

Representation and Objects of Thought in Medieval Philosophy

Edited by

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Chapter IV

Representation in Scholastic Epistemology

Martin Tweedale

Perhaps the most basic and most perplexing problem for epistemology is what is currently called the problem of intentionality, i.e. how it is possible for any being to have acts like thinking, imagining, perceiving, and states like belief and desire which are *about* something other than themselves and frequently about something external to the being in question altogether. Among the thirteenth and fourteenth-century scholastics the approach to this problem was almost always through the notion of representation. This chapter will first attempt to describe the ideas the scholastics inherited from the ancients and from earlier thinkers in the Islamic world and then proceed to concentrate on the notion of intentional existence and how views on it changed radically in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century. Necessarily an appraisal of this length can give only a brief sketch of developments, but I hope to suggest what the basic motivations were for the varying approaches that were propounded.

1 Origins

At the very beginning of *De interpretatione*¹ Aristotle tells us spoken sounds are signs of certain *pathemata* in the soul, which are themselves *homoiomata* of things in the world. A *homoioima* is a likeness or image while a *pathema* is some condition the soul passively receives. Aristotle refers us to his works on the soul for further explanation, but in fact the notion of a likeness or image is not prominent in his psychological pieces. Rather Aristotle relies on the idea that what is cognized, either through sense perception or mind, is a form which exists both in external objects and in the cognitive faculty. The theory is limited to the primary objects of cognition, which, in the case of sensation, means the forms of the very properties of things which excite the sense organs to activity, and, in the case of the mind, to the abstract natures of things encountered in the world we perceive. It is clear enough that Aristotle wants to attribute two sorts of existence to these forms: in the one existence they exist as the definitive natures of material things and give rise to actual instances

¹ *De int.* 1, 7-9

of types of things: in the other existence they do not give rise to other instances but allow for some form of cognition of the type of thing in question.

Aristotle says that in the case of sense perception 'the sense has the power of receiving into itself the sensible forms of things without the matter.'² He compares this to the way wax receives the shape of a signet ring without taking on any of the gold or iron of which the ring is composed. Still it seems clear that the sense or sense organ does not take on the form in a way which gives us another thing that has the quality in question in the same way as the external object does. In the case of sight there is the suggestion that when a color is perceived the transparent liquid in the eye is said to take on that color, but only in a different sense from that in which the external object is colored. The external object is colored *kath' hauto*, by virtue of itself, while the eye liquid is colored by virtue of something else, in the way the sea is blue.³ All of this suggests the idea that something in the organ of sense is a likeness of what is being perceived.

In the case of non sensory cognition, i.e. intellectual cognition, it is the abstract and non sensible natures of things that are the objects, and these are the forms of physical things, but they are intelligible objects only when they exist in the immaterial mind. In fact the existence of these forms in the mind is the full actuality of the mind itself.⁴ There are two important differences, however, between the intellectual and the sensory forms of cognition. First of all, in the case of sense perception Aristotle never says that what is sensed is something internal to the sense itself. Although in his view the full actuality of the sense object is identical with the activity of the sense faculty, an activity which does occur in the sense organ, Aristotle comes close to some such position, by and large the assumption seems to be that we perceive something that exists in external reality. But with the intellect and Aristotle holds the view that the object is a universal and universals exist only in minds, and this is why the mind can call up its object at will once it has apprehended it.⁵ In this the mind is like the imagination, only the imagination works with *phantasmata*, i.e. images retained from sensation. It is also claimed that the mind when it thinks has to make use of these images.⁶ It would be highly unlike Aristotle to claim that it is the images themselves that we are thinking about or even imagining; rather we are thinking about and imagining what the images are images of. Hence there is implicit here a belief that representation plays a role in thought and imagination, if not in sense perception itself.

Centuries later the peripatetic philosopher and commentator, Alexander of Aphrodisias (fl. c. 200 CE), treated sense perception as an assimilation of the sense faculty to the sense object via some alteration of the sense organ. He made it clear,

² *De anima*, II 12, 424a17–20.

³ See Tweedale (1992), 227. The key texts are *De anima*, II 7, 418a28–b5, and *De Sensu*, 439b1–5.

⁴ See *De anima*, III 4, 429a28.

⁵ See *De anima*, II 5, 417b19–25.

⁶ See *De anima*, III 7, 431b1.

however, that the sensible form that the organ receives does not make the organ genuinely have the quality being perceived. In the case of sight, where it is colors that are perceived, the colors exist in the organ only in the way they do in a mirror or in water.⁷ This is not so far from what I suggested was Aristotle's view, and is a clear attempt to find a way for a form to exist other than the way in which it makes something genuinely have a certain quality.

Still later we find Themistius (c. 320–90), whose commentary on *De anima* was known to the Christian scholastics in the latter part of thirteenth century, proposing that the sensible form exists in the sense faculty but not in its matter. At one point he says:

But the senses do not come to be the materials of the sense objects, for the sense does not whiten or blacken or get heavy or sharp.⁸

Themistius's theory marks a point where the existence of the form whereby it either is cognition or a pre-requisite for cognition is described as an immaterial existence. Its subject is the soul itself rather than any organ of the soul's faculties.

This line of thought is perpetuated by John Philoponus (late sixth century) in the following passage:

Since the body is affected by heat, the tactile sense is also affected, but it is not the same affection. Rather the sense has been affected cognitively by just the form of the hot thing, while the sense organ or flesh is like matter which in virtue of both form and matter becomes the subject for the heat itself and is affected by the whole thing that heats it as a whole. It is no wonder if sense is affected by the sensible objects in a different way than is the sense organ and bodies generally, for the being of the colors, flavors, sounds, heats, colds themselves is different from the being of the sensible object. For this reason colors, flavors, sounds and the rest exist even when sense does not, but sensible objects do not exist if sense does not lay hold of them.⁹

The sensible objects then have a different sort of existence from the sensible qualities, an existence dependent on being apprehended by the sense faculties. The implication is that the matter of the sense organs is not what supports this existence, although in other places Philoponus grants that in sensation alterations are produced in the organ.

When we turn to the Islamic thinkers we find that Avicenna had quite a complex view of sense perception, which involves elements of the preceding views but worked up in quite an original way. He held that sensation involves the sensed form

⁷ The relevant texts here are found in Alexander of Aphrodisias, *Alexandri de anima liber cum mantissa*, 38, 21–39, 2; 39, 12–14; 62, 11–16. See Tweedale (1992), 224–5.

⁸ See Themistius, *Themistii in libros Aristotelis de anima paraphrases*, 78, 8. See Tweedale (1992), 223–4.

⁹ See Philoponus, *Ioannis Philoponi in Aristotelis de anima libros commentaria*, 438, 10–20. See Tweedale (1992), 222–3.

having some sort of existence in the sense organ and that in sight 'likenesses' are radiated into the eye.

Those [apprehensive powers] that apprehend by the agency of what is outside are the five or eight senses. Of these one is sight, which is a power belonging to the optic nerve for apprehending the form of that which is formed in the crystalline humor from likenesses of bodies having color, which likenesses come through bodies radiated in actuality onto the surfaces of smooth bodies.¹⁰

There is definitely a suggestion here that the object of sight is something in the eye rather than something external. Avicenna was aware that this makes the sensing of something external indirect, as the following passage shows.

For the primary sensed object is most definitely what is represented in the sense's instrument, and that is what [the sense?] apprehends. Further, it seems that when we say that what is outside is sensed our meaning is more than what we mean by saying that what is to be sensed is in the soul. For the meaning of 'what is outside is sensed' is that its form is assimilated in my sense; but the meaning of 'what is to be sensed is in the soul' is that its very form which has been imaged is in my sense, and on account of this it is difficult to count it as one of the sensible qualities found in bodies. But we must definitely know, since some body affects the sense but that body is not affected, that in the body there is a peculiar quality which is the origin of a change in the sense, even though a sense does not change it.¹¹

Here we have an adoption of the assimilation theory found in Alexander combined with Philoponus's point that the form in the soul is not the same as the external sensible quality. It is a representation or likeness of it.

Imagination too, according to Avicenna, requires a representative likeness, as is particularly evident in the following:

A corporeal instrument is also necessary for the apprehension of singular forms by a complete abstraction from matter and by ridding the abstraction of any sort of material concomitants, as is the case in imagination. For imagination can imagine only if the imaginable form is represented in it in a body by a representation which is common to the power and to the body. For Socrates's form, which is represented by the imagination in respect of its figure and its outline, and in respect of the position of his various limbs to each other (which appear in the imagination just as though they were seen) can only be imagined as such if the parts and dimensions of his limbs are represented in a body in such a way that the dimensions of that form are in the dimensions of the body and its parts in that body's parts.¹²

10 Avicenna, *Avicenna Latinus. Liber de Anima seu Sextus de Naturalibus*, part I, ch.3, p.59, 23ff.

11 *Ibid.*, part II, ch. 2, p.120, 42ff.

12 *Ibid.*, part IV, ch. 3, p.45, 41-6, 52.

We can see from these passages that the existence of the representative likeness in both sense and imagination is very much tied to the corporeal organ, in a way that differs from Themistius's and Philoponus's accounts. This accords better. I would say, with the original Aristotelian position.

But then Avicenna added an entirely new dimension to his view of sense perception. He claimed that besides the sensible forms the faculty of sense perception also apprehends 'intentions' of sensible things. Consider the following passage:

Now of the powers of apprehension that are moved by what is inside, some apprehend the intentions of sensibles. Moreover, of the apprehensive powers there are some which apprehend and operate at the same time, some which apprehend and do not operate, and some apprehend principally and some secondarily.

Now the difference between apprehending a form and apprehending an intention is this: The form is what the interior sense and the exterior sense apprehend together, but the exterior sense first apprehends it and then sends it on to the interior sense. For example, when a sheep apprehends the form of a wolf, i.e. its shape, character, and color, the sheep's exterior sense first apprehends it, and then the interior sense. An intention, on the other hand, is what the soul apprehends of the sensible even though the exterior sense did not earlier apprehend it. For example, the sheep apprehends an intention which it has of the wolf, which is the reason why it is compelled to fear the wolf and flee, even though the sense does not apprehend this in any way. But what the exterior sense first and then the interior sense apprehend of the wolf is here called a form, while what the hidden powers apprehend without the senses is here called an intention.¹³

The Arabic word for 'intention' also translates the Greek '*logos*', and thus must be something like what a word means or an account of what something is. Nevertheless, Avicenna is quite willing to attribute such knowledge to brute animals; without it animals would not recognize the need to flee what is dangerous or, presumably, to pursue what is good to eat.

On top of all this, but, I think, on a continuum with it, is Avicenna's view that intellectual knowledge is also an intention, but here a universal intention which is just some essence existing in the mind. Avicenna also treats this as the intelligible form common to many things of the same type.¹⁴ Since Avicenna held to the immateriality of the mind, we can be sure that the intelligible form or intention does not require any material basis. Neither is there any indication that the intentions formed by the interior senses are based in bodies. In Avicenna the intentions, but not the likenesses caused in the exterior senses, appear to be based in the soul alone, not any corporeal organ.

Averroes, the great twelfth century commentator on Aristotle, erased the distinction Avicenna had drawn between the likenesses of sensible qualities that exist in the sense organs and the intentions that are only perceived by the interior senses. His view is that only intentions are perceived.

13 *Ibid.*, part I, ch. 5, p.85, 88-6,6.

14 Avicenna, *Avicenna Latinus: Liber de Philosophia Prima sive Scientia Divina*.

... we are to think that the reception of sensible forms by each sense is a reception abstracted from matter. For if it received them with matter they would have the same being in the soul as outside the soul. Thus in the soul there are intentions and apprehensions, while outside the soul there are neither intentions nor apprehensions, but rather material things that are not apprehended at all.¹⁵

Averroes has interpreted Aristotle's dictum that in the senses the form is received without the matter as meaning that in the senses they have some immaterial or 'intentional' existence, rather than as simply meaning that the material of external objects is not imported into the sense organ. A little further on Averroes elaborates on this proposal:

Next he [Aristotle] says: 'In like fashion each of the senses is affected [by what has color or flavor or sound]. I.e., in this way each of the senses is affected by the items it is naturally suited to be affected by, whether color or sound; but it is not affected by them in virtue of the fact that it is a color or sound, since, if that were the case, it would turn out that when it had received it it would be a color or sound, not an intention. And this is what he means to say when he says: 'but this not [in virtue of its being called each of these]', i.e., not in virtue of being called each but in virtue of being an intention, for the intention of a color is different from the color. And then he says, 'in virtue of being in this condition and in intention', by way of guarding against the intentions which the intellect receives, for the latter are universals while the former are only *these*.¹⁶

In other words, the senses do not receive the colors or sounds or tastes etc. themselves, but only their 'intentions', and it is these intentions which are directly apprehended. In this respect the senses are, evidently, like the intellect, which also receives intentions, but ones that are universal rather than particular. Obviously, an account of this sort is problematic for the sort of direct realism Aristotle himself seems, at least for the most part, to have adopted.

Averroes recognizes that he is opening up a gap between what exists in the external world and what the soul apprehends. Witness this passage:

Someone could say that sensibles do not move the senses in the way that they exist outside the soul, for they move the senses in as much as they are intentions, and intentions in actuality do not exist in matter but only intentions in potentiality. But someone cannot say that that diversity is due to a diversity of the subjects, so that intentions come into being on account of the spiritual matter which is the sense rather than on account of a mover outside. For it is better to hold that diversity of forms is the cause of diversity of matter, not that diversity of matter is the cause of diversity of forms. Since this is so, it is necessary to posit an outside mover in the case of the senses that is different from the sensibles, just as was necessary in the case of the intellect. It seems, then, that, if we grant that diversity of forms is the cause of diversity of matter, it will be necessary for there to be an outside mover. But Aristotle says nothing about this in the case of the senses, since

there it is not obvious, whereas it is in the case of the intellect. But you ought to think about this, since it requires scrutiny.¹⁷

Averroes rejects here the idea that the existence of intentions in the senses is due to some special, 'spiritual' matter that the external sensibles affect. Instead, he sees a need for some other 'outside' agency to bring about the sensible intentions, just as Aristotle had posited the need for an agent intellect to bring about universal intentions in the mind. The problem of how apprehending such intentions is going to give us knowledge of the external world and its sensible qualities is clearly now a very pressing one.

To sum up, in the tradition the late scholastics inherited sense perception is treated in two quite different ways. On the one hand, we have the idea that the sense organs are affected by the sensible qualities in such a way that a "likeness" or representation of that quality is formed in the organ. This, in accord with Aristotle, is thought of as the form of the sensible quality having an existence in that organ whereby it brings about cognition but does not make something in the organ genuinely have that sensible quality. The other approach is to say that this form exists immaterially in the soul itself. In Averroes this is read as thinking that an 'intention' exists in the sensory soul, and in this way the sensory soul is held to be much more analogous to the intellect where cognition is also accomplished through intentions existing immaterially. In either case a problem arises as to how, if what is existing in the sense organ or in the sensory soul itself is what we perceive, perception can give us knowledge of a world outside the senses where what is inside can have no existence.

2 The Theory of Species

In the thirteenth century scholastics the term used for a representation, likeness or image was '*species*', a term which had roughly this meaning in late ancient times.¹⁸ To give some idea of the way this notion is used at that time I shall talk about the views of Albert the Great and his student, Thomas Aquinas.

Species figure prominently in Albert's two theories of sensation, an earlier one found in the section of his *Summa de creaturis* called *De homine* and a later one in his questions on Aristotle's *De anima*.¹⁹ In *De homine* he treated the form of the sensible quality existing in the sense organ as a species that has 'spiritual' rather than 'natural being'. This terminology is meant to distinguish the way the form exists as a species from the way it exists in the external world in material objects. In other words, it deals with the distinction we saw made as early as Aristotle and Alexander to protect the theory from having to claim that something in the sense organ has the

¹⁷ Ibid., 221.

¹⁸ Augustine uses the term this way in several places, e.g. *Contra Secundinum Manich.* 2 (PL 42: 579), *Contra adversarium legis* 1.10.13 (PL 42: 610), *De Trin.* 11.2 (PL 42: 987). My thanks to Rega Wood for drawing these passages to my attention.

¹⁹ This summary of Albert's views relies heavily on Dewan (1980).

¹⁵ Averroes, *Averrois Cordubensis Commentarium in Aristotelis de anima Libros*, 317, 13ff.

¹⁶ Ibid.

very sensible quality it perceives and in the same way as external material objects have it. In the case of sight, but not the other senses, Albert also thought the species existed in the medium, i.e. the air or transparent fluid lying between the external object and the eye. The object, evidently, transmits a flow of species, and some of these lodge in some sort of spiritual matter in the eye. It is clear from this that the 'spiritual being' that the species has is a physical sort of existence but in a material that is able to support the species while not actually taking on the quality it is a species of. This means that species of opposed forms, i.e. forms which could not co-exist in the same subject in natural being, can co-exist in the same spiritual matter.

Albert's later theory in his questions on *De anima* is more complex and in some ways reminiscent of Avicenna's. Actual sense perception now requires an act of judging on the part of the interior, 'common' sense, situated in the brain. For this to occur the species that we find in the sense organs of the exterior ('proper') senses must be transmitted to the brain and made to exist in a still more spiritual way. This 'clear spirit' in the brain has an active role in this process, doing for the sensible species in the external organs what light does for colors.²⁰ Here, I believe, Albert has taken seriously Averroes's proposal that some special agent is needed as much in the case of sensation as in the case of the intellect.

Albert represents a widespread effort among thirteenth century scholastics to have a theory of cognition based on species, and in the case of sense cognition to make this a theory where everything is physical, although it acknowledges that some forms of physical existence are not the usual concretions of form and matter on which the Aristotelian ontology is based. This sort of existence, often referred to as intentional as well as spiritual, allows for a sort of halfway house between the standard matter/form composites and the totally non-physical way in which species exist in the intellect. On this view all cognition involves a to some degree de-materialized existence for the form cognized, although in sensation and sense perception some special matter is still required. In his later theory Albert allowed that these species exist in the media for all the external senses, thus making even clearer that we are dealing here with a physical sort of existence. The species, i.e. the representation or likeness of the sensible form, can exist even in inanimate bodies, although only in animate ones does it go on to produce sensation, for only in them do we find the especially clear spirit of the internal sense organs.

Aquinas carried this line of thought, I believe, to its logical conclusion. Cognition consists in forms existing immaterially, i.e. intentionally, and these he called species.²¹ Nevertheless, Aquinas followed Albert in thinking that sensible species exist in the inanimate media as well as in the sense organs, and, since Aquinas certainly did not want to attribute cognition to things without soul, a contradiction arises. It is not clear what Aquinas would have to say about this if it were brought to his

²⁰ Albertus Magnus, *In Aristotelis librum de anima commentarium*, II, IV, 12, 165.20–30.

²¹ This interpretation of Aquinas's remarks has been adopted both by me in Tweedale (1992), 216–18, and Robert Pasnau in his excellent study, see Pasnau (1997), ch.1.

attention, but I am inclined to believe that, like Albert, he would have acknowledged degrees of 'spirituality' in physical things and held that the inanimate media are insufficiently spiritual to produce cognition although they allow for intentional existence of species.²²

The other notable feature of Aquinas's account is his refusal to let his belief in the existence of species, both sensible and intellectual, get in the way of epistemological direct realism. We saw that in Philoponus, Avicenna and Averroes there is a willingness to allow that what is directly apprehended by the senses is something internal to the senses, not the sensible quality in the external world. Aquinas, I think, sees that this is leading toward very un-Aristotelian doubts about our knowledge of the external world and almost always insists that the species is the means of cognizing what it represents; it itself, at least not in the primary act of cognition, is not what is cognized. This was not a universally held view: Durand of St Pourcain, writing in the early fourteenth century argues against species on the grounds that, if we cognized sensible qualities through such a representative, we would cognize the species first. But he takes it as obvious that it is the quality we first apprehend.²³

Robert Pasnau has explored in depth what Aquinas's view might have amounted to,²⁴ and he holds that it allows for an apprehension of the species which permits cognition of the external cause of the species in the sense that it is that external object which we are prepared to make judgments about. This seems to me to be very likely the correct interpretation. To put it differently, I think Aquinas was thinking of the way in which we can look at a picture and focus not on the picture but on the things pictured, being prepared to make judgments not about the former but about the latter, although the latter is certainly something we apprehend. Just as it takes a special reorienting of our attention to take the picture as something we want to make judgments about, so it takes a special reorienting to assess a sensible or intelligible species. But if Aquinas thinks that this view escapes the sceptic's reach, I think he is mistaken. Once we view perception this way, it is perfectly reasonable to ask whether, even in normal cases, the species represents the external object as it really is, in just the way we can question this when we are relying on a picture of something.

Although in the primary act of cognition the species is used as a means to cognizing something else, Aquinas does allow that the intellect is capable of acts of reflection by which it cognizes the very species by which it cognizes its objects.²⁵ Also Aquinas allows for the intellect to take a sensible image as its object rather than the thing the image is an image of.²⁶ It does not appear that in such passages Aquinas

²² Pasnau (1997) holds the view that inanimate media stand at the bottom of a continuum of things that are capable of retaining information representationally. This, I think, is compatible with my proposal, but he is more inclined than I to exculpate Aquinas from a major oversight.

²³ *Ibid.*, 17–18.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, ch. 6.

²⁵ See *Summa Theologica*, I, qu. 85, art. 2.

²⁶ See Pasnau (1997), 206.

is just referring to the way the intellect might recognize species as some entity needed to construct a coherent theory of cognition. Rather, it is more likely that he thinks we can have some knowledge of the intrinsic character of these species. But what do we know about them other than that they represent certain things to the sense or mind?

Like Albert, Aquinas denies that the species is a 'natural' likeness of what it represents. It does not literally have the same qualities. But it is a representational or intentional likeness. Although there were scholastics who insisted that the similarity between the species and the represented object had to be 'natural'.²⁷ I think Aquinas's view is defensible. Pictures can accurately represent things without being similar to them to any significant degree. A painting or photograph of a house is not anything like a house, but it can still show you what the house is like. Admittedly, just how this is possible in the case of species, particularly intelligible species, is hard to say. But perhaps Aquinas does not have to say. He could, if pressed, just claim that the soul is innately equipped to read or interpret the species analogously to the way we seem able to interpret pictures without any special training. However, this relatively modern idea of 'interpreting' likenesses is not one Aquinas and the late scholastics in general seem to have had in their philosophical toolkit. Consequently, it was a problem for them to see how the species could represent anything, given it had no natural likeness to what it was supposed to represent. I think this is part of what leads to dissatisfaction with the species theory generally, and the adoption by such figures as Peter John Olivi and William of Ockham of theories which rely simply on the act of cognition itself without any prior existence of a species.²⁸ Ockham, however, still referred to the act itself as a likeness of what it cognizes and Olivi thought of the act as itself a species, so representation was still involved. But here I think it is likely that the act is representative of what it cognizes *because* it is cognizing that thing, rather than being cognitive of that thing because it represents it. Or at least there is no more reason to say one is because of the other than the other way around.

A robust species theory such as Aquinas's makes the species in both the senses and the intellect present an object to the cognitive power in question, and this must occur before an act of cognition can take place. What is the attraction of such a theory? It seems to me that probably thinkers like Aquinas thought there was something very unreasonable in supposing that an act of the soul could be directed to an object without there being in the soul or its organs something apart from the act that determined what object the act was directed to. Olivi and Ockham challenge this assumption by holding that the act, having been partially caused by the external object, carries in itself all that is needed to be directed toward an object. It is not necessary, then, to see the prior cause of the directedness of the act in something internal to the cognizer.

27 Notably Roger Bacon and William Crathorn. See Pasnau (1997), 66 and 90.

28 See *ibid.*, 19–17 and 41–2 of Tweedale (1990).

3 *Esse Objectivum*

Toward the end of the thirteenth century a distinction between *esse subjectivum* and *esse objectivum* comes into common use among the scholastics. Perhaps the first thinker to make heavy use of it is John Duns Scotus. The idea here is that something might have two ways of existing: (1) a real existence in no way dependent on being the object of any mental act or state; (2) existence as an object of some mental act or state. The former is *esse subjectivum*; the latter, *esse objectivum*. Something can have either of these without the other, or both at once. If someone imagines something that in fact does not exist, what the person imagines has only *esse objectivum*. It can still be described in the vocabulary we use to describe real things, but the truth of such descriptions does not imply it has any real existence. We can also think of something that does really exist, and then that thing has both forms of existence. *Esse objectivum* comes in various forms depending on what mental act or state is taking the thing as its object. Scotus and others speak of *esse cognitum*, *esse volitum*, *esse intellectum*, and *esse representatum*, as all forms of *esse objectivum*.

Even where the *ens objectivum* is something that has *esse subjectivum* as well the *ens objectivum* may have properties that the *ens subjectivum* does not. Thus Scotus makes universality belong to the common nature as an *ens objectivum*, but not as an *ens subjectivum*, because an *ens objectivum* can have a certain indeterminateness that an *ens subjectivum* cannot.²⁹ To understand this think of a picture of some person who really exists. The picture may not show us whether the person has long hair or not, and thus the *ens objectivum* here is not determinate in respect of that feature, although certainly the real person is. We can talk about what the picture represents without supposing that what it represents has any real existence, but then we have to admit that there is indeterminacy in what it represents.

Scotus treats concepts and intentions as *entia objectiva*. He speaks about *things* of first or second intentions, by which he means some property, and *concepts* of first or second intentions, by which he means a class of *entia objectiva*. This is quite a radical departure from the treatments of intentions and *esse intentionale* that we have examined previously. There intentional or spiritual being is a kind of real being, but one that only species can have. In the case of sensible species it is even a sort of physical real being. In contrast, Scotus treats *esse intentionale* as a sort of existence which does not of itself entail any real existence. Nevertheless, he retains species but these are forms having a real existence in the organ or soul. This approach clarifies matters considerably. The species is analogous to a picture and the *ens objectivum* is analogous to what the picture represents taken without any assumption of whether this has real existence or not. Obviously, when we dream or hallucinate or imagine, there is something that we apprehend even if what we apprehend has no real existence.

29 Unfortunately Scotus does not give treat *esse objectivum* extensively in any one place. One has to draw conclusions from many different passages. One which implies that universals have this sort of existence occurs in *Ordinatio*, I, d. 8, pt. 1, qu. 3 in *Opera Omnia*, vol. 4, sects. 146–7. I have explained how I read Scotus on this matters in Tweedale (1999), vol. II, 608–10.

The *entia objectiva* provide objects here for those acts. But they are there in veridical thought and perception as well, but not as something other than the really existing thing being thought of, for one and the same thing can have both sorts of being.

Given cognition is through a species and of what that species represents, we have to admit that once there is a species a cognitive act of what it represents is possible and this cognitive act can occur even though what is represented does not exist. Later in the fourteenth century Peter Aureol used this device to explain sensory illusions.³⁰ Scotus uses it to explain God's knowledge of possible things that will never be created, although in this case no species in the usual sense is required.³¹ God's essence itself is what does the representing, and since the *entia objectiva* that result have no real existence we are not involved in claiming something real other than God exists without being created.

Unreal objects of cognitive acts had been proposed in the twelfth century by Peter Abelard,³² but he did not see them involved in veridical perception. The reason Abelard treats these 'images' as unreal is that they are described as having the features which real physical things have, but it would be absurd to think that just by imagining something that is, say, round and tall, some real, round and tall object comes into existence. He makes it clear, too, that he is not attributing some real but mental existence to images. They have neither real physical nor real mental existence.

Since Abelard did not think such images were involved in veridical perception, he did not open himself up to the skeptically oriented criticism that he had interposed between the perceiver and what he perceives some third entity that mediates the perception. Scotus's view, and even more Aureol's, does, however, seem vulnerable to that kind of doubt, and this is largely why Ockham, after first having some sympathy with *entia objectiva*, abandons the whole idea. To defend against the threat of skepticism one has, at least, to emphasize that in veridical perception the really existing object is indeed the thing which also has *esse objectivum*. In perceiving the *ens objectivum* one is not thereby perceiving something other than the external object. One is just perceiving that object as it is represented by the species that presents it to the cognitive faculty. To then go on and ask how we can be sure that it is presented as it really is, is a form of doubt that Scotus replies to by saying that it is self-evident that a faculty does not err with respect to its appropriate objects unless it is disordered, and we can know when a faculty is disordered.³³ That reply

³⁰ See Pasnau (1997), 71–6. It is not clear from what I have read how close Aureol is to Scotus in his treatment of *esse objectivum*.

³¹ This doctrine is prominent in *Lectura*, I, d. 36, qq. 1–2 (in *Opera Omnia*, vol. XVII, 461–76; see paras 26, 30) and in *Ordinatio*, I, d. 35, q. 1 (in *Opera Omnia*, vol. VI, 245–70; see paras 32, 41–2.) It can also be found in *Ordinatio*, I, d. 3, pt. 1, qu. 4 (in *Opera Omnia*, vol. III, 123–72; see para. 268. The topic is well discussed in Perler (1994a), (1994b) and (1995).

³² See his commentary on the *Peri ermenias*, in *Logica Ingredientibus*, pp. 314(25)–15(17).

³³ *Ordinatio*, I, d. 3, pt. 1, qu. 4 (in *Opera Omnia*, vol. III, 123–72).

is perhaps not totally reassuring, but this sort of skepticism arises whether we have a representational theory of cognition or not.

It is clear, however, that the *ens objectivum* which is the object of a veridical cognition had better not have some quasi-real existence that makes it distinct from the species doing the representing, for then indeed we have some intermediate thing which is the genuine object rather than the external, fully real thing which we suppose ourselves to know. In the remainder of this paper I want to describe how William of Alnwick, a student and follower of Scotus's confronted and developed an alternative to such a view in the first question of his *Quaestiones Disputatae de esse intelligibili*.³⁴

Alnwick describes the view he wants to refute as follows:

Some recent thinkers say to this question that the *esse representatum* of some object signifies an entity distinct from what represents the object, and that the *esse cognitum* of some object designates an entity distinct from the cognition.³⁵

The former *esse* is what something gets just by being represented, something required of all cognition on the view we have been considering. The latter *esse* is attributed only when something is the object of an act of cognition. Alnwick goes on to ask the question we all want to see answered:

But what is this being and what is this distinction between *esse representatum* and *esse cognitum* on the one hand and the item doing the representing and the cognition on the other? To this those holding the above view say that there are three sorts of being taken generally: namely, real being [*esse reale*], intentional being [*esse intentionale*] and being of thought [*esse rationis*].³⁶

Real being is the actual existence of the thing while intentional being is equated with *esse representatum*. Being of thought or *esse rationis* belongs only to types of things which come into existence on account of acts of the intellect in which it compares and relates the contents of the mind. Most of the scholastics of this era think universals have only *esse rationis*, since they exist only by the intellect predicating one content of another. It is important to realize that all the thinkers who use the notion of *esse representatum* or *esse intentionale* distinguish it from *esse rationis* and in fact claim that things must have the former sort of being before there is any question of arriving at items with the latter sort. The mind has to have objects before it can compare and relate them. The view Alnwick is describing equates *esse representatum* with *esse intentionale*. Alnwick goes on to explain further the reasoning his opponents use:

Therefore, they say that intentional being is not real being, because it can belong to a thing that does not exist in its own distinctive nature, nor is it being of thought, since a being

³⁴ William of Alnwick, *Quaestiones Disputatae de esse intelligibili*, 1–29.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 3–4.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

of thought [*enti rationis*] is opposed to existing in reality. Thus this intentional being is intermediate, as they say, between real being and being of thought.³⁷

Alnwick states his own view as follows:

But to me it does not seem that these views are correct. Thus, I show that *esse representatum* is really the same as the form that does the representing and *esse cognitum* is really the same as the cognition, for every positive entity that does not depend on the soul is a real entity, because such an entity would have existence even if the soul did not. For this reason The Philosopher and The Commentator, in *Metaphysics* VI, divide being by a first division into being in the soul and being outside the soul, and they say that a being outside the soul is a real being because it is that which they divide into the ten categories, each of which is a real being or a real entity. For it is obvious that what is no thing is nothing; consequently, it is obvious that being which is not dependent on the soul is real, but represented being is a positive being and a certain positive entity, as even they [Alnwick's opponents] allow, and it is not dependent on the operation of the intellect or soul, as they also allow, since the species would represent something even if the intellect were not thinking. Therefore, if *esse representatum* is real being or a real entity, it is not something other than the entity of what does the representing, because, if it were some other real entity outside the soul, it would have subjective being [*esse subjectivum*] really distinct from what does the representing. Thus *esse representatum* is really the same as the form that does the representing.³⁸

What Alnwick is arguing for here is the genuine reality of representation; he is not arguing for the reality of what is represented, although of course often enough what is represented is real. Being represented is something that really happens to things: it is just as real as what does the representing, for, in fact, there is no real distinction between them. If there were such a real distinction, then either there could be something represented, an *ens representatum*, without representer, and then we do genuinely have something with its own subjective being, a view even his opponents do not want to hold, or we could have a representer without any *ens representatum*, in other words representation but nothing represented, an obvious absurdity.

Alnwick will admit, however, that *esse representatum* is a 'diminished' sort of being for the thing represented, for it does not imply the real existence of that thing (nor, of course, does it imply that the thing does not have real existence.) What his opponents have done is confuse this point with the sort of reality we want to ascribe to the *esse representatum* itself. Alnwick asserts this in the following:

... when it is argued that the *esse representatum* of a stone is not an entity of thought because it precedes the act of the intellect, I grant that. And when it is argued further that it is not a real entity because it is a diminished being, I answer that, although *esse representatum* is a diminished being of the stone that is represented, it is nevertheless a real being which is really the same with the being of the form which does the representing.

37 Ibid., 6-7.

38 Ibid., 8-9.

just as, although being in thought is a qualified being of the item that is thought of, it is nevertheless a true thing and an act of thought in the mind of the one who is thinking.³⁹

Although the *esse representatum*, which, as we saw, is a real being, is attributed to the object, this does not mean that the object thereby has to be real, for it is attributed by 'extrinsic characterization', not as an intrinsic form.

... for when I say that a stone is represented and cognized by a species or by the divine essence, the characterization is made in virtue of either an intrinsic form or an extrinsic form. It is not made in virtue of an intrinsic form inhering in the stone, because then it would not be the case that it would belong to the stone even if the stone were non-existent. Also it would follow that the known being of the stone would have a being formally inhering in the stone, and thus our intellect in thinking of the stone would cause some form to inhere in the stone, which is false. Therefore, when I say a stone is represented or cognized, the characterization is made only in virtue of a form that characterizes extrinsically, i.e. a form which is only representative or a form of thought. Thus, just as when it is said that a stone is located an extrinsic characterization is made in virtue of the place that surrounds it, even though when it is said that the stone is 'where-ified' [*ubicatus*] a characterization is made in virtue of the 'where' existing in the stone, so, when it is said that the stone is represented or cognized by a species, the characterization is made only in virtue of the species that does the representing and the cognition that terminates in the stone.⁴⁰

In this way Alnwick can claim that although *esse representatum* is a real form of being, the thing to which it is attributed need not really exist in order to have it. As for the item represented (*ens representatum*) if it is a really existing thing, then it is really distinct from and really related to the form doing the representing, but when it is not a really existing thing it is neither, as the following passages show:

... when the very item that is represented is a real thing then there is a real relation of the item that is represented to what does the representing ... and thus what does the representing and the item represented are really distinguished and also the being of what does the representing and the formal, intrinsic being of the very item represented are distinguished really.⁴¹

But when the creature represented does not have actual existence, represented being belongs to it only by extrinsic denomination and not in the sense which implies a real relation, because a real relation requires an actual subject.⁴²

This is not the place to explain the Scotist doctrines on real relations and real distinctions. Suffice it to say that both require more than one really existing thing. Also real identity, as Alnwick holds exists between both the item represented when it does not really exist and its *esse representatum* on the one hand, and the form

39 Ibid., 20-21.

40 Ibid., 15.

41 Ibid., 22.

42 Ibid., 24.

doing the representing on the other, does not, for Scotists at least, preclude other sorts of distinction, less than the real distinction, which will permit certain things to be correctly asserted of one of the items but not of the other, even though these items are really identical. All that the real identity of x and y amounts to is the logical impossibility of either existing without the other.

Alnwick has worked out here the logic and ontology of representation in a very subtle way that may avoid the pitfall of implying that even in veridical cognition we must cognize something internal before we cognize the external thing we suppose ourselves to be apprehending. The key move, and the greatest contribution of the Scotist theory of *esse objectivum*, is to clearly distinguish the representer or likeness from its content. It is not the form doing the representing that we apprehend but the content of the representation, i.e. the *ens objectivum*. That content, in contrast to the representer, can have a real existence external to the cognizer. I suggest, although further investigation is needed to either confirm or refute this hypothesis with any certainty, that the prior theories of representation suffer from the problems that they have largely because of a failure to make this distinction between representer and content in any clear way.

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