Notes on Objective Being

**Peter Aureol** (c. 1280 - 1322)

Peter holds that what we see when we see motion is not a substance outside the mind but a third entity. We see an “intentional object.” His view is an example of what is called *perceptual representationalism*, the view that we do not directly see objects in the world (a view called *direct realism*) but rather we see some sort of “intentional” representation of those objects.

When one is carried on the water, the trees existing on the shore appear to move. This motion, therefore, which is objectively in the eye (*in oculo objective*) cannot be posited to be the [sense of] vision itself; otherwise vision would be the object seen, and vision would have been seen, and vision would be a reflective power. Nor can it be posited to be really in the trees or in the shore, because then they would really have moved. Nor can it be posited to be in the air because it is not attributed to the air but to the trees. Therefore, it is only intentionally (*tantum intentionaliter*), not really, in seen being and in judged being.

Peter Aureol, Scriptum in I Sentarium, lat. 329. d.3, s. 14, a. 1; II:696. Deborah Brown, “Objective Being in Descartes”

**Francisco Suárez** (1548-1617)

Suárez held: (1) we have knowledge not *of* things in the world but *of* objective concepts (of what Ockham called *esse objectivum*), (2) that objective concepts are representatives of things in the world, and (3) that the content of objective concepts can be individuals, or “entities of reason” like privations or relations, or universals (Norman J. Wells, “Material Falsity in Descartes, Arnauld, and Suárez,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 22(1984), 25-50):

By the formal concept is meant the act itself or(what is the same thing)the word by which the intellect conceives either some thing or a common nature. … it is called formal moreover because it is the final form of the mind; because it formally represents to the mind the thing thought; or because it is seen as an intrinsic and formal term of mental conception – in all of which ways it differs from the objective concept, of which I am going to speak.

*Conceptus formalis dicitur actus ipse, seu (quod idem est) verbum quo intellectus rem aliquam seu communem rationem concipit. … formalis autem appellatur, vel quia est ultima forma mentis, vel quia formaliter repraesentat menti rem cognitam, vel quia revera est intrinsecus et formalis terminus conceptionis mentalis, in quo differt a conceptu objectivo, jam dicam.*

*Disputationes Metaphysicae*, 2, 1,1;25,64-65.

By the ojective concept is meant that thing or idea (ratio) which is uniquely and immediately is known or represented by means of the formal concept.

*Conceptus objectivus dicitur res illa, vel ratio, quae proprie et immediate per conceptum formalem cognoscitur seu repraesentatur …. Homo autem cognitus et repraesentatus illo actu dicitur conceptus objectivus.*

*Disputationes Metaphysicae*, 2, 1,1;25,26.

An objective concept, in truth, in not always a real positive thing; for we sometime conceive privations and other sorts of things which are called “mental entities” (*entia rationalis*) because the only have objective being in the intellect. … Moreover, a objective concept indeed can sometimes be a singular and individual thing the degree that it can be put before to the mind (*menti objici*), and conceived through a formal act, often indeed it is a universal thing, both confused and common, as is *man, substance* and others that are similar.

*objectivus [conceptus] vero non semper est vera res positiva; concipimus enim interdum privationes, et alia, quae vocantur entia rationis, quia solum habent esse objective in intellectu. …*

*Conceptus autem objectivus interdum quidem esse potest res singularis, et individua, quatenus menti objici potest, et per actum formalem concipi, saepe vero est res universalis vel confusa et communis, ut est homo, substantia, et similia.*

*Disputationes Metaphysicae*, 2, 1,1;25,65.

In another way, something is said to be in the reason through the mode of an object for its said to be a res cognita in being known, not in the manner of inhearing through its image, but also objectively according to itself.

Alio ergo modo dicitur aliquid esse in ratione per modum objecti, nam ... dicitur res cognita esse in cognoscente, non solum inhaesive per suam imaginem, sed etiam objective secundum seipsam."

*Disputationes Metaphysicae*, 54, 1, n. 5 (XXVI, p. 1016)

**Petrus Fonseca** (1528-1599)

Further to clarify a conceptual distinction: at the start it should be posited that a concept is twofold: one formal, the other objective … formal concept is nothing more than the actual similitude to a thing which is understood by the intellect constructed for expressing that thing. For example, when the intellect perceives human nature, the formal concept of human nature is an actual similitude of this nature which the intellect fabricates for itself. It is called moreover an actual similitude to distinguish it from the intelligible species, which is also similar to the thing understood, but which inheres in the intellect as an habit rather than an act. Accordingly, it is clear why a concept of this kind should be called formal, for when there should be some form of an accident inhering in the intellect, it is fitting that is should be called formal to be distinguished from the objective … there is another reason why it is called formal: indeed, because it represents the thing as having that form or nature through which it is conceived.

*Atquae ut distitione coneptus ordinamur: principio ponatur duplicem esse conceptum: formalem unum, alterum objectivum … conceptus formalis nihil est aliud quam actualis similitudo rei, quae intelligitur, ab intellectu ad eam exprimendam producta. Exempli causa, cum intellectus precipit naturam humanam, acutalis similtudo illius, quam sibi fabricat, ut humanam naturam exprimit, est conceptus formalis humanae naturae. Dicitur autem actualis similitudo, ut discernatur a specie intelligibili, quae etsi sit similitudo rei, quae intelligitur: non inhaeret tamen intellectui, ut actus, sed ut habitus. Hinc patet, cur huiusmodi conceptus dicatur formalis. Cum enim sit forma quaedam accidentaria inhaerens intellectui, merito formalis appellatur, ut distinguatur ab objectivo … est et alia ratio, cur dicatur formalis: nempe, quia reprasentat rem sub ea forma seu natura, secundum quam itelligitur … conceptus objectivus est res quae intelligitur, secumdum eam formam naturamve quae per formalem concipitur.* P. Fonseca *Commentarii in XII libros Meaphysicorum Aristotelis*, q. ii, sectio 1.

**Eustace of St. Paul** (1573-1640)

On this (question)we should first address several things of generally about formal and objective concept and of what of thing it is. Therefore, it is assigned into twofold kind, one formal, the other objective. It is called a concept in its own right, but the latter in truth only analogically and denominatively [i.e. in its function as giving a naming to or classifying things], as thing or object conceived. Moreover, a formal concept is an actual similitude to the thing which is understood by the intellect and is produced for the purpose of expressing that thing. For example, when the intellect perceives human nature the formal concept of this understood nature is an actual similitude which sets out (exprimit) human nature. It is called moreover an actual similitude to distinguish it from the intelligible species which is an habitual image of the same thing. From this you understand that a formal concept is the species expressed (expressam) of the thing as understood, or in other words it is a mental word (verbum metalis). Moreover, that is called objective which is a formal *ratio*; it is the thing that is represented by the formal concept to the intellect, as in the earlier example it human nature in the cognitive act that is called the objective concept. … When to the formal concept there corresponds in some way or other an objective concept, which is nothing other than the thing represented by the formal concept, then in that very way its exemplar corresponds [to it] by means of an image.

*… in hac praesenti (quaestione) generatim de conceptu formali et objectivo cuiusque rei nonnulla praemittamus. Duplex igitur cuiusque rei assignatur, alter formalis, alter objectivus: ille proprie, hic vero non nisi anologice et denominative conceptus dicitur: concepta sive objectum conceptus. Est autem formalis conceptus actualis similituto rei quae intelligitur ab intellectu, ad eam exprimendam producta : exempli gratia, cum intellectus percipit humanam naturam, actualis similitudo quam de natura humana exprimit est conceptus formalis huius naturae intellectae. Dicitur autem actualis similitudo, ut discernatur a specie intelligibili, quae est habitualis eiusdem rei imago. Ex quo intelligis formalem conceptum esse speciem expressam rei intellectae, seu verbum mentis. Objectivus autem qui dicitur etiam ratio formalis, est res quae per conceptum formalem intellectui repraesentatur, ut in supra dicto exemplo, natura humana actu cogita dicitur conceptus objectivus. … Cum formali cuique conceptui respondeat objectivus, qui nihil aliud est quam res formali conceptu repraesentat, quemadmodum cuique imagini suum respondet exemplar.*

In *Summa Philosophiae Quaripartita, de rebus dialecticis , moralibus, physicis et metaphysicis.* Prima pars metaphysicae, De natura entis, de conceptus formali et objectivo.

**Charles-Francis d'Abra de Raconis** (1590-1646)

A concept is said to be a relation, either to the conceiving mind or to the mind forming a likeness to an object. This is due clearly to the subdivisions of concept by kind, of which the broadest given is into formal and objective. A formal concept is an actual likeness to a thing espressed by the intellect through intellection: by some it is is called a mental act, and it is in fact an offspring of the mind and informs it, whence it is called “formal”, and it is an active intention: it is an intention because the intellect reaches out (intendit) to perceive its object. A formal concept is genuinely active in comparison to the earlier distinction in which a concept is called objective. It is also called an intention, but one that is passive because it is what terminates the intention of the active mind. Moreover it is called not just a concept but an objective concept (with the addition) because by this it is said to be the object that is conceived and expressed by the action of the mind. Another way a concept can be explained is by simple example: in expressing a proposition to himself, somebody forms the concept of an animal and its nature. That *ratio*, which expresses this through his intellection or, as they say, through a “formed” word, is called a formal concept. The animal itself as understood in fact is called an objective concept.

*Conceptus dicit relationem ad mentem concipientem seu objecti similitudinem formantem. Generatim dari patet ex ipsius divisionibus, quarum generalissima traditur in formalem et objectivum. Formalis conceptus est actualis similitudo rei ab intellectu per intellectionem expressa: ab aliis vocatur actio mentis estque de facto eius proles, ac eam informat unde formalis nucupatus est, et intentio activa: intentio quidem quia per eam intendit intellectus objecetum suum percipere: activa vero ad distinctionem prosterioris conceptus qui dicitur objectivus, vocaturque etiam intentio, sed passiva, quia est id quod terminatur ipsa activa mentis intentio. Dicitur autem conceptus non proprie sed cum addito, nempe objectivus, eo quod sit objectum conceptum et per acitonem mentis expressum. Uterque conceptus facili exemplo explicari postest: aliquis propositi sibi animalis conceptum et naturam formet, ratio illa quam de eo per suam intellectionem exprimet seu verbum, ut loquuntur, efformatum, vocabitur, formalis conceptus, animal vero ipsum cognitum, objectivus.*

*Totius Philosophiae , hoc est logicae, moralis, physicae et metaphysicae, revis et accurata, facilique et cara methdo disposita Tractatio.* C.F. d’abra de Raconis, De Principiis entis, a. 3, de essentia et conceptus entis, sectio 1a de nomine conceptus et existentis. P. 827.

**Descartes** (1596-1650)

But I respond to this that there subsists an equivocation in the word “idea”: for it can be taken either materially, for an operation of the intellect, in which sense it is not possible that I can be said to be “more perfect”, or objectively, for the thing that is represented through that operation, which thing, even if it is not supposed to exist outside the intellect, can nevertheless be “more perfect” with respect to the *ratio* of its essence.

*Sed respondeo his subesse aequivocationem in voce ideae: sumi enim potest vel materialiter, pro operatione intellectus, quo sensu me perfectior dici nequit, vel objective, pro re per istam operationem repraesentata, quae res, etsi non supponatur extra intellectum existere, potet tamen esse perfectior ratione suae essentiae.*

*Meditations, Prefatio ad Lectorem* 7:8.19-25