵⁰ which is “man’s ultimate perfection and ultimate happiness.”⁵¹ Still, this is the end attainable by the human species and not necessarily the end attained by each member of the species, simply because our attainment of intellectual knowledge in the intelligibles in act resulting from abstraction is a product of individual will and effort. We must use our powers of sense, imagination, cogitation and memory to form particular refined intentions, intelligibles in potency, for presentation to the agent intellect for abstraction, that is, for transference to the higher level of being of intelligibles in act, and for the attendant impression upon the receptive material intellect.⁵²

Conclusion

In all three of his commentaries on *De Anima* Averroes held the notion that the agent intellect must be conceived as “form for us” and as an intrinsically acting formal cause in human beings in the process of the apprehension of intelligibles in act. In all three works the formation of intelligibles in act is explicated as a genuine abstraction from worldly experience coming about as a result of a conjoining and uniting with the unique and separate agent intellect. Common to all these accounts is also the notion that this attainment of knowledge is the end and perfection for human beings in which ultimate happiness can be found. Although couched in language of uniting and conjoining which perhaps brings to mind religious or mystical notions, there is nothing of that sort at work in these commentaries. What is more, even though all three have substantially differing conceptions of the material intellect, there is no argument in these to the effect that the individual human soul or intellect lives on in any sense after the death of the body.

resp. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones de anima* in *Opera Omnia*, v. 24.1. B.-C. Bazán (ed.). Roma: Commissio Leonina; Les Éditions du Cerf, 1996. Elsewhere Aquinas asserts that “nothing carries out an activity except through some power which is formally in itself. . . . Therefore, it is necessary that the principles in virtue of which these actions are attributed [to human beings], namely the possible intellect and the agent intellect, be certain powers existing formally in us.” Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book II, ch. 76 n. 17-18. I will examine the use of this principle to very different ends by Averroes and Aquinas in another article.

⁵⁰ *Averroes on Plato’s “Republic,”* Ralph Lerner, Ralph (trans.) (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1974) p.88.

⁵¹ *Averroes on Plato’s “Republic”* (1974) p.86.

⁵² On the cogitative power, see the article cited in note 22 and Richard C. Taylor, “Cogitatio, Cogitativus and Cogitare: Remarks on the Cogitative Power in Averroes,” in *L’elaboration du vocabulaire philosophique au Moyen Age*, ed. J. Hamesse et C. Steel (Turnhout, Brepols, 2000) pp. 111-146. (Rencontres de philosophie Medievale Vol. 8.)

The notion of the agent intellect as “form for us” acting in us in the activity of abstraction contributed importantly to the coherence of Averroes’s understanding of human knowing. Still, this notion strains the limits of his Aristotelian philosophical project, limits already strained powerfully by his novel doctrine of the unique and separate material intellect shared by all human beings.⁵³ It is central to the thought of Aristotle that form is the nature of a thing (*Physics* 2.1, 193b7-8), that form is the intrinsic cause of being in a substance (*Metaphysics* 7.3, 1029a29-32), and that form is substance (*Metaphysics* 7.6 ff.). Hence, to employ the notion of form so that the ontologically separate agent intellect is also an intrinsic form acting in the ontologically distinct human knower so as to be called “form for us” and “the final form belonging to us” is to extend the meaning of form far beyond that of the nature of a thing or the cause of existence in a thing. Averroes uses the principle, “that in virtue of which something carries out its proper activity is the form,”⁵⁴ to argue that, since human beings carry out intellectual understanding of intelligibles in act as a proper activity, then it must follow that the agent intellect needed for abstraction of intelligibles must be “form for us.” Yet, at the same time he asserted that the agent intellect is ontologically separate from the individual human intellect for which it serves as form. This is both because individual human beings perish at death while the agent intellect is eternal and because the activity of intellectual abstraction can only be carried out by something which has the immaterial nature of intellectuality in itself. However, these uses of the term ‘form’ are compatible only by an equivocation in the meaning of the word ‘form’: ‘form’ in the phrase “form for us” when said of the agent intellect does not denote the full ontological presence of the agent intellect’s form in us. Rather, it denotes a formal activity present in the human soul for abstracting and understanding intelligibles in act which, nevertheless, cannot be either an accident or a power consequent upon the very substance of the human soul itself. Yet Averroes shows no indication of an awareness of the extent to which his conception of the agent intellect in its relation to the human soul is equally as novel and problematic as his conception of the material intellect as unique and shared by all human beings.

⁵³ Averroes was aware his account was not found in any of the Greek or Arabic thinkers who preceeded him. The material intellect in the *Long Commentary* is not itself form, matter or a composite of these. Rather, he writes, “One should hold that it is a fourth kind of being. For just as sensible being is divided into form and matter, so too intelligible being must be divided into things similar to these two, namely, into something similar to form and into something similar to matter.” {409}

⁵⁴ LCDA {499}.

Gyula Klima:

Intentional Transfer in Averroes, Indifference of Nature in Avicenna, and the Representationalism of Aquinas

Comments on Max Herrera and Richard Taylor

Is Aquinas a representationalist or a direct realist? Max Herrera's (and, for that matter, Claude Panaccio's) qualified answers to each alternative show that the real significance of the question is not that if we answer it, then we can finally learn under which classification Aquinas should fall, but rather that upon considering it we can learn something about the intricacies of the question itself. In these comments I will first argue that the Averroistic notion of "intentional transfer", combined with the Avicennian idea of the indifference of nature, yielding the Thomistic doctrine of the formal unity of the knower and the known renders the question moot with regard to Aquinas, indeed, with regard to the pre-modern epistemological tradition in general. These considerations will then lead to a number of further, both historical and philosophical questions, which I will offer in the end for further discussion.

So, why is it interesting at all whether this or that philosopher is a representationalist or a direct realist? And why is this question interesting in particular in connection with pre-modern philosophers, who certainly did not think of themselves in these terms?

To answer the first question, we must recall that the distinction emerged in the context of the modern (post-Cartesian) theory of ideas. As Thomas Reid saw it, the problem with that theory was that it constituted a mistaken theory of perception and mental representation in general, which in turn led to skepticism concerning an external, mind-independent, physical reality.

How does representationalism lead to skepticism? A simple answer to this question may appear to be that since representationalists assume the existence of some intermediary representations, the so-called ideas, between our mental acts and the objects of these representations, and it is only these ideas that they claim we are directly aware of, it follows that we can never be sure whether there really are any matching objects corresponding to these representations. Therefore, from this representationalist picture it directly seems to follow that all our knowledge-claims concerning an external reality beyond our ideas are doubtful.

The trouble with this simple answer is that it ignores Descartes' important remark in his *Replies to the First Objections*, where he writes: "the idea of the sun is the sun itself existing in the intellect – not of course formally, as it does in the heavens, but

objectively, that is, in the way in which objects are wont to be in the intellect”. (AT VII 102; CSM, II 75) The important point here is that the idea of the sun is nothing but the sun considered as the object of the intellect, and not an intermediary “between” the sun and the intellect, distinct from both. So, on the basis of this remark and the popular understanding of what makes someone a representationalist, Descartes is either not a representationalist after all, and then his brand of skepticism cannot be a consequence of his representationalism, or, if his skepticism really *is* a consequence of his representationalism, then we have to reconsider *what is essential* to representationalism on account of which it entails this kind of skepticism. However, if we were to say that its skeptical implications are *not* essential to representationalism, then we would seem to miss the point on account of which the distinction between direct realism and representationalism was philosophically interesting in the first place. So, we had better take the other alternative, and see how Descartes can and has to be a representationalist in the appropriate sense, in which it necessarily leads to the type of skepticism he entertains.

If we take it to be a distinguishing mark of representationalism that it leads to the kind of skepticism Descartes entertains, then we must be clear on the issue of what kind of skepticism we are talking about. Of course, everybody can be skeptical about all sorts of unfounded knowledge-claims, indeed, on the grounds that such claims are not merely actually unfounded, but cannot be justified. In this sense, for example, Aquinas is skeptical about the knowability of the eternity of the world. But the kind of skepticism threatening in the modern case is a sort of *restricted global* skepticism concerning *any* knowledge claim about an extra-mental physical reality, arguing for the possibility of our complete cognitive isolation from such a world, envisioned in the philosophical fables of the Demon-manipulated Cartesian mind, or of the brains-in-vats, recently most vividly visualized in the *Matrix Trilogy*.

Descartes’ famous dreaming and Demon arguments were devised to establish precisely this possibility, namely, the possibility that all our cognitive acts that appear to represent an extramental physical reality are possibly non-veridical. The dreaming argument seeks to establish this much concerning all sensory cognitions, arguing for the possibility that they are not matched by any actually existing physical object they appear to represent. The Demon argument, on the other hand, seeks to establish that even our intellectual acts may not have any corresponding reality that they appear to represent (that is to say, it may be the case not only that there is no physical world for us to see, touch, hear, etc., but also that if there is any reality besides our own consciousness, that reality cannot be a world of bodies in general: our intellectual concepts of bodies may be entirely vacuous, unmatched by any real object, whether past, present, future, or merely possible). The crucial idea of these arguments is that it might be possible, by means of some elaborate manipulation of our consciousness, for some agent to produce all the same cognitive acts, with exactly the same mental contents in our mind, regardless of whether or not they are matched by some real objects that they appear to represent.

Looking at these arguments in this way, the connection between skepticism and representationalism now should be obvious. In this framework, global skepticism about

external physical objects emerges because the relationship between cognitive acts and their ultimate objects is taken to be contingent. What really matters in this regard is not that an intermediate object, distinct from both the cognitive act and its ultimate object is posited between the act and its ultimate object. For even if the intermediate object is identified with the ultimate object, as is the case in Descartes' remark, if that identity is taken to be contingent, then the possibility of complete cognitive isolation will still be an inevitable implication. But Descartes certainly took the identity of the sun with the idea of the sun to be a contingent identity, which is clear from his allowing the possibility that I might entertain the very same visual idea of the sun (having the very same act of sight), even if God were to remove the sun itself and would just maintain my act of sight, now targeting the remaining vacuous sun-idea.

So, taking it to be the distinguishing mark of modern representationalism what renders it philosophically interesting, namely, that it entails the possibility of complete cognitive isolation from a physical reality, the really essential feature of representationalism turns out to be not that it posits an intermediary object, but rather that it takes the relationship between cognitive act and ultimate object to be contingent. To be sure, assuming the non-identity of intermediary object and ultimate object renders more plausible to assume the contingency of this relationship. For then we *clearly* can have the same acts with the same intermediary objects, regardless of whether there are matching ultimate objects in reality, *unless* there is some further reason for us to claim that there is a necessary relation between intermediary and ultimate objects. But, as we could see, the actual identity of ultimate and intermediate objects in and of itself does not guarantee the necessary relationship between act and ultimate object, for the actual identity of ultimate and intermediate object may be taken to be merely contingent.

On the other hand, it is important to note that the *non-identity* of ultimate and intermediate objects does *not* entail the contingency of the relationship between act and ultimate object, *if* there is a reason why the intermediate and ultimate objects are necessarily related, despite their non-identity.

I believe that in the pre-Cartesian, indeed, as I have argued elsewhere, pre-Ockhamist epistemological framework, what provides this further reason is precisely the idea of intentional transfer combined with the doctrine of the indifference of nature, analyzed by Max and Richard, yielding the Thomistic doctrine of the (formal) identity of the knower and the known.

In this framework, there *are* intermediary objects between cognitive acts and their ultimate objects. Indeed, there can be *multiple* intermediary objects between a cognitive act and its ultimate objects, as Aquinas certainly takes it to be the case in intellectual cognition, where an act of thought uses an intelligible species to form a concept to represent a common nature that in turn exists individualized in the ultimate objects of this act of thought, namely, in the members of the species, some of which provided the sensory information, the phantasms, from which their intelligible species was abstracted in the first place.

So, if what makes someone a representationalist is the mere positing of intermediary objects, then Aquinas is certainly "guilty" on several counts. But, as we have seen, the

mere positing of intermediary objects in and of itself is *not* what makes representationalism an alleged “epistemological crime”. It is rather its implication of the possibility of Demon-skepticism that does. However, this implication is not so much the consequence of the positing of intermediary objects, as it is the consequence of the assumed contingency of the relationship between cognitive act and its ultimate object, whether *with* or *without* the assumption of any intermediaries between them. But Aquinas is certainly not guilty of *this* kind of “epistemologically criminal” representationalism. His representationalism is the epistemologically *innocent* positing of intermediary objects that on account of their formal identity with the ultimate objects *necessarily* relate cognitive acts to their ultimate objects. But this kind of “innocent” representationalism is certainly unjustly “criminalized” by the modern perception that the positing of intermediaries directly entails the possibility of Demon-skepticism.

Now, having thus distinguished epistemologically “innocent” and epistemologically “criminal” representationalism, and having classified Aquinas as belonging to the innocent kind, the question obviously emerges whether there are also corresponding versions of direct realism, and who, if anybody, falls under those classifications.

Since “epistemological guilt”, on the foregoing analysis attaches to the contingency of the relation between cognitive acts and their (ultimate) objects, and not to positing any intermediaries, one might expect that there are direct realists, i.e., philosophers not positing such intermediaries, who are, nevertheless, “epistemologically guilty” in allowing the contingency of this relationship. In fact, this is precisely the characteristic of post-Ockhamist nominalism, and of Ockham himself, after he abandoned his *fictum*-theory. Late-medieval nominalist philosophers are direct realists in the sense that they deny any intermediaries between cognitive acts and their objects, but they are “epistemologically guilty” in the sense just described. Descartes, on the other hand, seems to be an interesting borderline-case: he is apparently talking about ideas as intermediary objects all the time, but in the above-quoted remark, he allows their identification with ultimate objects. But since he obviously merely contingently identifies intermediary and ultimate objects, he is necessarily “epistemologically guilty” of the usual charges brought against representationalism. Nevertheless, the genuine representationalists in the commonly accepted sense, in which they both endorse intermediary objects and are “epistemologically guilty”, are Reid’s actual targets, namely, the British empiricists, Locke, Berkley and Hume, who just reacted differently to basically the same representationalist framework (the latter two simply abandoning the inaccessible ultimate objects of Locke’s ideas).

Now, given this analysis of the representationalist vs. direct realist distinction, I think it is clear why it cannot be applied without further ado in a pre-modern, pre-Cartesian, or indeed pre-Ockhamist context. But this result certainly opens up a number of further philosophical and historical questions.

It seems that the epistemological advantage of Aquinas’ and Averroes’ pre-modern representationalism is that on account of analyzing the cognitive process in terms of intentional transfer that preserves the same ontologically indifferent *ratio*, it simply does not allow for the possibility of the fundamental, global mismatch between mental

representations and their ultimate physical objects that “epistemologically guilty” modern representationalists as well as nominalist direct realists commonly endorse. If this is correct, then the fundamental issue seems to be the following: what accounts for this shift in the analysis of the cognitive process that allows the emergence of “epistemologically guilty” modern representationalism and the equally guilty direct realism of late-medieval nominalists?

People sometime make the argument that it was the 1277 condemnation’s emphasis on divine omnipotence that allowed the emergence of these “epistemologically guilty” analyses of the cognitive process. But the relevant principle of that emphasis (namely, that the first agent by its absolute power can bring about immediately whatever it brings about by its ordinate power mediately) was very much in force in the thinking of Aquinas as well as in the thought of his Islamic predecessors. So, the emphasis on omnipotence in itself, although it is certainly relevant, does not seem sufficient. What else is needed, then? Perhaps it is in this regard that we can learn a great deal from Averroes’ criticism of Al-Ghazali (and from Al-Ghazali’s earlier criticisms of Alfarabi and Avicenna).

For it is there, it seems, that we may find the key as to *what* it is in the general analysis of causation that allows Ghazali’s occasionalism, in the sense of the total elimination of the transfer of energy and information from secondary causes to their effects. Obviously, the relevance of this general question of causation to epistemology is that this occasionalist possibility has the complete cognitive isolation of a cognitive subject from a world of secondary causes merely as its special case.

Viewed from this angle, I think it is also quite remarkable that we do not have the epistemological dangers of occasionalism in Avicenna or Averroes, despite the fact that the agent intellect in their conception is just as ontologically separate from us as God is, and so it might just as well have the power to isolate us from, rather than join us to, an external physical reality. Again, the notions of intentional transfer and indifference of nature seem to be crucial here. For on this conception, being produced through secondary agents seems to be essential to the identity conditions of at least some sorts of ultimate effects (especially, our cognitive acts), in contrast to the notion of causality involved in Ghazali’s occasionalism, where, apparently, being produced by the first agent rather than by secondary agents is generally irrelevant to the conditions of identity of ultimate effects.

Martin Pickavé:

Henry of Ghent on Individuation

I.

The problem of individuation rests on certain metaphysical assumptions. One has to be a metaphysical realist, believing in the extra-mental reality of universals, to be able to regard individuation as a genuine philosophical problem. For then it has to be explained how a common form or nature can be determined to this or that individual. In William of Ockham's words, you have to believe that "the nature that is somehow universal (at least in potency and incompletely) is really in the individual, although some say it is distinguished really from the individual, some only formally, some that it is in no way distinguished on the side of the nature of things, but only according to reason or through the consideration of an intellect" (*Ordinatio* I, dist. 2, q. 7, *Op. Theol.* II, 225f.; transl. Spade 1994, 190). Ockham rejected all these different versions of realism and therefore saw no need to care about individuation at all. For him, "each thing outside the soul is singular by itself ... One does not have to look for a cause of individuation. Rather one has to look more for a cause why it is possible for something to be common and universal" (*Ordinatio* I, dist. 2, q. 6, *Op. Theol.* II, 197; transl. Spade 1994, 172).

Ockham introduces his remark on realism with the qualification that all those he "has seen" held one version or another of a realist theory. Indeed, realism was the default position in the 13th and early 14th centuries. Given this background and the subsequent theoretical need to explain how universal natures and individual substances go together, it should not surprise that there was a controversy over the principle of individuation. Bonaventure writes about a "dispute among philosophical people" (*contentio inter philosophicos viros*) and his Franciscan confrere Richard Rufus even talks about a "contentious dispute" (*litigiosa contentio philosophorum*).¹ Around the middle of the 13th century, the most important candidates for such an individuating principle seemed to have been (1) matter or, more precisely, designated matter (Aquinas), (2) form (e.g., Richard Rufus), (3) matter and form together (Bonaventura)², and (4) accidents (Avicenna)³.

¹ See Aertsen (1996a) for all these quotes.

² See Gracia (1994), Wood (1996), and King (2000).

³ See, for instance, the testimony of Petrus de Falco, *Quaestiones disputatae*, q. 5, ed. Gondras, 199: "... unde individuatō fit per accidentia, ut arguit Avicenna, V Metaphysicae."

This paper will focus on Henry of Ghent's discussion of the principle of individuation. Henry's teaching on this matter is notorious for at least two reasons: (1) Among the 219 propositions condemned by Étienne Tempier, the bishop of Paris, in 1277 are three articles that relate directly to the idea that matter has to be regarded as the principle of individuation (art. 81, 96, 191). From Tempier's document it appears that this idea was condemned because it was considered as questioning God's omnipotence insofar as it denies that God could produce a multitude of immaterial substances under a single species. Henry refers twice to these three articles, in q. 8 of *Quodlibet* II and in q. 1 of *Quodlibet* XI, and he approves of the fact that they were condemned; in the latter work he calls the condemnation of the relevant articles "reasonable" (ed. Badius, fol. 418vT). Henry was a member of the commission that allegedly advised the bishop of Paris on his verdict. Thus, it looks as if Henry's position on individuation is identical with the opinion of the censor.

(2) Where Henry comes to present his own account of individuation, his language seems very imprecise; he seems to shift between different candidates for the principle of individuation. In q. 8 of *Quodlibet* II, for example, he says things are individuated by their subsistence, i.e. by their existence, but he also calls God the principle of individuation. In *Quodlibet* V, q. 8, on the contrary, individuation is said to happen because of a negation, or more precisely, a double negation. Accordingly, interpreters give different answers to the question of what Henry regarded as the principle of individuation.⁴ How do all these elements fit together? And are they really able to explain how universal natures are individualized?

II.

What is meant by 'individuation'? Before we ask ourselves what precisely the principle is that Henry regards as the cause of individuation, it may first be useful to get a clear understanding of the concept of individuation itself. In Henry's words, "individuation is nothing else than that a form, which is by itself simple and indivisible, is plurified by means of something else and is designated in many", and the "principle or reason of individuation" (*causa et ratio individuationis*) is what is responsible for this plurification (see *Quodlibet* V, q. 8, ed. Badius, fol. 164vG). In other words: according to Henry, individuation is restricted to those forms that are indivisible in themselves. This is why we talk of individuation and not of a simple division. But what does it mean that some forms are indivisible and simple?

In creatures, Henry explains, we can find two kinds of forms. Some forms are such that they completely lack any unity with regard to their nature. They only occur as divided forms and they have unity only according to the intellect, "so that there is no individual in which they exist in pure unity and without the addition of some positive formal content". The form of a genus is of this kind because a genus exists in nature only insofar as it is further subdivided by the forms of species (*ibid.* fol. 164rE). Henry

⁴ According to Brown (1994), for example, Henry regards subsistence or existence as principle of individuation; for Roland-Gosselin (1926) it is a double negation.

intends in no way to deny the reality of generic forms, they are not merely figments. But in an existing substance, the form of genus can never be found alone and without differentia which determine it to this or that species; in this sense a genus is “naturally divided”. The unity of a genus is only a product of the intellect because only in the understanding can these forms be isolated from differences and species.

Yet, there is another kind of forms, which are according to their nature not in the same way divided as a genus since they occur without formal additions. In Henry’s technical vocabulary: “These forms subsist in their suppositis” – the underlying substrata informed by them – “with nothing formal added to them.” Their unity, therefore, is real and not a matter of understanding alone. Such are specific forms, the forms of species. That we may call these forms undivided does not mean that they are undivided in every respect. By an act of the intellect I can, for instance, divide the species “human being” into its defining parts “animal” and “rational”. Every form can in this way be analyzed in its parts (*ibid.*). The meaning of ‘indivision’, to which Henry here refers regarding specific forms, expresses that something is not further divided into ‘subjective parts’, i.e. divided into many parts each of which is of the same nature or kind as the whole of which they are parts. Now, someone might wonder whether species cannot be further divided into such ‘subject parts’, the concrete individuals which fall under a given species are clearly subjective parts of the species. But this is not what Henry has in mind here when he gives his characterization of forms of species. What matters here is that forms of species cannot by themselves (*per se*) be divided into further parts since there are no *differentiae* beyond specific forms. In this particular sense forms of species are simple and indivisible. According to Henry, both generic forms and specific forms are real, they exist in the singular concrete objects outside the mind, but as we see they subsist in them in different ways.⁵

Although the preceding suggests that forms of species are in themselves undivided, simple, and indivisible, such forms are nevertheless divisible in some sense. They have to, if individuals are said to have specific forms. But Henry insists that the division which applies to forms of species affects them only from outside and accidentally (*per accidens*), since they are not divisible *per se*. And therefore, since these forms are not intrinsically divisible, they are completely present in all their suppositis: every human being has the complete specific form of humanity.

We are now in the position to understand why, on Henry’s view, it makes perfect sense to call the form of a species, say the form ‘humanity’, on the one hand, an individual form (*forma individualis*) and to say, on the other hand, that this form is universal.⁶ It is

⁵ This discussion of specific and generic forms in Henry’s fifth *Quodlibet* was later quoted by William of Ockham in his refutation of realism. Cf. Ockham, *Ordinatio* I, dist. 2, q. 7, *Opera Theol.* II, 226-7. The notes in the modern edition indicate that the editor have not realized that Ockham refers to Henry of Ghent.

⁶ See, for instance, *Quodlibet* V, q. 8 (ed. Badius, fol. 164vH): “... forma individualis ut humanitas vel asininitas ...”, and *ibid.* (fol. 165rK): “...necesse est huiusmodi formam, quamvis ex se et natura sua universalis est ..., per materiam recipere designationem.”

individual in itself insofar as it is indivisible *per se*, but it is universal insofar as it is divisible *per accidens*. Now, once a form is divided *per accidens* and is in this or that thing, it becomes completely indivisible, i.e., it cannot further be divided in any way, either by itself or by accident. This is the reason, Henry explains, why we call a form of a species which is in this or that supposit both individual (*individualis*) and individuated.⁷

III.

What makes that specific forms are divided *per accidens*? The least we can say is that this individuation must happen in virtue of something extrinsic. Can forms of species be individuated by adventitious *forms*? Only accidental forms seem to be likely candidates. Substantial forms would make the forms to which they are added into forms of completely different substances. Accidental forms, however, are incapable of individuating species for two reasons: (1) Accidents are ontologically posterior to substances, i.e. they presuppose the existence of the substance in which they inhere. Thus, it is impossible that accidents can individuate substantial forms such as forms of species. On the contrary, it is rather the case that accidents are individuated by the individual substances in which they inhere (*Quodlibet* V, q. 8, ed. Badius, fol. 165rK; see also *Quodlibet* II, 8, ed. Wielockx, 55). (2) If accidental forms are responsible for individuation, then presumably because they themselves are individual. But then accidental forms must have been individuated by other accidental forms. This leads into an infinite regress. The only alternative would be to admit that accidents are individuated by something else. But what else could this be than an individual substance in which they inhere? We can conclude that “accidental features rather express the individuation of a form than that they cause it” (*Quodlibet* V, q. 8, ed. Badius, fol. 165rK-vL). This does of course not exclude the obvious truth that two things are also distinguished by their accidental features – and by means of these we normally perceive that two things are not the same –, but such accidents cannot be the true and intrinsic principles of their differences.

What about matter as principle of individuation? Here we have to distinguish between two questions: (1) Is matter the one and only principle of individuation – in the sense that things without matter cannot be individuated? (2) Is matter a principle of individuation – and maybe one out of many? Let’s pursue the second question first. Henry never rejects at all that matter is responsible for individuation. In his second *Quodlibet*, q. 8 he remarks that what Aristotle says about the individuation of material forms through matter “does not have any necessity” (*non habet necessitatem*). But when

⁷ Ibid. (fol. 164vH-165rH): “Et sic licet ex se et natura sua est indivisibilis et indivisa, per accidens tamen et per aliud quo designatur est per supposita divisa, quia tota secundum se est in uno, divisa et diversa est a se tota ut est in alio et sic per accidens est divisibilis, sed ut est in hoc et in illo, omnino et per se et per accidens est indivisibilis et pluribus designationibus indesignabilis. Et ideo ut est in hoc et in illo appellatur individua aut individualis.” I admit that ‘individuated’ and ‘individual’ are hardly precise translations for *individuum* and *individualis*. In English both Latin terms get normally rendered by ‘individual’ and there seems to be no easy way to translate these terms distinctly.

we look carefully at what Henry finds repulsive in Aristotle, we see that this in no way affects the general idea of matter being able to individuate something. Henry simply points at a problem for the specific Aristotelian understanding of individuation. According to Henry's description, Aristotle holds both (a) that matter is the principle of individuation and that (b) there are some forms, for example the form of the heaven, for which it is impossible to be plurified. On this view, the form of heaven cannot be plurified because the existing heaven contains all available existing matter. But, so Henry's objection, even if the plurification of certain material forms is impeded by the lack of matter, it does not follow that their plurification is simply impossible. These forms might contain all the actually existing matter but not all the possibly existing matter. God could always create more matter (*Quodlibet* II, q. 8, ed. Wielockx, 38).

Thus, there is no reason to deny that for Henry matter is a principle of individuation for at least some forms, namely material forms. But how does matter individuate? Strictly speaking, matter itself doesn't individuate. Matter only individuates by virtue of being a material quantity. Continuous quantity, therefore, is what causes plurification of forms because it can itself be plurified and by definition has parts. Would there be no quantity in matter, matter would be simple, completely without parts and not able to undergo plurification. "And consequently a form received in such matter would not be able to be plurified, but would likewise be only one and unindividualized in such matter ... Thus, because quantity is in matter, matter is divided in parts under the parts of quantity, so that each part of matter is under a part of quantity." Insofar as forms exist in these bits of matter, forms are individualized and plurified.⁸

But now it looks as if individuation, at least of material forms, is by means of accidents, namely quantity? Henry makes no effort to pretend that the quantity by which individuation of material forms is achieved is not an accident. So, why does quantity not fall under the argument by which Henry wanted to rule out that accidents are causes of individuation? Henry does not discuss this problem himself – maybe because he was less interested in individuation of material forms than in the individuation of immaterial forms –, but a look in the works of Thomas Aquinas gives us an idea of how Henry would have replied to this problem. Aquinas too regards matter, or more precisely, matter under quantity, as a principle of individuation, and he agrees that accidents are normally individuated through the subject in which they inhere. The reason, why this is not a contradiction for Aquinas, lies in a particularity of quantity. Unlike all other accidents which need to be individualized, quantities or so-called dimensive quantities, to use Aquinas's expression, are already individualized by themselves. "Dimensive quantity itself is a certain principle of individuation, so that we can imagine several lines of the same species, differing in position, which is included in the notion of this quantity; for it belongs to dimension for it to be quantity having position; and therefore

⁸ *Quodlibet* V, q. 8 (ed. Badius, fol. 165r-vL). Someone might object to my reading of these passages by pointing out that they are taken from a passage in which Henry reports some *aliqui's* doctrine of individuation. This is true, but as we will see in the following, Henry will endorse this doctrine insofar as it is taken as a partial explanation of individuation.

dimensional quantity can be the subject of the other accidents, rather than the other way round.”⁹

This might explain why there is no infinite regress in the individuation of accidents, but what about the objection that substance is prior to accidents? Henry simply denies that this objection applies to quantity. “In matter quantity precedes the substantial form”, Henry explains, referring to Averroes’s treatise *De substantia orbis*. “Since it belongs to form to mark the boundaries and to complete matter and quantity according to the needs of nature of the form, he [Averroes] couldn’t say that quantity precedes form in matter according to specific determinate dimensions”, but only according to indeterminate dimensions (*Quodlibet* V, q. 8, ed. Badius, fol. 165vL; Averroes, *De substantia orbis*, chap. 1, ed. Juntina, vol. 9, fol. 3vff.). The kind of quantity that causes individuation in material substances is therefore not posterior to substance because it precedes the form that makes the matter-form compound into a complete substance.

IV.

But is matter the one and only principle of individuation? It is well known that Henry denies this. Matter is only the principle of individuation for a certain kind of forms, i.e. forms of material substances. To regard matter as the general principle of individuation is, according to Henry, opposed to both truth and faith (*Quodlibet* V, q. 8, ed. Badius, fol. 165vL). If matter were the only principle that individuates forms, it would follow that non-material forms could not be individuated. What then accounts for the singularity of non-material substances? Nothing, it seems. But since everything that exists, exists as something numerical one, forms of immaterial substances must by themselves or by their own nature be singular (although unindividuated) forms. This is what Henry regards as Aristotle’s view about the singularity of immaterial substance.

For Henry, however, this view is completely wrong: Just to be separated from matter does not automatically make something into a singular substance, it has to be explained how separateness leads to singularity – if this is true at all. Yet, to posit that immaterial forms are singular on account of their own nature levels down the difference between God and created immaterial substances and makes the latter into godlike entities. Only God is such that he is his singularity; in the same respect in which creatures are not identical with their existence, they are also not identical with their singularity (*ibid.*; see also *Quodlibet* II, q. 8, ed. Wielockx, 41). Thus it looks as if for Henry, this view on individuation was not so much of a problem because it questions God’s omnipotence – this seems to have been the reason why the view was condemned in 1277 – but because it denies God’s transcendence and implies a wrong conception of created substances. Henry thus concludes that “matter and quantity cannot be called the precise reason (*praecisa ratio*) and cause of individuation and the distinction of individuals of the same species,” although matter and form are causes for individuating material things (*Quodlibet* II, q. 8, ed. Wielockx, 47; *Quodlibet* V, q. 8, ed. Badius, fol. 165vL).

⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III.77.2; for this text see Wippel (2000), chap. IX, 295-375, in part. 370ff.

That matter is not the precise reason and cause of individuation can mean two things. Either it simply means that matter is not the only principle and that there are completely different principles for different kinds of beings; or it means that even in the case of material beings, it is not completely adequate to call matter the principle of individuation. Henry obviously believes in the second alternative, yet, so he assures us, once we have discovered the “precise and proximate cause of individuation”, we will also see why it is true that material forms are individuated by matter (*Quodlibet* V, q. 8, ed. Badius, fol. 165vL).

What is now the precise cause of individuation? Henry suggests two ways in which something might individuate something else: from inside, or formally, and from outside. Thus, when we indicate that something is the cause of individuation we have to specify whether it is formally the cause or whether it is something which causes individuation only from outside, i.e. without it being formally the cause. The meaning of this distinction becomes clearer if we look at the case in which Henry develops it: the individuation of immaterial substances such as angels. A particular angel is different from angel as such. Individuation is a kind of determination by which the universal form is determined to this or that supposit. How can we say is this form ‘angelness’ determined? Since every action or operation happens with regards to singulars, we can conclude that one kind of determination is caused by the agent which produces such a form in real existence, namely God. In this way the form ‘angelness’ receives its determination “effectively” (*effective*), by being an effect of an agent. But the form is also formally (*formaliter*) determined in this or that supposit, “since in the supposit the form is according to the being which is proper to this supposit” (*Quodlibet* XI, q. 1, ed. Badius, fol. 439rV).

Henry develops his idea of a twofold individuation in a discussion of the individualization of angels, but there can be no doubt that he considered this model as applying to all cases of individuation. The two ways of determination are, of course, intimately connected. At another place Henry explains this as following: “Supposit signifies something as determined, having in it the participation of a determined form. This aspect of determination causes first and from inside (*ab intra*) the meaning of supposit, and this happens either through matter or through the agent” (*Quodlibet* V, q. 8, ed. Badius, fol. 166rM). The aspect of determination is what constitutes a supposit and, according to Henry of Ghent, matter or the agent play the role of external causes in producing such a supposit. But they are not themselves that which restricts the form *ab intra*, they are not inner principles of the supposit.

Now we are able to see, why Henry thinks that matter is not the precise cause of individuation in material things. Matter is only an external principle of individuation. The internal or formal principle, the principle that makes a supposit into a supposit, will turn out to be the precise cause. And we can also understand why Henry says God is individuating immaterial substances, he also does so externally or, to be more precise, “effectively”.

V.

We still haven't learnt what the interior and formal principle of individuation is, the principle that determines form and constitutes a supposit. Henry's works offer us two answers to this question. In *Quodlibet* II, Henry says that it is subsistence which ultimately causes that two things belonging to the same nature are different. Subsistence, i.e. existence, individuates essences (*Quodlibet* II, q. 8, ed. Wielockx, 50ff.). This candidate for a principle of individuation matches all of the criteria which the criticism of other candidates has established to be essential for a principle of individuation. Subsistence (or existence) is not limited to material beings, it also accounts for the individuation of immaterial substances. Insofar as subsistence is said to determine an essence formally, it can be called a formal principle of individuation, yet it is not a form itself; and although existence is something exterior to essences and can therefore be called an accident in a broad sense, the arguments demonstrating that an accident cannot individuate substances don't apply. Despite our common way of talking, essence is not prior to subsistence in the sense that subsistence is imprinted in essence; essence, to use Henry's example, is not like a preexisting wall in which someone imprints a color (see *ibid.*, 50).

Although Henry insists that individuation is brought about by something added from outside the essence, he also insists that this addition is not a real addition but merely an intentional one. In the background here lurks his famous doctrine of an intentional difference or intentional distinction. A real addition, for Henry, is an addition of one *thing* to another *thing*. Things have essences; a real addition, therefore, is an addition of one thing that has a determined essence to another thing of a determinate essence. Existence itself does not bring along its own essence, since it causes nothing more than a determination of the essence to which it is added. However, the composition of essence and existence can not be simply a conceptual addition of the latter to the former: essence and existence are not just different aspects under which we grasp objects; in this sense the distinction between them is real. Henry thus posits a third mode of composition that is somewhat in between a real and a conceptual addition and calls this the addition of an intention. The fact that individuation is not formally caused by a real addition also explains for Henry why we do not have a direct intellectual understanding of individual substances. The direct objects of our intellect are essences of specific things. Since the determining intention doesn't have its own essence, our intellect is unable to grasp individuals directly; only indirectly and by reflection on the nature of substances are we able to understand individual substances (*Quodlibet* II, q. 8, ed. Wielockx, 49-50 and 53ff.).¹⁰

In the preceding two paragraphs I have described the account of the principle of individuation that Henry provides in his second *Quodlibet*. We might call this the positive account if we contrast it with another description of the very same principle, this time from Henry's fifth *Quodlibet*. There Henry argues in favor of a double

¹⁰ On Henry's intentional distinction see Paulus (1938), Paulus (1940-1942), Gomez Caffarena (1958), and Porro (1996).

negation as the principle of individuation and thus offers a kind of negative account. He begins by asking himself whether a cause that formally individuates a form and formally establishes a supposit can be something positive and complete in itself. His answer is negative and betrays a particular understanding of what it means to be 'positive' and 'complete'. Saying that such a positive thing causes individuation amounts for Henry to saying that individuation is by a real composition, a composition between two things, and this is, as I just described, impossible for Henry. He then suggests two alternative candidates, something negative or a positive relation. But individuation cannot take place by means of a positive relation, since a positive relation is, according to Henry, a real accident that adds some *thing* to its subject. Thus, there remains only something negative, a negation, and Henry concludes that individuation formally happens by a negation. He adds: "This negation is not a simple one, but a double negation. For it removes from inside any possibility for plurification and diversity and removes from outside any identity, so that in this way the form is called this form, because it is only this form, not having within the possibility to be another one. And moreover, it is only this form because it is not the some form of other things of the same species." Henry continues to call such a double negation the principle that formally individuates essences and that establishes a supposit (*Quodlibet* V, q. 8, ed. Badius, fol. 166rM).

John Duns Scotus had this negative account of individuation in mind when he objects to Henry that a negative principle could never cause individuation (see, for instance, *Ordinatio* II, dist. 3, p. 1, q. 2, n. 48ff., *Opera Omnia* VII, and 412ff.). However, it should be clear from what I described before that the negative account is only one side of a coin, and the positive account according to which subsistence individuates formally is the other side of the same coin. Modern interpreters too are often unaware of this, but Henry explains the relationship himself. In *Quodlibet* XI, q. 1 he concludes his discussion of the individuation of angels with the following remark: "And in this way the positive individuation of the form takes place effectively only through the producing agent and formally only through this being [i.e., the being proper to the supposit]. But I have explained somewhere else how individuation happens to take place negatively" (*Quodlibet* XI, q. 1, ed. Badius, fol. 439rV). Both accounts complement each other.

What is the purpose of explaining individuation as caused by a double negation? Confronted with this question, Henry would probably have answered the following: Among the transcendental notions 'being' and 'unity' there is absolutely no *real* difference. They are distinct in the sense that 'unity' expresses 'being' under a different mode of signification. By the term 'one' I refer to 'being' under the aspect of its being undivided. 'Unity' expresses a negation, namely the negation of a multitude, but we shouldn't conclude from that that 'unity' signifies a negative property. According to our human condition we are more acquainted with a multitude, therefore we grasp unity primarily as the absence of multitude, and not in properly positive terms.¹¹ The same applies here to individuation: We have no direct intellectual grasp of subsistence, the

¹¹ For Henry's doctrine of the transcendentals see Aertsen (1996b).

positive principle of individuation; for us, individuation is better understandable in negative terms, namely, the negation it adds to that which is individuated.

VI.

Henry's teaching on individuation is based on two main distinctions: The one is the distinction between individuating externally and individuating internally (or formally), the other is the distinction between a positive and a negative description of individuation. The first distinction, the most important, allows Henry to clarify his attitude towards the view which regards matter as the principle of individuation. Matter is the principle of individuation, but only for material substances and only externally. But there is one principle of individuation for all beings, namely subsistence, or existence, since subsistence individuates formally. The second distinction is between two ways in which we can describe individuation formally, but these two ways are only two ways of presenting the very same thing, and should not lead us to any premature conclusions about the existence of a negative principle of individuation.

Why have interpreters, both medieval and modern, not been more attentive to this two core elements of Henry's doctrine of individuation?¹² The answer is simple and quite banal: You cannot understand Henry's position if you are only looking at one quodlibetal question. Giles of Rome (*Quodlibet* II, q. 7, ed. Leuven 1646, 64ff.) and Thomas Sutton (*Quaestiones ordinariae*, q. 27, ed. Schneider, 753ff.), to cite some medieval examples, only seem to care about the account Henry gives in his second *Quodlibet*, Duns Scotus, on the other hand, mainly refers to Henry's fifth *Quodlibet*. But the depth of Henry of Ghent's position becomes only obvious from a view at the whole.

¹² Recently, for example, Brown (1994) and Aertsen (1996a).

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Giorgio Pini:

Scotus on Individuation

So much has been written about Duns Scotus's doctrine of individuation that there is little hope to say anything new — unless one is ready to make the extravagant contention that all that has been said so far is wrong. This is definitely not what I am going to claim in this paper. Quite the contrary, I will take advantage of the fact that so many excellent studies have already shed light on the details of Scotus's teaching on individuation in order to take these details for granted and to consider once again the topic from a general point of view, as it were from a distance.

In what follows I will first present some features of the usual description of Scotus's position on individuation. Second, I will express some reasons for dissatisfaction with this picture. Third, I will present an alternative reconstruction of Scotus's project. Fourth, I will turn to Scotus's own texts on individuation to show how they fit my reconstruction. Fifth, I will focus on Scotus's own solution to the question of individuation and I will show its novelty and merit. Sixth and finally, I will turn to some textual problems suggesting an evolution in Scotus's terminology that confirms my interpretation of Scotus's doctrine of individuation.

1

I will start focusing on some features of Scotus's treatment about which scholars keep usually silent, possibly because they think that they are so evident as to be obvious. As far as Scotus is concerned, however, I suspect that nothing can be dismissed as obvious. Questions and problems arise even when we think that we have finally captured the correct picture.

So let me state a general remark concerning Scotus's treatment of individuation. Most scholars in medieval philosophy are familiar with Scotus's questions devoted to individuation, both in his three commentaries on the *Sentences* and in his *Questions on the Metaphysics*.¹ All these treatments start with a sophisticated confutation of several doctrines of individuation adopted by Scotus's predecessors. As Scotus observes, some held that the principle of individuation (i.e. what makes a thing of a certain kind an individual thing) is a positive entity, others that it is a negation. The former disagreed

¹ *Lect.* 2, d. 3, p. 1, qq. 1-7 (Vat. XVIII, pp. 229-301); *Ord.* 2, d. 3, p. 1, qq. 1-7 (Vat. VII, 391-516); *Rep.* 2, d. 12, qq. 3-8 (Vivès, XXIII, pp. 20-47); *Quaest. in Metaph.*, 7, q. 13 (OPh, IV, pp. 215-280). In what follows I take the *Ordinatio* treatment as the basis of my exposition. For a recent exposition and analysis, see Noone (2003).

among themselves as to what makes things individual within a certain species: matter, quantity, existence, and the relationship to the producer were all taken into account as serious candidates. By contrast, those who thought that the principle of individuation is a negation specified that we are actually dealing with a double negation: a first negation that removes the possibility of being divided into further individuals and a second negation that removes the possibility that a given individual be identical with another individual. Scotus himself attributed this last position to Henry of Ghent, even though it has been contended that Scotus's presentation of Henry's position is not entirely fair.² After such an articulated presentation and subtle confutation of so many positions, we are presumably eager to hear Scotus's final and hopefully enlightening words on the subject. It is hard to deny, however, that Scotus's own solution falls short of our expectations. For one thing, Scotus's exposition of his own position, when compared to what precedes, looks simply too brief. Even worse, Scotus's explanation of what he takes to be the principle of individuation is, at best, elusive. He resolutely affirms that the principle of individuation is a certain entity determining the specific nature to singularity. After presenting some arguments for the existence of such an entity, he carries out a comparison between the species/individual relationship and the genus/species relationship, which is intended to illuminate the kind of entity the principle of individuation is.³ Accordingly, we know that there is such an entity and that it plays at the individual level the same role that a specific differentia plays at the specific level. But as to what such an entity is, we are still left in the darkness.

It is at this point that Scotus finally gives what is possibly his most explicit statement concerning what such a principle is. The very way in which he introduces his description is quite remarkable, however. He almost causally adds: "and if you ask me what such an individual entity from which the individual difference is taken is" – as if we have not been asking that very question from the very beginning. And then, what is Scotus's answer? If we expect a direct and clear statement, it is difficult not to be bewildered. He starts recalling the basic elements of his doctrine of essence, according to which each quidditative entity is by itself indifferent to individuation. This means that an essence, by itself, is not an individual. Indeed, there are individual essences, but they are not primitively individual: they are made individual by something that is in some way added to them. Since matter, form and the composite of form and matter are all quidditative entities (i.e. they all are essences of some kind), Scotus concludes that the principle of individuation is none of them. The principle of individuation is not an essence. It is, as Scotus says, "the ultimate reality of being that is matter or that is form or that is the composite."⁴

This is Scotus's most explicit statement about what the principle of individuation is in his main work, the *Ordinatio*. Elsewhere he calls it by several names: *forma*

² *Ord.* 2, d. 3, p. 1, q. 2 (Vat., pp. 410-417). See Brown (1994).

³ *Ord.* 2, d. 3, p. 1, q. 6, nn. 176-186 (Vat., VII, pp. 478-482).

⁴ *Ibid.*, n. 188 (Vat., pp. 483-484).

individualis, gradus individualis or *individuans, realitas, formalitas, entitas*, a few times even *haecceitas*.⁵ What lies behind such names remains ultimately mysterious.

It may be the Scotists' best-kept secret, but I think that it is hard to deny that such a brief and elusive characterization comes as an anti-climax after Scotus's long confutation and discussion of other theories of individuation. Accordingly, it is not surprising that Scotus's students have made much of the very word 'haecceity', which at least allowed them to give a label to their master's position: it lent a pretence of respectability, as it were, to an otherwise mysterious entity and it allowed to contrast it to those opinions according to which individuation is carried out by more worldly items such as matter or quantity or existence. Recently, some scholars have focused on the mysterious character of such an entity and have proposed an extremely interesting and suggestive interpretation of its elusiveness. Scotus's principle of individuation — we are told — must be seen as a 'theoretical construct'.⁶ We know what role it plays, namely that it makes the specific essence individual; but this is all we know about it. As a matter of fact, we should not be surprised that we do not know anything else about it. Its unknowability is inescapable, at least in this life — we are also told. Scotus himself holds that our cognitive faculties are incapable of knowing the principle by which two individuals differ. In the next life we will be able to see and understand, not in this one. As a consequence, all we can do now is to posit the existence of an entity that plays the role of the principle of individuation and to be sure that it is not one of the things with which we are familiar. Scotus's elusiveness is fully justified. The solution of the mystery is deferred to the next life.⁷

2

If this is all we come by after Scotus's long and sophisticated treatment, it is indeed difficult to conceal a sense of unease. Since each and every entity that has been thought to play the role of principle of individuation has been ruled out, the only resort is to invent another one, about which we only know that it is not one of the old ones but it can perform their work without having their defects. This seems to be nothing else than a classic case of positing an *ad hoc* entity to take us out of trouble. And this is not a very subtle philosophical move.

And what are we to think of this new entity?

We do not know it in this life. But, in principle, it can be known, and it will be known in the next life — we are told —, because it depends only on our present limitations that we do not know it now.

⁵ See Dumont (1995).

⁶ The expression is in King (2005). A similar point is made by Noone (2003), p. 120.

⁷ Scotus holds that we do not have intellectual knowledge of the individual in this life even though the individual is in itself knowable in *Quaest. in Metaph.* 7, qq. 14-15 (OPh, IV, pp. 281-309). Specifically concerning the present ignorance of the individual difference, *Quaest. in Metaph.* 7, q. 13, n. 158 (OPh, IV, p. 271).

So, in the next life we will know a new entity, which now plays the role of principle of individuation. Let us stop and ponder what this means: there are objects in this world in addition to the ones with which we are familiar and which for Scotus are included in the Aristotelian categories. So, if this interpretation is correct, Scotus is bound to maintain that Aristotle's categorial framework is only a temporary tool, which we may use to describe the world in this life but will be superseded in the next one by a fuller ontological framework. And even in this life, the Aristotelian framework shows some gaps, which we shall be able to fill up in the next life, because even now we can suppose that there are individuating entities, although we do not have any knowledge of what they are.

I confess that this scenario strikes me as both unappealing and implausible. It is unappealing because it attributes to Scotus the bad habit of multiplying *ad hoc* entities whenever it is required. We should be clear about what this reconstruction implies: if it is accurate, Scotus's move is not similar to that of the astronomer who posits the existence of a new planet, which is nevertheless invisible, in order to explain some astronomical phenomena which are visible.⁸ Scotus would not be suggesting that individuation is carried out by some thing that, although currently hidden, nevertheless is no more mysterious than a planet is; instead, he would be inventing an entirely new kind of entity, of which nobody has ever suspected the existence. His move would be more like that of an astronomer who is willing to explain some irregularities in the orbit of a planet by positing the existence of an unknown fluid whose very function is to modify the orbit of that planet.

Secondly, this possibility strikes me as implausible for the very reason that it would commit Scotus to positing the existence of a new kind of thing that is not included in Aristotle's categories. But nowhere does Scotus express dissatisfaction with the Aristotelian categories as capable of working as an all-inclusive framework. Quite the contrary, he is a staunch defender of their adequacy.⁹

Accordingly, Scotus's position on the problem of individuation seems to amount to little more than stating that there is a problem of individuation and that other people did not manage to solve it. But it does not seem to be a very brilliant solution just to postulate that there is a solution without stating exactly its terms except that it must solve all the problems connected with individuation. As I said, this is stating the problem, not solving it.

3

Now, this is indeed the way Scotus has been often interpreted, even though the unflattering conclusions that I have drawn concerning the merits of his position are usually, and understandably, omitted.

⁸ King's example in King (2005).

⁹ See Pini (2005)¹.

But is this the only way to read him? Is it the right way?

My claim is that it is not: I think that there is another way to consider Scotus's doctrine of individuation. This alternative way becomes clear if we consider carefully how Scotus posits the question of individuation and what exactly he wants to find. I maintain that crediting Scotus with trying to solve the problem of individuation by introducing just another entity (call it haecceity or individual form or in any other way) amounts to a misunderstanding of his very project.

The difficulty in making sense of Scotus's answer from a philosophical point of view is the first clue that Scotus's project may be different from that which is usually attributed to him. Another indication is textual. As I mentioned, Scotus refers to the principle of individuation by a considerable variety of terms: *forma individualis*, *gradus individualis*, *realitas*, *formalitas*, *entitas*, *haecceitas*. The relationship between this entity and the specific essence (common to all the individuals of a certain kind) is sometimes described in terms of a formal distinction, other times in terms of unitive containment (the individual principle and the specific essence are said to be both unitively contained in the same individual). Formal distinction and unitive containment are technical notions on which I will not dwell now.¹⁰ What has retained the attention of scholars is that Scotus uses both of them to describe the relationship between the principle of individuation and the specific essence, even though these notions are not equivalent. Why this variance? As S. Dumont has demonstrated, Scotus does not use these different notions randomly: in some works he systematically prefers certain ways of referring to the principle of individuation and its relationship with the specific essence, in other works he prefers others.¹¹ This is an undeniable textual difficulty. But I think that this very difficulty offers us with a key or at least an indication as to how to consider Scotus's theory of individuation. For Scotus's varying terminology can be seen as an attempt to express his new insights concerning individuation. This very variety of expressions is a sign of Scotus's difficulty in conveying his point but, if correctly interpreted, is also an indication of what his point is. In a few words and to anticipate what I argue for in what follows, I suggest that Scotus is trying to find a way to describe the relationship between the principle of individuation and the specific essence not as a relationship between two parts of the same thing. Admittedly, Scotus never gets completely free of his talk of the principle of individuation as a component of the individual thing. But he becomes more and more dissatisfied with the terminology of parts and whole to describe the relationship between the principle of individuation and the individual. I maintain that this increasing dissatisfaction can account for Scotus's varying terminology to refer to the principle of individuation; whereas in his early works he clearly refers to it as to a part and a component of the individual, in what I take to be his last elaboration on the topic he gives up such a way of speaking and finally refers to the principle of individuation as to a *gradus individualis*, a degree or intensity pertaining to the individual. So the principle of individuation is finally likened

¹⁰ See Adams (1976), Cross (2004), Dumont (2005).

¹¹ Dumont (1995).

to the particular intensity of the shade of a color. And the intensity of a shade of a color is not one of its parts. Or, if it is, it is a part in a different sense of the word 'part' from that in which, say, form and matter are parts of a material substance.

Scotus's struggling with terminology shows where and how his theory differs from other theories of individuation: not just in the final answer to the question but in the very way of posing the question. What Scotus is criticizing is not just a series of attempts to say what performs the role of principle of individuation; he is criticizing the entire philosophical strategy of looking for the principle of individuation among entities such as accidents or matter, which he regards as essences or things. Accordingly, what Scotus is proposing is not just another answer to the question of individuation, but a new strategy to address that very problem. What we need to find is not another thing, but the principle and actuality of a thing. In other words, Scotus's point in his critique of previous theories of individuation is that they all went wrong because they were looking for some kind of thing capable of performing the individuating function. Scotus's point is that we do not have to look for another kind of being to be added to the specific essence. By contrast, we have to look for something that can be described as a being only in a sense of the word 'being' different from the sense in which an essence is a being. This is the meaning of his otherwise elusive doctrine that being is not univocally predicated of quidditative entities and ultimate differences: ultimate differences, including individual differences, are not an additional kind of being; they are beings in a difference sense of the word 'being'.¹² When compared to essences, individual differentiae do not belong to another kind, but to what we would describe as a different logical category, to adopt Ryle's terminology. Accordingly, Scotus's point is that all previous attempts to solve the problem failed because they asked the wrong question and consequently were looking for the wrong answer. We could say that Scotus's predecessors were looking for the answer to the question of individuation in the wrong place. It is not a thing such as matter or quantity or existence that can perform the function of the principle of individuation. It is an entity and a being in a different sense of the word 'entity' and 'being'. The principle of individuation is not a thing, but the *principle* of a thing.

So, does not this amount, after all, to positing a new kind of entity capable of individuating essences? No, because the kind of entity that the principle of individuation is, is quite simply an Aristotelian actuality: and an Aristotelian actuality is not a new thing added to the thing that it makes actual; it is that same thing insofar as it is actual. This is the point that Scotus is trying to express with his admittedly idiosyncratic terminology. His point is that we do not have to look for a thing belonging to an Aristotelian category different from the very category in which the individual itself is. We do not have to look for a different kind of being but for a different sense of 'being': being as the actuality of an essence instead than as an essence. So the

¹² *Ord.* 1, d. 3, p. 1, q. 3, nn. 159-161 (Vat., III, pp. 97-100). Scotus maintains that being is a univocal concept, because it is univocally predicated of all quidditative entities; but he holds that being is not univocally predicated of everything, because it is not univocally predicated (i.e. it is not predicated in the same sense) of quidditative entities and ultimate differentiae. See Dumont (1987).

relationship between an essence and what makes it individual is not more mysterious than the relationship between potentiality and actuality.¹³

So what we need is a different level of analysis. This is what Scotus's talk about individual forms or realities or formalities or entities is supposed to provide. These 'entities' are not to be considered as things, only smaller, 'thinglets', as sometimes '*realitas*' has been translated.¹⁴ What we need is not a new ingredient in the metaphysical framework, but a different way of analyzing things. Admittedly, Scotus's own way of expressing his point may be sometimes clumsy and it certainly did lend itself to many misunderstandings. So for example William Ockham understood Scotus's principle of individuation as a distinct component within the individual thing. Accordingly, he was probably the first to call it 'a little thing' (*parva res*) within the individual. This is precisely what Scotus never did. Even more, it was what Scotus's doctrine of individuation was supposed to avoid. All the same, it was on the basis of such a misunderstanding that Ockham criticized Scotus.¹⁵ In this regard, he was followed by many.

Still, this is what Scotus had in mind: not just another theory of individuation and another candidate to solve the old problem, but a new way of positing the problem and, as a consequence, a new solution. This is why his solution at first sight looks so disappointingly elusive. It is certainly disappointing if we expect from Scotus an answer similar to the old answers to the question on individuation. In that case, the best we can do is to think that Scotus is positing a new entity, but that this entity is unknown. By contrast, his answer becomes clear and indeed new as soon as we realize that it is supposed to answer a new question, which is for Scotus the right question concerning individuation: not looking for a thing capable of individuating but looking for a principle and cause. Scotus is trying to show that the relationship between a specific essence and its principle of individuation is not to be seen as the relationship between two essences or kinds of being, such as a substance and an accident, but as the relationship between a potentiality and an actuality, an essence and a principle, namely between two different senses of 'being': two entities belonging to what we would call different logical categories.

4

I am aware that all this sounds pretty vague. So let me go back to Scotus's own way of addressing the problem. I have said that Scotus's originality, in my opinion, is not to have given just another answer to the problem of individuation but to have maintained that what is important is to be clear as to what the question to be asked is. When the right question is asked, it becomes evident that the solutions usually given are wrong. It also becomes evident what the right answer to the problem of individuation is.

¹³ The parallelism with potentiality and actuality has already been stressed in King (1992).

¹⁴ See the criticism of this translation in Dumont (2005), p. 8, n. 3.

¹⁵ See for example William Ockham, *Quodl.* 5, q. 22 (OTh, IX, p. 565).

So, what question does Scotus ask?

First of all, it is a metaphysical question, namely a question concerning the structure of the world. It is not trivial that there is something like a metaphysical question of individuation. Scotus defends the view that there is a metaphysical question of individuation against those who want to reduce the problem of individuation to the relationship between the way the world is and the way we know the world. According to this approach to individuation, all the essences out of which the world is constituted are by themselves individual. Consequently, there is no room for a metaphysical problem of individuation. According to this view, the relationship between universals and individuals can be explained by referring to the difference between our way of knowing the world by way of universal concepts and the way the world is actually constituted by individuals. Against this view, Scotus contends that the distinction between non-individual and individual essences is written in the world. It is as part of this contention that Scotus introduces his famous doctrine of essence as something by itself not individual (and for that matter, not universal either).¹⁶

Consequently, since there is a metaphysical problem of individuation, what is the question to be asked in order to solve that problem?

Before Scotus, the usual question asked about individuation was: given a certain species, what makes two individuals different from each other within that species? For example, what makes Socrates different from Plato, given that both of them are essentially human beings?

It is this question that became the focus of attention with the Condemnation of 1277. The problem was that the Aristotelian doctrine endorsed by Thomas Aquinas, according to which what makes two individuals different within the same species is matter, seemed to rule out the possibility of a plurality of individuals within the same species in immaterial creatures such as angels. Also, it is in this context that Henry of Ghent deals with the question of individuation.¹⁷

Now, this way of posing the question of individuation is not without important philosophical consequences. For it starts from positing species as sets of necessary properties that all the individuals of a certain kind must possess. As compared to these sets of necessary properties — such as being a living thing, being an animal, being a human being —, individuals are contingent. Socrates and Plato have something in common, i.e. what makes them human beings. What constitutes their belonging to the human species is their set of necessary properties. By contrast, what does make them different men? Here different possibilities present themselves: a certain quantity of matter or a certain quantity or a certain existence. The possession of each of these characteristic seems to be wholly contingent.

¹⁶ *Ord.* 2, d. 3, p. 1, q. 1, nn. 8-28 (ed. Vat., VII, pp. 395-402); *Quaest in Metaph.* 7, q. 13, nn. 65-71 (OPh, IV, pp. 241-243).

¹⁷ Brown (1994).

Now, even though Scotus does start from this formulation of the problem — the plurality of angels within the same species —, he does not seem to be immediately influenced by it. His treatment of individuation, in this way, is wholly philosophical; the theological question of the possibility of the plurification of angels does not seem to play any significant role for him.

Scotus shifts the focus. He moves the notion of necessity from the species, where it was usually posited, right into the individual. This becomes apparent when we consider Scotus's own way of posing the question of individuation. Both Scotus and his predecessors are looking for a principle of individuation, and both Scotus and his predecessors maintain that the principle of individuation is what accounts for a thing's individuality, i.e. what makes a thing of a certain kind an individual. But when the notion of individual must be explained, it seems that Scotus differs from his predecessors. Before Scotus, as I have mentioned, being an individual is essentially being different from other things of the same kind, i.e. from things that have the same necessary properties. Accordingly, the principle of individuation was regarded as what accounted for the fact that the individual *a* is different from the individual *b* within the same species. The possession of the individual feature was regarded as contingent, whereas belonging to the species was considered as necessary.

By contrast, Scotus focuses on the individual and on its *necessary* properties. He is quite fastidious when spelling out that being an individual means having two necessary properties or satisfying two requirements. The first property accounts for an individual's being something for which it is impossible to be divided into subjective parts, i.e. to be instantiated:

Therefore, the sense of the questions on this topic is: What is it in this stone, by which as by a proximate foundation it is absolutely incompatible with the stone for it to be divided into several parts each of which is this stone, the kind of division that is proper to a universal whole as divided into its subjective parts? (Transl. Spade, p. 69.)¹⁸

The second property accounts for an individual's being something for which it is impossible not to be this, i.e. something that is necessarily this individual and not another one:

... first I explain what I understand by individuation or numerical unity or singularity: Certainly not the indeterminate unity by which anything in the species is said to be one in number. Instead I mean signate unity as a "this," so that just as it was said above that an individual is impossible with being divided into subjective parts and the reason for that impossibility is asked there, so too I say here that an individual is impossible with not being a designated "this" by *this* singularity and the cause is asked not of singularity in general but of *this* designated singularity in particular – that is, as it is determinately "this." (Transl. Spade, p. 76.)¹⁹

¹⁸ *Ord.* 2, d. 3, p. 1, q. 2, n. 48 (Vat., VII, p. 413): "Est ergo intellectus quaestionum de hac materia, quid sit in hoc lapide, per quod 'sicut per fundamentum proximum' simpliciter repugnat ei dividi in plura quorum quodlibet sit ipsum, qualis 'divisio' est propria toti universali in suas partes subiectivas."

¹⁹ *Ord.* 1, d. 3, p. 1, q. 4, n. 76 (Vat., VII, pp. 426-427): "... primo expono quid intelligo per individuationem sive unitatem numeralem sive singularitatem. Non quidem unitatem indeterminatam

Slightly afterwards in the same context, Scotus nicely refers to both properties as defining what it is like to be an individual (i.e. the two necessary and sufficient conditions of individuality):

... it is impossible for substance to be individual through some accident – that is, that through something accidental to it it is divided into subjective parts and through this accident it is incompatible with it for it to be “not this.” (Transl. Spade, p. 87; italics mine.)²⁰

Concerning these two properties of individuals, Scotus dispels a possible misunderstanding. Admittedly, all individuals share the same properties of being noninstantiable and of being identical with some individual. Scotus, however, is not interested in this universal properties; what he is looking for is what accounts for my property of being noninstantiable and my property of being identical with me, your property of being noninstantiable and your property of being identical with you, and so on. This is the upshot of Scotus’s statement that he is not interested in finding the cause of singularity in general but of this designated singularity in particular.

Let us call the first property ‘noninstantiability’ and the second property ‘identity’.²¹ Any valuable candidate as principle of individuation must satisfy two requirements: it must account for an individual’s being noninstantiable and it must account for an individual’s being identical with itself and different from any other individual. Scotus maintains that it is one and the same principle that accounts for both properties of individuals.

Scotus’s description of these two properties is probably derived from Henry of Ghent’s view of individuation as a double negation: noninstantiability corresponds to the negation that removes the possibility of an internal plurification; identity corresponds to the negation that removes the identity among individuals. Scotus, however, maintains that behind Henry’s negations there are two positive necessary properties.

(qua quilibet in specie, dicitur esse unum numero), sed unitatem signatam (ut ‘hanc’), – ita quod, sicut prius dictum est quod individuum impossibile est dividi in partes subiectivas et quaeritur ratio illius impossibilitatis, ita dico quod individuum impossibile est non esse ‘hoc’ signatum hac singularitate, et quaeritur causa non singularitatis in communi sed ‘huius’ singularitatis in speciali, signatae, scilicet ut est ‘haec’ determinate.”

²⁰ *Ord.* 2, d. 3, p. 1, q. 4, n. 111 (Vat., VII, p. 446): “... impossibile est per aliquod accidens substantiam esse individuum, *hoc est, quod per aliquod accidens sibi dividatur in partes subiectivas et per illud repugnet sibi esse non-haec.*” (Italics mine). See also *Ord.* 2, d. 3, p. 1, q. 6, n. 165 (Vat., VII, p. 473): “... illo modo quo expositum est prius “aliquid esse de se hoc” (hoc est, cui repugnat per se dividi in plures partes subiectivas, cui etiam repugnat esse de se non-hoc).” And *Quaest. in the Metaph.*, 7, q. 13, n. 115 (OPh, IV, 257): “Notandum quod individuum, sive unum numero, dicitur illud quod non est divisibile in multa, et distinguitur ab omni alio secundum numerum.” This *notandum* is part of an addition to the original draft of the question.

²¹ I take the term ‘noninstantiability’ to refer to the first property from Noone (2003). Interestingly, the identity of an individual with itself is referred to as ‘thisness’ in contemporary debate, where ‘thisness’ is explicitly recognized to be a rendition of Scotus’s ‘haecceity’. See Adams (1976).

By turning to the necessary properties pertaining to individuals as individuals instead than to specific essences, Scotus shifts the focus of the question and ties the question of individuation to the notion of necessity. This move will have important consequences and seems to provide a link between medieval and modern conceptions of individuation.

Once the question of individuation is posited in this way, it appears that the usual answers are not satisfactory. As Scotus shows, no one of the entities previously invoked to play the role of principle of individuation accounts for either the noninstantiability or the identity of individuals.

Specifically, quantified matter does not account for noninstantiability, because it is actually what makes things divisible into different parts; it does not account either for identity, because the individual changes its matter all along its history while remaining the same individual. Accidents cannot account for either noninstantiability or identity, because they pertain to their subjects in a contingent way, so they cannot account for the possession of any necessary property. As to existence, Scotus considers it as a sort of accident, because it is added to essence; consequently, it is as unsatisfactory a candidate as accidents are. Furthermore, existence is simply what makes possible things real. As such, it cannot play the role of the principle of individuation for two reasons. First, all real things are real in the same way, so existence is not a principle of differentiation but is the same in all existing things; any difference among things comes from a difference among essences, not a difference in the way of existing. Second, existence, by itself, concerns only real and existing things, not possible ones. But Scotus maintains that also possible things can be individual, not just existing ones. Consequently, he is looking for something that can account for possible individuals, not just existing ones.²²

So, what accounts for the two properties of individuals, noninstantiability and identity? It cannot be anything external to the individual itself, since both properties are necessary. It is indeed something added to the specific essence. Scotus, however, wants to capture the point that it cannot be another thing added to the specific essence that the individual instantiates. Such a characteristic would pertain to the individual contingently. Consequently, Scotus concludes that what accounts for the two necessary properties of individuals must be the actualization of the very essence that the individual instantiates:

Therefore, this individual entity is not matter or form or the composite, inasmuch as each of these is a nature. Rather it is the ultimate reality of the being that is matter or that is form or that is the composite. Thus whatever is common and yet determinable can still be distinguished (no matter how much it is one thing) into several formally distinct realities of which this one is not formally that one. This one is formally the entity of singularity and that one is formally the entity of the nature. (Transl. Spade, p. 107.)²³

²² *Ord.* 2, d. 3, p. 1, q. 3-6 (Vat., VII, pp. 418-494); *Quaest. in Metaph.*, 7, q. 13, nn. 12-55 (OPh, IV, 219-237).

²³ *Ord.* 2, d. 3, p. 1, q. 6, n. 188 (Vat., VII, pp. 483-484).

This is indeed a simple solution. But it is not a disappointment or an anti-climax. What is important to realize is that the principle of individuation cannot be any of the things that it was supposed to be, because such things are constitutionally unable to account for the necessary properties of individuals. So we must look elsewhere for what makes an individual necessarily noninstantiable and necessarily identical with itself. This must be something that constitutes that very individual from the inside, not something external to its essence. The only plausible candidate is the ultimate actuality of the essence.

So Scotus here does give an answer to the question of individuation. But what is interesting in his answer is that he is not pointing to just another candidate as principle of individuation (call it ‘actuality’ or ‘haecceity’). Rather, he shifts the problem to a different level. We do not have to look for another essence or thing to be added to the specific essence. We have to look for what makes such an essence actual in such an individual.

5

Scotus illustrates his point by drawing a parallelism between specific and individual differences. In his intention, this parallelism should illuminate us as to what kind of entity the principle of individuation is:

So too the reality of an individual is like a specific reality in this respect: It is so to speak an act determining the reality of the species, which is as it were possible and potential. But it is unlike it in this respect: It is never taken from an added form, but rather precisely from the last reality of the form. (Transl. Spade, p. 104.)²⁴

Scotus’s first point is that the principle of individuation is what makes an essence – which by itself can be instantiated by a plurality of individuals – this particular individual. In this respect, it is nothing mysterious: no more mysterious than a specific difference with regard to a genus. Once we have realized that the relationship between the specific essence and its principle of individuation is that between a potentiality and its actuality (i.e. what makes it actual), we are on the right track. Sometimes, however, what makes something actual is taken from a different category: it is a different item added to what is potential, as in the case of the soul added to the body. Scotus’s second point is that this is not the case of the principle of individuation: it is not a different thing added to the essence, just its ultimate actuality in the very same category. As Scotus says more than once, the principle of individuation is something intrinsic to the individual and the individual is something in the same categorial coordination as the specific essence.²⁵ This is Scotus’s central tenet concerning individuation: what makes

²⁴ *Ord.* 2, d. 3, p. 1, q. 6, n. 180 (Vat., VII, p. 479): “Quoad hoc ista realitas individui est similis realitati specificae, quia est quasi actus, determinans illam realitatem speciei quasi possibilem et potentialem, – sed quoad hoc dissimilis, quia ista numquam sumitur a forma addita, sed praecise ab ultima realitate formae.” See in general *ibid.*, nn. 176-186 (Vat., VII, pp. 478-483); *Quaest. in Metaph.*, 7, q. 13, n. 124 (OPh, IV, pp. 261-262).

²⁵ *Ord.* 2, d. 3, p. 1, q. 2, n. 57 (Vat., VII, pp. 416-417); q. 3, n. 65 (Vat., VII, pp. 420-421); q. 4, nn. 89, 92 (Vat., VII, pp. 433-436).

an essence individual is its ultimate actuality, and this is not something added to the essence from a different category; it is not a different thing, but the full actualization of that essence. The principle of individuation is not a different thing or essence in the word, but a formal principle: the actuality of an essence. As such, it exists not just in a different way from that in which the essence which it actualizes exists: we are not dealing with two kinds of existence but with two radically different senses of ‘to exist’. The essence exist as a quidditative entity; the principle of individuation exists as a non-quidditative entity (just as a specific differentia and any ultimate difference).²⁶

The parallelism between specific differentiae and the principle of individuation is illuminating also concerning the delicate issue of the knowability of the principle of individuation. Specific differentiae are what makes a species actual with regard to a genus. Sometimes the form from which the specific differentia is drawn is indeed unknown and we have to rely on accidental differences instead than on substantial ones. This does not mean, however, that the forms from which the specific differentiae are drawn are mysterious entities and that in the next life we are going to discover a new kind of entity. Similarly, concerning individuals, we are not currently in a position to know the ultimate actualities by which a specific essence becomes an individual. Admittedly, any distinction among individuals is necessarily accompanied by a distinction among accidents.²⁷ For example, Peter and Paul are two numerically distinct individuals, and they also have a different eye color. So I can distinguish Peter and Paul because of their eye color. This does not mean, however, that it is this accidental difference that acts as principle of individuation. Accidents necessarily accompany the ultimate actuality of the essence, which is the real and only principle of individuation. Since now this principle is unknown to us, we can surely distinguish individuals according to their accidental differences. This is not a problem for Scotus. But we should not confuse our current way of distinguishing individuals with the metaphysical question of individuation. All the same, this does not mean that that actuality, even though currently unknown, is a sort of mysterious entity of an unknown kind. It is no more mysterious than all the actualities with which we are familiar in this world.

Actually, what is noteworthy about Scotus’s opinion on the knowability of the principle of individuation is not that he maintains that it is currently unknown. This is something about which most of his contemporaries would have agreed. It was actually a common doctrine that individuals cannot be known as individuals by the intellect. What is more striking in Scotus’s position is that individuals, even though they are currently unknown to the intellect, are in principle intellectually knowable. So there is nothing in an individual that is in itself mysterious and not transparent. All its constituents are formal

²⁶ *Ord.* 2, d. 3, p. 1, q. 6, n. 197 (Vat., VII, pp. 488-489).

²⁷ *Ord.* 2, d. 3, p. 1, q. 4, n. 124 (Vat., VII, p. 454): “Dico quod omnem distinctionem numeralem concomitatur distinctio accidentium, et ideo ubi nulla potest esse accidentium varietas, ibi nulla potest esse distinctio numeralis; et ex hoc potest argumentum Boethii tenere, quod, cum non possit in divinis esse accidens aliquod (nec accidentium varietas), ibi non potest esse distinctio vel differentia numeralis, – non sicut a causa praecise negata ad negationem illius cuius est causa, sed tamquam a necessario concomitante ad negationem illius quod necessario concomitatur”.

– there is no element that in principle cannot be known. Even the principle of individuation, far from being an obscure and mysterious entity, is the most luminous one, the ultimate actuality of an essence:

... intelligibility is absolutely speaking a consequence of entity, as was pointed out in the last question in Bk. VI. The singular includes the whole essential entity of [specific nature] above it, and in addition it has that ultimate grade of actuality and unity; and [as was clear] from the question on individuation, this added unity does not diminish but adds to the entity and the unity, and thus to the intelligibility. (Transl. Wolter, pp. 256-257.)²⁸

So, if now we are not able to tell one twin from another, this depends on our poor faculties, not on the fact that what makes one of the two twins the individual he or she is and what makes the other twin the individual he or she is, is something mysterious. If we finally manage to tell one twin from the other, this does not mean that we have found out a new entity whose existence we did not suspect. It only means that our faculties have improved and that now we are able to see how one twin is not the other one.²⁹

If we approach Scotus's question on individuation in the way I have suggested, I think that we can give a satisfactory interpretation of his apparently dismissive answer to those who keep asking what the principle of individuation is, namely what the individual entity from which the individual difference is taken is. Scotus's contention is that what matters is not to point to an entity but to realize that the principle of individuation is a being in a sense of the word 'being' different from that in which an essence is a being. The principle of individuation is an actuality, just as the specific difference is an actuality. The principle of individuation is the ultimate actuality of an essence. The essence, by itself, is not individual, but is made individual by being made actual. So what is controversial is not so much the nature of the principle of individuation: it is simply the ultimate actuality of a potentiality; what is controversial is Scotus's consideration of essence as an entity potentially instantiable by a plurality of individuals. But this is the core of his interpretation of the doctrine of the indifference of the essence, which Scotus defends at length by arguing that positing a less-than-numerical unity in the extra mental world is at least implicitly required by any sound metaphysical picture of the world. No single entity plays the role of principle of individuation for all things (neither matter nor quantity nor existence). Saying that what makes an individual noninstantiable and identical to itself is a thing added to its essence actually sounds as a glaring form of Platonism: the reason why Peter, Paul and the cat Kiddo are each one thing should be due to a common cause and to the same entity. This

²⁸ *Quaest. in Metaph.*, 7, q. 15, n. 14 (Oph, IV, p. 298): "... intelligibilitas absolute sequitur entitatem, ut dictum est VI, quaestione ultima. Singulare totam entitatem quiditativam superiorum includit, et ultra hoc, gradum ultimae actualitatis et unitatis, ex quaestione 'de individuatione', quae unitas non deminuit, sed addit ad entitatem et unitatem, et ita ad intelligibilitatem."

²⁹ *Ord. II*, d. 3, p. 1, q. 6, n. 191 (Vat., VII, p. 486): "Ad secundum concedo quod "singulare" est per se intelligibile, quantum est ex parte sui (si autem alicui intellectui non sit per se intelligibile, puta nostro, de hoc alias)." Scotus is here referring to *Quaest. in Metaph.*, 7, q. 15, where he demonstrates that our intellect cannot currently know the individual.

is the mistake against which Scotus reacts. Behind the unity of each thing there is no single entity (matter, quantity, existence or some other mysterious entity). Each thing is individual because it is an actual essence. Consequently, the cause of its individuation is its actuality. For each essence, the principle of individuation is the actuality of that essence. Consequently, in a sense there are as many causes of individuation as there are essences. But if the question on individuation is approached in a sensible and philosophically interesting way, we must say that the principle of individuation is an essence's actualization. As I said, this means that the principle of individuation is not a thing or an essence, but a principle of a thing and an essence.

Once we get this point we manage to put the question of individuation on the right track. If somebody keeps asking what such an actuality is and expects to find a new kind of being to be added to the specific essence, they are going to be disappointed. Actually, they are asking the wrong question: they should ask not what kind of thing the principle of individuation is, but in what sense it is a being.

6

Admittedly, Scotus has some difficulties in expressing this point. Scotus's own way of presenting his theory of individuation may have actually induced his readers to misunderstand him as a proponent of just another theory of individuation.

Sometimes, he does speak of the principle of individuation as a part and a component of the individual: the specific essence and the principle of individuation (call it individual form or reality or individual entity or haecceity) are the two components out of which a third entity arises, the individual. So the haecceity is introduced as something added to the essence. Scotus, however, always insists that it is not a different *thing* added:

These two realities cannot be distinguished as "thing" and "thing," as can the reality the genus is taken from and the reality the difference is taken from. (The specific reality is taken from these.) Rather when in the same thing, whether in a part or in the whole, they are always formally distinct realities of the same thing. (Transl. Spade, p. 107.)³⁰

My point is that Scotus was aware of the fact that his way of expressing his theory of individuation lent itself to misunderstanding. I suggest that this is the reason why his ways of calling the principle of individuation and of referring to its relationship with the specific difference shifted considerably along his career.

My suggestion is that Scotus gradually modified his way of referring to the principle of individuation in order to move away from the idea that the specific essence and the principle of individuation should be seen as two parts belonging to the same logical category, as if they were two little things constituting a larger thing (as Ockham and many after him actually interpreted his doctrine of individuation). By contrast, Scotus stressed that the principle of individuation is nothing else than what makes the specific

³⁰ *Ord.* 2, d. 3, p. 1, q. 188 (Vat., VII, p. 484). This passage immediately follows the passage quoted above, n. 22.

essence actual, not a different component added from outside but a principle that brings the essence to its full realization.

Scotus refers to the principle of individuation and to the relationship between the principle of individuation and the specific essence in different ways.³¹ I suggest that, in the light of what I said, it is possible to account for this difference in terminology as reflecting Scotus's several attempts to express with increasing precision the view that I have attributed to him.

I maintain that a crucial role, in this process, is played by the question on the *Metaphysics* where Scotus deals with the issue of individuation.³² This question, in itself, presents some problems, which, if disentangled, can lead us to the solution of the riddle.

I think that there is strong evidence that this question, like several other questions on the *Metaphysics*, underwent two drafts, and that what we now have is the somehow messy result of the combination of the original draft and the additions that should have resulted in a second and definitive draft. Such a second draft was never completed, so the fragments that should have resulted in it were incorporated sometimes clumsily into the first draft.³³

Even though the details of this hypothesis are still to be worked out, my suggestion is that it is possible to single out the primitive core of the question, belonging to the first draft. This primitive core antedates both the *Lectura* and the *Ordinatio*. It corresponds roughly to paragraphs 1-114 in the current critical edition.³⁴ In this first version, Scotus is still looking for an appropriate way of expressing his original view on individuation. Accordingly, he resorts to an old view of individuation rejected by Bonaventure and Kilwardby to express his own doctrine. He speaks of the principle of individuation as an individual form (*forma individualis*)³⁵. Later on, in his *Lectura* and *Ordinatio*, he rejects such terminology, probably because he now sees that it may give rise to the idea that the principle of individuation forms a real composition with the specific essence, as form constitutes a real composition with matter. Accordingly, in the *Lectura* (ca 1297-1299) and *Ordinatio* (started in 1301 and never completed), Scotus gives up the talk of forms; he now prefers to name the principle of individuation a *realitas* and an *entitas*. Also, he develops his doctrine of formal distinction in order to account for the relationship between the specific essence and the principle of individuation so conceived.³⁶ Still, he is not completely satisfied with this way of expressing his doctrine. Probably, he realizes that there is still room for mistaking his doctrine of individuation for a doctrine

³¹ See the table in Dumont (1995).

³² *Quaest. in Metaph.*, 7, q. 13.

³³ On the different drafts present in a different question, devoted to univocity, see Pini (2005)².

³⁴ *Quaest. in the Metaph.* 7, q. 13, nn. 1-114 (OPh, IV, pp. 215-257).

³⁵ *Quaest. in the Metaph.* 7, q. 13, n. 84 (OPh, IV, p. 246). See Dumont (1995), pp. 205-213, 223.

³⁶ See Dumont (1995), pp. 205-213, 223-225.

concerning two entities at the same level, an essence and an individual difference, added one to the other, and that consequently his principle of individuation can be seen as just another entity of the same sort as matter, quantity, and existence. Consequently, in his *Paris Reportatio* and in his additions to the *Ordinatio*, Scotus experiments with the notion of unitive containment and haecceity.³⁷

What I consider the last stage of this process is the set of additions to the question on individuation on the *Metaphysics* (corresponding to paragraphs 115-181 in the critical edition).³⁸ It is while preparing a second draft, which would never be completed, that Scotus made some additions, which were intended to make his old treatment more similar to that contained in the *Ordinatio*.³⁹ Because Scotus was never able to complete his revision of the original question on the *Metaphysics*, most of the material that was intended to constitute such a second draft and to replace what we now read in the *corpus* of the question are now found at the end of it, as a sort of addition. It is in those final paragraphs — which I suspect are Scotus's last words on the issue of individuation — that Scotus innovates on the terminology and calls the principle of individuation a *gradus* or *gradus individualis* or *gradus individuans*. Similarly, the relationship between the principle of individuation and the specific essence is described as 'unitive containment' instead than as a formal difference between two realities.⁴⁰ In this way, Scotus conveys his point that the difference between the specific essence and the principle of individuation is clearly one between entities that we would recognize as belonging to different logical categories: not two things or two equal components of a thing but an essence and its particular intensity, so to speak.

Some of Scotus's students, including William Alnwick and Francis of Meyronnes, would pick up some of the elements of this late development. Accordingly, the debate among Scotus's students could perhaps be explained in part as concerning the different

³⁷ See Dumont (1995), p. 215, n. 42.

³⁸ *Quaest. in the Metaph.*, 7, q. 13, nn. 115-181 (OPh, IV, pp. 257-280). These additions are not a polished second version of the questions; some of them should be considered additions to previous additions, so it is clear that the process of revision was far from being complete, and what we have now is just a series of notes that probably Scotus would have used in order to carry out the definitive draft of his question. In any case, it is interesting to remark that the terminology of 'gradus individualis', which I take to be typical of this last stage of Scotus's elaboration, appears again in *Quaest. in Metaph.*, 7, q. 15, nn. 14-15 (OPh, IV, p. 298), which the editors take as the second version of *Quaest. in Metaph.* 7, q. 14 (OPh, IV, pp. 281-292: p. 281, n. 1).

³⁹ This would explain the parallelisms between the *Quaest. in Metaph.* and the *Ord.* noticed by Dumont (1995), pp. 202-205.

⁴⁰ *Quaest. in the Metaph.*, 7, q. 13, nn. 131, 133, 136, 138, 146, 147, 177 (OPh, IV, pp. 264, 265, 268, 278). See Dumont (1995), pp. 213-217, 225-227 (both on *gradus individualis* and *continentia unitiva* in Scotus's *Questions on the Metaphysics*). These passages occur in the long addition now at the end of the question. I take it as evidence that they are posterior to the passages where Scotus refers to the principle of individuation as to an individual form, which I maintain are all in what I take to be the original draft of the question.

legacies and periods of evolution of Scotus himself.⁴¹ But I cannot stress too much that this is just a hypothesis that must be considered with great caution.

Scotus's own evolution concerning the terminology to refer to the principle of individuation is also a hypothesis that I put forward for the sake of discussion. Still, I think that this may be taken as an interesting case to test the extent to which philosophical and textual analysis can illuminate each other.

⁴¹ On the debate on individuation between Alnwick and Peter Thomae, see the remarks in Dumont (1988) and Dumont (1995), pp. 198-199.

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Gyula Klima:

Thomas Sutton on Individuation

The Thomistic solution to the problem of individuation and its presuppositions

Consider two copies of this paper. For all intents and purposes they are “identical”. If I give you one copy and I read the other aloud, you can follow what I am reading on your copy. If I ask you to read the first sentence, you would read “consider two copies of this paper” just by looking into your copy, without having to look into mine. Still, obviously, the two copies are not identical, strictly speaking; for if your copy were identical with mine, then there would be only one copy here, and not two copies. If we wanted to make another copy, we would have to take another set of sheets, feed it into the copier and print the text on that other set of sheets. If the same text were printed in the same way on the same sheets, that would not make a different copy. So, apparently, what distinguishes two otherwise identical copies is the paper they are printed on. To be sure, two copies may differ in a number of other ways too; say, my copy may be printed on sheets of a somewhat different color, or it may have a coffee spill on it, etc. But these differences are possible only if we already have two copies printed on different sheets: it is not possible for me to have a coffee spill on my copy and for you not to have one on yours if my copy and your copy are printed with the same letters on the same sheets, for if they are the same text printed on the same sheets, then they are identical. So, what *primarily* distinguishes two copies of the same paper is the distinctness of the sheets they are printed on, for any other difference between them is only possible if they are printed on different sheets.

I think this example nicely illustrates the basic intuition behind the Thomistic-Aristotelian conception of individuation, namely, that what *primarily* accounts for the difference between individuals of the same species is their matter.

There are a number of points to be noted about this apparently simple, and, at least on the basis of the foregoing example, perhaps rather intuitive claim.

The first is that the question of what accounts for individuation presupposes that *there must be* something that accounts for individuation, because individuation is something to be accounted for. That is to say, it is presupposed that there is something to be individuated in the first place, which, without being individuated would not be individual. Put in this way, the entire business of individuation may at once *not* sound so intuitive. For what sort of thing would it be that, if left un-individuated, would not be individual? After all, isn't *everything that really exists* an individual?

The second point to note concerning the Thomistic claim about individuation is that individuation is something to be accounted for only in material beings. For if the answer to the question of what accounts for individuation is that it is their matter, then, clearly, this answer cannot apply to immaterial beings. But why would the individuation of immaterial beings be any less problematic than the individuation of material beings? After all, according to the Thomistic answer, in the constitution of material beings there *must be* something to be individuated, which is certainly not their matter, for matter is that which *accounts for* the individuation of what is to be individuated. But then why wouldn't the same apply to immaterial beings, which may just as well have something in their constitution that needs to be individuated, even if certainly *not by their matter*?

The third point to be noted about the Thomistic claim is that it is not just matter in general that is supposed to do the work of individuation. The two copies of my paper of course agree not only in their text, but also in their common property that the same text is printed *on paper*. So, what distinguishes these two copies is not the stuff they are printed on as such, but rather *this stuff here* as opposed to *that stuff there*, which Aquinas refers to as designated matter, i.e., matter considered under determinate dimensions, here and now. But then it might seem that if it is the distinction of different chunks of designated matter that primarily does the job of individuation, the primary cause of individuation is the difference of the dimensions distinguishing these distinct chunks of matter in the first place. So the primary principle of individuation would then turn out to be some accident, the dimensive quantity of *this* chunk of matter, as opposed to *that* dimensive quantity of *that* chunk of matter. However, since accidents are individuated by their subjects, this result seems to involve a vicious circularity in the explanation of individuation: the individuation of material substances is explained in terms of the distinctness of their designated matter, which in turn is explained in terms of the distinctness of their dimensions, which, however, given that these dimensions are accidents of their subjects, has to be explained in terms of the distinctness of their subjects, i.e., the individual substances that they are the dimensions of. But with this we have come full circle: the distinctness of material substances is explained by the distinctness of their designated matter, which is explained by the distinctness of their dimensions, which in turn is explained by the distinctness of the substances with which we started out.

Three problems for the Thomistic solution

As we can see, each of these points, meant to clarify the Thomistic position, leads to some rather disturbing problems. In reverse order, these problems may be summarized as follows.

1. The Thomistic position on individuation seems to involve a vicious circularity of explanations. How could the distinctness of substances be explained in terms of the distinctness of one of their accidents, if the distinctness of accidents is to be explained in terms of the distinctness of substances? Let me refer to this, for want of a better designation, as “Scotus’ (1266-1308) problem”.

2. Why would the individuation of immaterial substances be any less problematic than the individuation of material substances? Why shouldn't we demand an explanation of the individuation of immaterial substances just as well as we do for the individuation of material substances? And then, if we do have good reason to demand an explanation in both cases, what is that common explanation, *if* there is one? What is the principle of individuation for both material and immaterial substances? Let me refer to this, without providing here any historical justification, as "Henry of Ghent's (c. 1217-1293) problem".
3. Finally, why should there be "a problem of individuation" at all? Apparently the problem is based on the unjustified, unjustifiable, and simply wrong assumption that there is something to be individuated in the first place, which without this "individuation" would be left un-individuated. Let me call this "the nominalists' objection to the problem".

In the remainder of this paper I will address each of these problems in this order, taking my cue from the astute discussions of Thomas of Sutton, O.P. (c. 1250-1315), an early defender and quite original interpreter of Aquinas in Oxford.

Scotus's problem

Sutton takes on Scotus's problem in the 21st question of his 1st *Quodlibet* by raising the question "whether the principle of individuation is a substantial property that precedes all accidents".

He presents only one argument in favor of the affirmative answer, without attributing it to Scotus. The argument runs as follows:

No accident can be a principle of *per se* subsistence. But an individual in the category of substance, insofar as it is individual, is subsistent. For species and genera do not subsist, but individuals of the category of substance do. Therefore, no accident is the principle of individuation, but some substantial property is. For it cannot be said that form is the principle of individuation, for the form is the cause of agreement of individuals of the same species; it cannot be matter either, for it is purely passive, and it is a part of the species just as form is. Therefore, nothing can be the principle of individuation, except a substantial property.¹

Of course, this argument by elimination can only work with the common presupposition that these are all the possible candidates for being the principle of individuation. But this is not contested by Sutton. In the body of the article he rather strives to show how individuation is possible through a combination of some of these candidates, namely,

¹ Nullum accidens potest esse principium per se subsistendi, sed individuum in genere substantiae secundum quod individuum est per se subsistens. Species enim et genera non subsistunt, sed tantum individua in genere substantiae. Ergo nullum accidens est principium individuationis, sed aliqua proprietas substantialis. Non enim potest dici quod forma sit principium individuationis, quia forma est causa convenientiae individuorum eiusdem speciei; nec materia, quia ipsa est pure passiva et etiam ipsa est pars speciei, sicut et forma. Nihil ergo potest esse principium individuationis nisi proprietas substantialis. Thomas of Sutton, *Quodlibeta*, München 1969, henceforth: QDL, q. 21, p. 139.

matter and quantity, i.e., *materia quanta*, or quantified matter. To prepare his answer, he first carefully explicates the question itself:

When it is asked what the principle of individuation of material substance is, then the question concerns what causes its incommunicability or contraction under the most specific species, so that it is predicated only of one thing and not of several things. Therefore, it is one thing to ask what *the cause of individuation* is and it is another to ask what *the cause of the individual* is. For an individual in the category of substance has all four causes, namely, matter, form, efficient, and final. But not all of these can be the cause of individuation, that is, incommunicability, or limitation under the species, in the same way as not everything that is the principle of the species, such as man, is the principle of its specification, that is, contraction under the genus. For animal is a principle of the species man. However, animal is not a principle of its specification or contraction under the genus, but rational is the principle of contraction under the genus.²

This is a rather difficult passage, couched as it is in a rather strange language. But even so, it makes one thing at the beginning quite clear: the question is not *what causes this individual to be*; for that question would appropriately be answered by providing the four causes accounting for the individual's *existence*; but those are not what we are looking for. The question rather is *what causes this individual to be this individual*, which is a more specific question, concerning the *individuality* of the individual itself. Therefore, what we are looking for is not the cause or causes of the *existence* or *subsistence* (i.e., *per se* existence) of the individual, but rather the cause or principle of its *individuality itself*. So, what is this “individuality itself”? And what is this “contraction” that supposedly results in this individuality?

In answering these questions, we first need to clarify the language of this passage, especially with regard to the supposedly helpful analogy of the contraction or specification of the species under the genus. Just *what are the things Sutton is talking about* when he says “animal is a principle of the species man; however, animal is not a principle of its specification or contraction under the genus, but rational is the principle of contraction under the genus”? In what way is animal a principle of man, but not a principle of its specification? And in what sense is rational the principle of specification sought for? What are the things the terms ‘man’, ‘animal’ and ‘rational’ are supposed to stand for in these sentences? The key to the answer is provided by Sutton’s indication that he is talking about the species, genus, and difference, and not the individuals that fall under the corresponding terms. In scholastic logical jargon, these terms here are to be taken in *simple*, and not in *personal* supposition. In the Thomistic version of the

² Cum quaeritur, quid est principium individuationis substantiae materialis, quaeritur, quid est causa incommunicabilitatis ipsius, seu contractionis sub specie specialissima, ita quod praedicetur de uno solo, non de pluribus. Unde aliud est quaerere, quid est causa individuationis, et aliud est quaerere, quid est causa individui. Individuum substantiae habet omnes quattuor causas, scilicet: materiam, formam, finem et efficiens. Sed non omnes istae causae sunt causae individuationis, hoc est incommunicabilitatis seu limitationis sub specie, sicut non omne, quod est principium speciei ut hominis, est principium specificationis, hoc est contractionis sub genere. Animal enim est principium huius speciei homo. Sed tamen animal non est principium suae specificationis, id est contractionis sub genere, sed rationale est principium contractionis sub genere. Ibid. pp. 139-140.

medieval theory of supposition, when a term is in *simple supposition*, then it stands for *the nature signified* by the term in question *precisely as it is conceived* by the concept expressed by the term in question. Now what are the natures signified by the terms ‘man’, ‘animal’ and ‘rational’? According to Aquinas and his followers, they are the individual humanities, animalities, and rationalities of individual humans, animals, and rational beings, which constitute them as individual humans, animals and rational beings, *conceived in abstraction* from their individuating conditions. But the reason why these terms are predicable of the corresponding individuals is precisely the fact that these individuals actually have these natures, constituting them as singular beings in their natural kinds. Furthermore, as Aquinas insisted, the individual humanity of this human being is not distinct from the animality or the rationality of the same. It is one and the same individual nature that constitutes this individual in his or her specific kind, which is the kind of a human being, a rational animal. But this very same essence or nature is *conceived* differently, insofar as it is conceived as the principle of the vital operations of any animal, and insofar as it is the principle of the operations of a rational being. Animal nature, as such, is the principle of sensitive life, rational nature, as such, is the principle of rational life, so a rational animal nature is the principle of a rational animal life, which is what we call a human life.

Now, with this understanding of the “things” Sutton is talking about, we may have a better understanding of the contraction or specification that results in the specific nature “contracted under” the generic nature. The generic nature, conceived as such, that is, as the principle of animal life, can be present in any animal, whether brute or rational. However, rational animality can only be present in a rational animal, but not in a brute animal. So, rationality, when it specifies animality, contracts animality to rational animals, that is to say, to human beings only, constituting rational animality, or humanity, the specific nature of humans. Thus, the predicate ‘man’ signifying this nature as such, namely, rational animality, cannot be predicated of brutes, for brute, irrational animality is not rational animality *per se*, on account of the immediate opposition between rationality and irrationality. Therefore, the principle of specification that contracts the specific nature under the generic nature is the difference, even if the genus is also a principle of the specific nature, but is not the principle of its specification or contraction.

Now, Sutton’s claim is that when we are looking for the principle of individuation, we are analogically looking for the principle of contraction of the individualized nature under the specific nature: we are looking for what it is on account of which the individual nature of Daniel is contracted to Daniel in such a way that the name signifying his individual nature cannot be predicated of anything else. So, the analogy is that the name ‘Daniel’ can only be predicated of Daniel on account of the fact that the nature signified by this name can only belong to this person named Daniel (without equivocation) and not to anything else, in the same way as the nature of rational animality can only belong to humans and not to anything else, and in both cases there is something that accounts for the contraction of the nature signified by these names.

But then, on the basis of this understanding of the question, one part of Sutton’s answer to “Scotus’ problem”, namely, the reason why he would reject Scotus’ solution in terms

of a *per se* individual substantial property, should immediately be obvious. For in this setting, the individual nature of Daniel is necessarily the *result* of individuation (just as the specific nature is the result of specification), whence it cannot be its *principle*. Therefore, the principle of individuation must be something other than the individual nature, something that is *per se* incommunicable to other individuals of the same species and thus it contracts the specific nature to result in the individual nature, in the way in which the specific difference is *per se* incommunicable to other species of the same genus (as the difference of rational nature is *per se* incommunicable to brute animal species) and thus it contracts the generic nature to result in the specific nature.

In the body of the question, Sutton provides the following, as he claims, “necessary reasoning” to prove that the principle of individuation thus understood can only be the dimensive quantity of material substances:

... that is the principle of contraction under some common [nature] by which one thing contained under that common [nature] is distinguished from another thing under that same common [nature] ... but that by which one individual is *per se* and primarily distinguished from another individual of the same species is dimensive quantity, and nothing from the genus of substance or from another genus other than quantity.³

Sutton goes on to prove the minor premise by means of the following reasoning:

... those [principles] that distinguish individuals of the same species have to be things of the same *ratio* [or formal character], insofar as they are parts of the same nature. For if they were things of diverse natures, then they would distinguish [whatever they distinguish] in species, and thus the latter would not be individuals of the same species. Indeed, rational and irrational, by which man and brutes are distinguished are not of the same nature, and so they distinguish [man and brutes] by species. But it is only quantity and nothing else that has parts of the same *ratio*. ... for quantity is *per se*, [i.e., by itself] divided into parts of the same *ratio*, and not by substance or something else, because position, which is the order of parts in the whole is included in its *ratio*. For dimensive quantity is that which has position. And so the parts of quantity of the same species are distinguished on account of the diversity of their positions.⁴

Thus, the main reason why Sutton singles out dimensive quantity as the principle of individuation for material substance is that it is something consisting of parts that do not differ specifically at all, and yet they are different, just because of what they are, namely, parts of a whole situated at different positions, thereby spatially extending the

³ ... illud est principium contractionis sub aliquo communi, per quod unum contentum sub communi distinguitur ab alio contento sub eodem communi ... Illud autem, per quod distinguitur per se et primo unum individuum ab alio eiusdem speciei, est quantitas dimensiva et nihil de genere substantiae nec de aliquo genere alio quam de genere quantitatis. Ibid. p. 140.

⁴ ... quia illa, quae distinguunt individua eiusdem speciei, oportet esse res eiusdem rationis tamquam partes eiusdem naturae. Si enim essent res diversarum naturarum, distinguerent secundum speciem, et sic non essent individua eiusdem speciei. Quia enim rationale et irrationale, per quae distinguuntur homo et bruta, non sunt eiusdem naturae; ideo distinguunt secundum speciem. Nunc autem quantitas et nihil aliud habet per se partes eiusdem rationis. ... Quantitas autem per se dividitur in partes eiusdem rationis, non per substantiam, vel aliquid aliud et hoc est, quia positio, quae est ordo partium in toto, in eius ratione includitur. Quantitas enim dimensiva est habens positionem. Et ideo propter diversitatem situs distinguuntur diversae quantitates eiusdem speciei. Ibid. p. 141.

whole itself, so that it has parts outside of parts in space. But the different positions, which in this way constitute dimensive quantity itself, are not different on account of anything else: to put it in modern, but not incompatible terms, points of the same coordinates are just the same, whereas those of different coordinates are diverse, period (and, of course, the same goes for lines, surfaces and bodies determined by such points).

Accordingly, Sutton vehemently rejects the Scotistic objection to the alleged circularity of the Thomistic account, on the basis that it rests on not understanding the question, confusing the cause of individuation with the causes of the individual, and so confusing different orders of priority. For although it is true that quantity, being an accident, depends *for its being* on the substance that it informs, nevertheless, material substance, as well as its matter, form, being, and even its individualized nature, depends *for its individuation* on quantity, which is the only kind of thing that has to have distinct parts of the same specific nature, and so it is only quantity that can be the primary cause of the numerical distinction of individuals of the same species. Therefore, although substance is necessarily prior to quantity *in the order of dependency for being*, nevertheless, quantity is prior to substance *in the order of dependency for individuation*.

So, Scotus' problem on Sutton's analysis is simply the result of ignoring these proper priorities. Accordingly, no wonder Sutton closes his argumentation against Scotus, 16 years his junior, *and* a Franciscan, with the following biting remark: "It is obvious, therefore, that the entire position of those who take themselves so subtly to have found something new is but childish fiction."⁵

Henry of Ghent's problem

But the much older, and at the time much more influential Henry of Ghent does not fare much better in Sutton's opinion, for he is also guilty of ignoring the proper order of individuation, although on the basis of a more fundamental, underlying error.

The proper priorities of the order of individuation, as conceived by Sutton, are neatly laid out by him in his *Quaestiones Ordinariae*, in the following passage, directly targeting Henry of Ghent's conception:

... the cases of dimensive quantity and substantial being are not similar to each other. For dimensive quantity of itself has the distinction of parts on account of the diversity of their position, which pertains to its *ratio*. Therefore, such a quantity is the cause of the multiplication of individuals of the same *ratio* among material things. But substantial being does not of itself have the distinction of its parts. And so it cannot be the cause of the multiplication of individuals in the same species, but it is multiplied by the multiplication of form in material substances of the same species, and form is multiplied by the multiplication of matter in which it is received, matter is multiplied by the multiplication of dimensive quantity, and dimensive quantity is multiplied of itself on account of the diversity of position. And thus the entire root of the multiplication of

⁵ Patet igitur quod totum dictum istorum, qui tam subtiliter putant nova invenire, non est nisi fictivum puerile. Thomas of Sutton, *Quaestiones ordinariae*, München 1977, henceforth: QORD, q. 27, p. 760

material substances is dimensive quantity; and so, since there is no dimensive quantity in angels, it is necessary that there is no multiplication of angels in the same species.⁶

The underlying error that in Sutton's analysis prevents Henry from seeing this proper order is his failure to see how the individuation of existence is itself dependent on the individuation of essence. As in the body of the article he writes:

We should consider that being is not multiplied, except by the multiplication of essence, and this can be seen from the following. The essence which is its own existence cannot be multiplied, but is only one, namely, God Himself ... And existence cannot be included in the essence of something caused, for an essence the *ratio* of which contains existence cannot be understood not to exist, and hence it cannot be produced from non-existence into existence. For the multiplication of existence, therefore, essences have to be multiplied, which receive and delimit existence in which they participate; for a subsistent, unlimited existence not received in anything can only be one. It has to be said, therefore, that just as form is multiplied because it is received in diverse matters, in the same way, actual existence is multiplied because it is received in diverse essences.⁷

To be sure, Henry's "failure" to see Sutton's (or for that matter Aquinas's) point is his subtly, but radically different conception of participation, based on a fundamentally different understanding of the relationship between essence and existence in general.

As in an earlier paper of mine I have pointed out,⁸ the difference in their conceptions is all the more surprising because apparently both Henry and Sutton (or again, Aquinas) draw basically on the same stock of common principles; so it is apparently a dark mystery how they can arrive at radically opposite conclusions. However, as I have argued in the same paper, the mystery can be solved, if we focus on the subtly different interpretations of those same principles provided by these authors, on account of their

⁶ Ad septimum dicendum est quod non est simile de quantitate et de esse substantiali, quia quantitas dimensiva ex se ipsa habet distinctionem partium eiusdem rationis propter diversitatem situs, qui est de ratione sua. Et ideo talis quantitas est causa multiplicationis individuorum eiusdem rationis in substantiis materialibus, sed [sicut, ed.] esse substantiale non habet de se distinctionem partium. Et propter hoc oportet quod non sit causa multiplicationis individuorum in una specie, sed multiplicatur in substantiis materialibus eiusdem speciei ex multiplicatione formae, et forma multiplicatur ex multiplicatione materiae in qua recipitur, materia autem multiplicatur ex multiplicatione quantitatis dimensivae, quantitas vero dimensiva propter diversum situm de se multiplicatur. Et ita tota radix multiplicationis substantiarum individualium est quantitas dimensiva; et quia quantitas dimensiva non est in angelis, ideo necesse est quod ibi non sit multiplicatio angelorum in una specie. Ibid. pp. 762-763.

⁷ Advertendum est igitur quod esse non multiplicatur nisi per multiplicationem essentiae, et hoc potest sic videri: Essentia quae est ipsum esse, non potest multiplicari, sed est una sola, scilicet deus ipse, ut alibi dictum est. Nec esse potest includi in essentia alicuius causati, quia essentia, de cuius ratione est esse, non potest intelligi non esse, et per consequens non potest produci a non-esse in esse. Ad hoc igitur quod esse multiplicetur, oportet essentias multiplicari, quae recipiant esse et limitent esse, quod participant; esse enim subsistens non receptum in aliquo est illimitatum et unum tantum. Oportet igitur dicere quod, sicut forma multiplicatur per hoc quod recipitur in diversis materiis, ita esse actuale multiplicatur per hoc quod recipitur in diversis essentiis. QORD, q. 27, pp. 753-754.

⁸ Klima, G. (2002) "Thomas Sutton and Henry of Ghent on the Analogy of Being", *Proceedings of the Society for Medieval Logic and Metaphysics*, <<http://www.fordham.edu/gsas/phil/klima/SMLM/PSMLM2/PSMLM2.pdf>>, 2(2002), pp. 34-44.

slightly different construal of the semantic role of the notion of being in all predications, influencing their entire understanding of how the essences signified by the categorematic terms of the ten categories specify or qualify the act of existence signified by the transcendental notion of being.

The Nominalists' objection to the problem

But similar considerations apply to the “nominalists' objection to the problem” raised at the beginning, which Sutton of course did not have to deal with, but anybody after Ockham had to and still has to. For at the core of the nominalist objection, which simply eliminates the problem instead of solving it, lies the even more radical departure from the semantic principles informing Sutton's, as well as Henry's and Scotus' relevant considerations. For with the nominalist conception of the semantic relations between categorematic terms and what they signify, the multipliable and so “contractible” common forms signified by these terms in the *via antiqua* are no longer needed or even wanted, and so they are the first to fall victim to Ockham's razor. But then, in this framework, the problem of individuation, as Sutton, or for that matter, Aquinas, Henry or Scotus construed it, cannot even be meaningfully formulated.

However, before anyone would reach for the champagne bottles to celebrate this achievement, we should note that this “achievement” of the nominalists came at the dear price of not only generating a whole new set of (mostly epistemological) problems for themselves as well as for later generations, but also of leading to a breakdown of the unity of scholastic discourse in general. But if the previous reflections on Sutton, Henry and Scotus are correct, then it is fair to say that at least in its finer details that unity was already pretty precarious when it was still by and large intact.