

THE ETIENNE GILSON SERIES 34

*Of Angels and Men*

*Sketches from High Medieval Epistemology*

TIMOTHY B. NOONE

11 March 2010



PONTIFICAL INSTITUTE OF MEDIAEVAL STUDIES

TIMOTHY B. NOONE, Ordinary Professor of Philosophy at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., is also Director of the Scotus Project and President of the Society for Medieval and Renaissance Philosophy. After his graduate studies at Toronto, where he received the M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Toronto and the M.S.L. from the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, he taught at St. Bonaventure University and served as associate editor of the Scotus project at the Franciscan Institute, and he became Chief Investigator and Director of the project at The Catholic University of America. The texts he coedited include Duns Scotus, *Quaestiones in libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis*, Opera Philosophica 3–4 (St. Bonaventure, N.Y., 1997), *Quaestiones in librum Isagoge Porphyrii* and *Quaestiones super Praedicamenta Aristotelis*, Opera Philosophica 1 (St. Bonaventure, N.Y., 1999), *Quaestiones super libros Perihermenias Aristotelis* and *Quaestiones super librum Elenchorum Aristotelis*, Opera Philosophica 2 (St. Bonaventure, N.Y., and Washington, D.C., 2004), and *Quaestiones super secundum et tertium De anima*, Opera Philosophica 5 (St. Bonaventure, N.Y., and Washington, D.C., 2006). He also coedited *A Companion to Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2003) and is the author of numerous book chapters and articles on medieval philosophy.

THE ETIENNE GILSON SERIES 34

ISSN 0708-319X

ISBN 978-0-88844-734-0

© 2011

Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies

59 Queen's Park Crescent East

Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5S 2C4

[www.pims.ca](http://www.pims.ca)

PRINTED IN CANADA

WHAT I would like to present here are some short sketches of how medieval philosophers thought created minds work. I say quite deliberately “created minds” because that is what human and angelic minds are. The topics treated here were usually examined during the High Middle Ages in the literary context of *Commentaria in libros Sententiarum*, *Summae*, *Quaestiones disputatae*, and *Quodlibeta* authored by bachelors and masters of theology. Occasionally, however, materials pertinent to these themes were treated in philosophical writings such as commentaries on the Aristotelian writings (or pseudo-Aristotelian writings) as well as in other theological works such as commentaries on Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite or commentaries on the Bible. The theme of the present lecture was suggested by various researches I have conducted into medieval accounts of knowledge, usually while engaged in the process of editing medieval philosophical and theological texts from manuscripts. What has struck me is how creative Latin philosophers and theologians were with the material they had at their disposal from the Arabic and Greek traditions of philosophy. Much of their creativity, to be sure, consists in developing insights found in their own, so to speak, native tradition drawn from the works of Augustine, Boethius, Bernard, and Anselm and in combining those insights with elements taken from what were to them newer sources: Aristotle, Avicenna, Averroes, the *Liber de causis*, and al-Ghazālī among others. But even such a characterization, well grounded as it is in the combination of sources one finds in the authors we shall examine, does not really address what I think is an even more important dimension: the broadly theological context for high medieval epistemology.

In his long career, Etienne Gilson produced many studies of medieval philosophers and philosophies, but always to the forefront of his interpretations of medieval thought were the ques-

tion of being and the nature of metaphysics.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, as a largely self-taught medievalist, Gilson had arrived early in his career at a quite significant point insufficiently emphasized by earlier scholars: high medieval thinkers had largely begun their philosophical investigations with the nature of things, pursuing inquiries into metaphysics, before turning their attention to epistemological issues. While such a claim may be queried to some extent (a figure such as Nicholas of Autrecourt comes to mind), it is in the main correct. The privileging of epistemology over metaphysics is a modern—not a medieval—move and the preoccupation with issues of thought and knowledge a modern and not a medieval fetish. What Gilson's approach to medieval philosophy was meant to avoid and did were the anachronisms associated with simply tapping into medieval sources and looking to how they solved a problem that also occurred in modern thought, thereby overlooking the very real possibility that the meaning and terms of a philosophical problem had changed through the historical process. Gilson realized that such investigations might well be historical in the narrow sense of employing historical sources but were actually ahistorical inasmuch as the approach taken presumed that nothing philosophically significant could have changed during the millennia. The strength of Gilson's approach was to place first what medieval philosophers mainly placed foremost in the order of rational knowledge: the study of being and its properties in the science of metaphysics. The drawback of this approach to medieval philosophy was that it did not encourage strongly enough the investigation of issues relating to cognition and epistemology; it implied that such issues were of little importance compared to those of metaphysics (at least within the realm of speculative philosophy) and even suggested the rather unfruitful hypothesis

<sup>1</sup> See, simply by way of illustration, Etienne Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience* (1937; rpt. San Francisco, 1999), 252–57, and *Methodical Realism*, trans. Philip Trower, intro. Stanley L. Jaki (Front Royal, Va., 1990), 17–36.

that disagreements among major medieval philosophers in the area of cognitive theory and epistemology could be put down to—rather than merely correlated with—their advancing different ontologies.<sup>2</sup>

Now I am not offering by any means a complete reversal of Gilson's views on the relative importance of metaphysics and epistemology in medieval thought, for that part of his approach I think is essentially correct. But I am proposing what I hope will prove to be a helpful overview and perspective from which to analyze medieval Latin contributions to epistemology. That perspective comes from the theological context of medieval philosophy.

As Fr. Armand Maurer noted in his excellent translation of St. Thomas's *De ente*, Aquinas there rather uncharacteristically presents human souls as figuring among the genus of separate substances along with God and the intelligences, which Aquinas identifies with the angels.<sup>3</sup> Much more typically, Aquinas and numerous other Scholastic theologians present human beings, not simply human souls, as part of another genus: the genus of intellectual creatures, whose species include humans and angels. This is the proper context for much of medieval epistemology: medieval theologians' efforts to state precisely what belongs to ordinary human understanding as opposed to—but also in reference to—angelic knowledge and that supreme example of human understanding in Christ. What the example of the angels encourages medieval philosophers to treat is the case of a pure

<sup>2</sup> For parallel observations regarding the limitations of Gilson's approach in reference to organizing the history of fourteenth-century epistemology by centering on Ockham's influence, see Katherine H. Tachau, *Vision and Certitude in the Age of Ockham: Optics, Epistemology and the Foundations of Semantics, 1250–1345*, Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters 22 (Leiden, 1988), xiv–xv.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, trans. with an introduction and notes by Armand Maurer, 2d rev. ed., *Mediaeval Sources in Translation* 1 (Toronto, 1968), 51 n. 1: "It is unusual for him to include human souls among the separate substances." The pertinent text in Aquinas is

intelligence, one not bound by the limitations of sense information, but nonetheless a finite intelligence requiring causal processes or a specific set of conditions to account for its natural knowledge. Hence exploring the topic of angelic knowledge gives a philosopher the opportunity to reflect on the limits set to human understanding by sense and imagination through contrasts with the angelic case. Furthermore, the angels allow philosophers to focus on the means or processes of properly intellectual—as opposed to sense—cognition. The theological example of Christ also is a rich one from the standpoint of cognitive psychology and epistemology, for it raises issues about the principled limits of human intellectual capacities even under ideal conditions, unswayed by the distractions and disorders common to the human estate since the Fall. As I hope to make clear through the sketches below, medieval philosophers are at their most creative when they deal with just such thorny issues as angelic knowledge and Christ's knowledge, and much of what they produce by way of innovations in these areas has repercussions for their understanding of ordinary human intellectual cognition.

A word about the newly received sources would be in order before our medieval sketches.<sup>4</sup> Most philosophers in the High Middle Ages drew heavily for their analyses of cognition and epistemological issues from ancient sources such as Aristotle and Proclus (by way of the *Liber de causis*) as well as texts com-

*De ente et essentia* 4 (ed. Leonina 43:375b.1-3): "Nunc restat uidere per quem modum sit essentia in substantiis separatis, scilicet in anima, intelligentia et causa prima." Unless otherwise noted, all references to Aquinas will be by "ed. Leonina," *Thomae d'Aquino Opera omnia, iussu Leonis XIII edita* (Rome, 1889-).

<sup>4</sup> See Fernand Van Steenberghen, *La philosophie au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 2<sup>e</sup> éd. (Louvain-la-Neuve and Paris, 1991), 67-107; Bernard G. Dod, "Aristoteles Latinus," in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy: From the Rediscovery of Aristotle to the Disintegration of Scholasticism, 1100-1600*, ed. Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny, and Jan Pinborg (Cambridge, 1982), 45-79; and, most recently, "Greek Aristotelian Works Translated

ing from Arabic sources, such as Avicenna, al-Ghazālī, and Averroes. One challenge presented by these sources in regard to intellectual cognition was the view of separated substances whose role it is to exercise specific cosmological functions such as moving spheres or playing the role of intermediaries for communicating being from the First Principle to sensible things. This challenge led to a discussion about whether angels were or were not identical with the intelligences posited as part of the emanationist theories associated with Neoplatonic-Arabian materials, and about the mode of metaphysical composition found in angels. But whether a given Scholastic author such as Thomas did or did not identify the Christian angels with the intelligences, the pattern among Latin authors for analyzing such separate minds varied considerably from that found in the received sources. The ancient and Islamic authors did not enter into the psychology, so to speak, of the separate intelligences. Rather those intelligences were understood to self-cognize and through such self-cognition cause an emanation of further entities.<sup>5</sup> The Latin situation is quite different. They had to explain how angels could know human individuals entrusted to their care and function in a certain role within salvation history. The pattern among Latin authors, accordingly, is to take their views on features of the human mind as an analogue and disanalogue for understanding angelic intelligence. The most important feature in this connection is precisely that the Latin authors delve into the mechanics and details of how angels understand.

into Latin," Michele Trizio, "Greek Philosophical Works Translated into Latin," and Charles Burnett, "Arabic Philosophical Works Translated into Latin," in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Robert Pasnau and Christina Van Dyke (Cambridge, 2010), 2:793–97, 798–801, 814–22.

<sup>5</sup> For emanation in al-Fārābī and other Arabic philosophers, see David C. Reisman, "Al-Fārābī and the Philosophical Curriculum," and Thérèse-Anne Druart, "Metaphysics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, ed. Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor (Cambridge, 2005), 57–58, 325–48.

## THE FIRST SKETCH:

### ST. BONAVENTURE AND THE ANGELS

THE problem of angelic cognition presents itself in the first half of the thirteenth century in ways that show the difficulties posed by the newly acquired literature. If we turn to Richard Rufus, one of Bonaventure's contemporaries, we can begin to appreciate the extent to which this is the case. For example, in Rufus's relatively early commentary on the *Metaphysics*, we encounter questions such as how an angel can understand if understanding necessarily involves receiving the form of the object understood.<sup>6</sup> The Aristotelian model of understanding requiring reception seems, to Rufus's mind, to threaten the possibility of self-awareness on the part of an angel and to pose serious difficulties for the claim that understanding could be an activity of the mind inasmuch as reception is essentially passive, while activity and passivity seem to be incompatible in the selfsame subject. We should notice the extent to which Rufus is inclined to slide easily from issues relating to human intelligence to those belonging to angelic intellects. Indeed, he sometimes begins by posing a question officially about angels and then replies with observations pertinent to humans before finally answering the question in the form stated. Such a pattern occurs in a question on book Lambda of the *Metaphysics* entitled "Utrum habitus per quos cognoscunt [angeli] creaturas, sint eis innati an acquisiti."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, the questions in the third and fifth lectures of the *Scriptum super Metaphysicam*, lib. 11 [modern 12] d. 2 (ed. Timothy B. Noone, "An Edition and Study of the *Scriptum super Metaphysicam* lib. 12 d. 2: A Work Attributed to Richard Rufus of Cornwall" [Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1987], 209–30; 252–56). Regarding self-understanding and angelic knowledge, see lib. 11 [mod. 12] d. 2 lect. 3 q. 5, "Quomodo intellectus separatus creatus intelligat se ipsum"; "Item si creatura solum intelligit, intelligit per receptionem et impossibile est idem seipsum recipere. Ergo impossibile est idem seipsum intelligere" (ed. Noone, 214).

<sup>7</sup> Rufus, *Scriptum super Metaphysicam*, lib. 11 [mod. 12] d. 2 lect. 5 q. unica (ed. Noone, 252).



Here Rufus resolves the difficulties connected with passivity and activity by describing what would belong to humans apart from the effect of original sin. We would, Rufus claims, know immediately all existing creatures at the outset of our intellectual lives were it not for the effect of original sin which requires our minds to abstract forms from phantasms and renders our agent intellects ineffective as instruments of immediate intellectual awareness.<sup>8</sup> Regarding the angels in particular, Rufus proposes that if the intellectual habits of angels are understood as their power of understanding, they are innate, but if they are understood as occurrent acts of cognition, they are acquired, though instantaneously. To help us understand how such instantaneous acquisition would be possible, Rufus gives one of his favorite examples drawn from contemporary interest in optics. All created intellects (notice here the reference to the genus of intellectual creatures) are like mirrors that instantaneously receive images (*idola*) from all surrounding sides. They receive such images and give them off in turn. This analogy, Rufus thinks, will solve nearly all of the difficulties concerning angelic cognition. Any given angel will understand itself not directly

<sup>8</sup> See *ibid.*, lib. 11 [mod. 12] d. 2 lect. 3 q. 3 (ed. Noone, 216): “Ad primum dicendum quod intellectus qui est in nobis dicitur intellectus possibilis. Per hanc enim additionem quae est ‘qui est in nobis’ fit possibilis intellectus. Intellectus autem possibilis secundum quod huiusmodi est terminus imaginativae virtutis et aliarum virtutum materialium. Hoc est dictu: intellectus secundum quod possibilis recipit ab istis virtutibus materialibus intentiones universales quas abstrahunt a sensu. Et talis intellectus est quo intelligit homo, et quidquid talis intellectus intelligit homo intelligit. Intellectus tamen secundum se, non in quantum possibilis, multa intelligit quae homo non intelligit in hac vita, quia eius actiones totaliter non copulantur homini. Et secundum hanc considerationem dicitur intellectus agens.” For a discussion of the concept of an intuitive agent intellect, see Timothy B. Noone, “The Franciscans and Epistemology: Reflections on the Roles of Bonaventure and Scotus,” in *Medieval Masters: Essays in Memory of Msgr. E. A. Synan*, ed. R. E. Houser (Houston, 1999), 63–90.

but indirectly through receiving the “image” of itself from another angel whose mind likewise functions as a mirror.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Rufus, *Scriptum super Metaphysicam*, lib. 12 d. 2 lect. 5 q. unica (ed. Noone, 254–55): “Habitus autem ille aut est virtus vel potentia, et tunc est innatus et concreatus. Si autem ille habitus dicatur ipsa cognitio actualis, non est innatus sed acquisitus, hoc est receptus in instanti. Simul enim intelligit angelus omnes creaturas quae sunt et est. Et non cognoscet creaturas antequam sint et non est acquisitus ille habitus in eo per tempus et per studium. Sed quandocumque intellectus causatus, qui est speculum, est, recipit obiectum undique. Sicut enim si speculum corporale poneretur in medio lucido et undique obstarent obiecta, in instanti reciperentur idola in ipso, similiter angelus qui est speculum quam cito est in instanti recipiuntur omnia idola sive species creatorum in eo. Et sic intelliget ea et videbit se in se, et alia in se, se in aliis intellectibus creatis quae similiter sunt specula. Et illud autem plenius determinatum est prius.” Cf. Rufus, *De ideis*, q. 12 n. 103–5 (Prague, Archiv Pražského Hradu 1437, fol. 35va–vb; Erfurt, Bibliotheca Amploniana Q 312, fol. 83vb): “Sed numquid permittis ut ipse intellectus de se natura exprimat suam propriam ideam in se ipso speculo? Est enim ipse intellectus natura vel ens causatum, unde et potest esse obiectum a quo irradietur idolum, et est ipse idem etiam speculum. Unde et idoli vel ideae susceptivum, et tamen ipse non est receptivus ideae abstractae nisi per naturam suae materiae spiritualis. Et nonne hic iam necessario intelligitur ipse intellectus, aliter ipse duplicis simul et semel natura et idea? Et nonne competens esset exemplum in rebus corporalibus si aliquis speculi corporalis idolum in aliquo alio speculo corporali receptum, et illinc reflecteretur in primum? Et ita videtur idem speculum per suum idolum receptum in se ipso speculo. Nonne tunc esset simul idolum et illud cuius est idolum, et esset iterum idem obiectum gignens idolum et speculum recipiens idolum? O dives pauperem satura. Doce etiam Domine, an omnis intellectus causatus intelligat per receptionem, et videtur quod hoc sit necessarium. Si enim non esset ita, tunc quo modo excellentiori intelligeres quam ipse. Et iterum si nihil intelligitur nisi species vel speciem habens, et species per quam intelligitur res habens speciem, necessario simul cum intellectu intelligente vel est ipse intellectus intelligens, tunc sine dubio intelligeret per receptionem. Quod si ipse intellectus intelligens nec est ipsa species rei per quam ipsa res intelligitur, nec habet apud se speciem eiusdem rei, nullo modo eam rem intelliget. Ergo si ad unum sit dicere: si intellectus causatus

In Rufus's views on angelic self-cognition, what we encounter is a rather bizarre theory to deal with a particular problem arising from the application of Aristotelian metaphysical and psychological principles to the process of cognition. But the chief difficulty that attended authors such as St. Bonaventure was accounting for the range of objects that angels were claimed to know and, in particular, how angels could be said to know individuals and their acts. Ever since the 1240s, the period of the Dominican theologian Guerric de Saint-Quentin, the majority opinion in Paris had favored the endorsement of species in the angelic mind as the means of cognition. Such species were understood to represent objects to the angels and according to most theologians these species were created along with the angelic intellect. Inasmuch as the model for such species was taken from the human mind, the angelic species were interpreted as providing universal intelligible content after the manner that human understanding produces such content through the activity of abstraction. But this led to an acute problem: how could angels know individuals and their properties inasmuch as they lack any sense cognition? Guerric de Saint-Quentin himself was aware of the difficulty and proposed a solution along the lines of applying a general idea to a particular instantiating that idea:

Whence I say that the angels have innate species of created things, but these only occur in them through their nature and according to universal types, not particulars. They know particulars, too, from the universal, much as from this universal proposition "every mule is sterile," I know, as soon as I see this mule, that it is sterile.<sup>10</sup>

*non est ipsa res per quam res extra intelligitur ab ipso, esset enim eiusdem rei et causam habet apud se speciem rei quam intelligit, ergo eam recipit. Forte ergo tibi placet quod intellectus causatus, quidquid intelligat intelligit per receptionem."*

<sup>10</sup> "Unde dico quod habent innatas species eorum; tamen tantum fiunt secundum naturam et secundum species universales, non particulares, et ex universali cognoscunt particularia, sicut ex hac universali quam scio, scilicet omnem mulam esse sterilem, quam cito video

The residual problem here, of course, is not the claim that an analogy for understanding the way in which angelic minds function in regard to particulars might be found in the manner in which humans apply a universal to a particular. But rather the problem lies in discovering how direct acquaintance with individuals would be afforded to angels in the first place since they lack sense cognition altogether and that is what humans depend upon in becoming aware of the individual.

Back in the 1230s, William of Auxerre had tried his hand at resolving the residual problem by employing, in the way that we have seen in Richard Rufus, the model of the mirror for understanding the angelic mind. The angel can know things in their proper reality by seeing them in its own mind and directing its gaze upon them since its mind, as an image of God, is a mirror of all things. But this would seem to allow for the possibility of the angel knowing even future things through its mind since its stock of intelligible objects would be based on the same indifference to time as that found in God's mind, a consequence that William expressly allows. An important point to notice in this connection is that when William speaks of the angelic intelligence seeing *per directionem aciei intellectus super rem*, he means that it fixes its gaze upon the *representation* of the thing in its own mind, mirroring, in turn, the divine mind.<sup>11</sup>

hanc mulam, scio eam esse sterilem" (Guerric de Saint-Quentin, *Quaestiones de quolibet*, Quodl. 4 a. 1c n. 16, ed. Walter H. Principe, C.S.B., with editorial revision by Jonathan Black, introduction by Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *Studies and Texts* 143 [Toronto, 2002], 235).

<sup>11</sup> *Magistri Guillelmi Altissidorensis Summa aurea*, lib. 2 tom. 1 tract. 6 c. 4 (ed. Jean Ribailier, *Spicilegium Bonaventurianum* 17 [Paris and Grottaferrata, 1982], 137): "Sine preiudicio . . . dicimus, secundum quod nobis videtur, quod angeli vident res existentes in proprio genere per medium. Sed distinguendum est duplex medium, videlicet medium quo et medium per quod. Medium per quod ipse est intellectus, quia per hoc quod assimilatur Deo ultima assimilatione est expressa ymago omnium et expressum speculum omnium. Unde per se ipsum sine speculo et sine alia ymagine, quando vult dirigere aciem supra res ipsas,

This seems to be the state of things when Bonaventure picks up the discussion in his *Sentences* commentary. The question title that Bonaventure proposes is quite similar to that found in Rufus's *Metaphysics* commentary, namely, "Utrum angelus omnia creata, quae cognoscit, cognoscat per species innatas." The level of the discussion has, however, become much more sophisticated in the ten years or so that separates Rufus's Aristotelian commentary from Bonaventure's *Sentences*.

Bonaventure reports two proposed answers to the question. In the current state of research, the first reply cannot be identified with a specific author but bears clear resemblances to the views of a number of authors in the 1240s and 1250s. This theory claims that angels know everything, specific types and individuals, through the species which multiply themselves inside the angelic mind as in a medium so that the angels know without any reception from things outside themselves inasmuch as reception is deemed impossible.<sup>12</sup> Denying that angels come to

potest res videre, et ipsa directio est medium quo eas videt distincte actu, et in hoc consistit libertas eius; in hoc autem differt in videndo a Deo, immo deficit ab eo, quod Deus omnia videt semper actu; angelus autem potentia videt, non actu, nec etiam omnia. Res autem futuras abstrahit a speculo et de abstractis iudicat, et sic eas cognoscit. Videt ergo angelus per duplex medium, scilicet per speculum quod ipse est, licet universale, et per medium quo discernitur eius visio, id est per directionem aciei intellectus super rem, sive preteritam, existentem et futuram."

<sup>12</sup> Bonaventure, *In II Sent.*, d. 3 pars 2 a. 2 q. 1 (*Commentaria in quatuor libros Sententiarum*, in *S. Bonaventurae Opera omnia*, 10 vols., ed. PP. Collegii S. Bonaventurae [Quaracchi, 1882–1902], 2:119a): "Aliqui enim posuerunt, quod angelus *omnia*, quae novit per species, scit per species *innatas*; et huius positionis tradunt *modum* et *causam*. *Modus* enim hic est. Quamvis in angelo sint innatae species in numero finito, scilicet rerum, quae sunt de prima constitutione mundi; tamen, sicut Deus in prima conditione indidit rationes causales et seminales rebus ad se multiplicandas, ita tradidit etiam speciebus, quas impressit angelico intellectui; et ita omnia possunt sine extrinseca receptione cognoscere. —*Causam* autem huius assignant, quia cum receptio fiat per quandam

know from receiving species from external things is common to Gueric de Saint-Quentin and William of Auxerre, but the feature of having the species multiply themselves in the angelic mind may be Bonaventure's effort to express William's or perhaps Rufus's views about created intellects functioning as mirrors reflecting intelligibles. In any event, Bonaventure's rejection of this first theory is based on his own position that angelic minds do have agent and possible intellects, contrary to what Gueric de Saint-Quentin contends. That is to say, the Seraphic Doctor rejects the suggestion that the division between active and passive mind is restricted to human beings and their abstracting intelligibles from phantasms. Instead, he proposes that any mind that is not a pure actuality, as angelic minds surely are not, is potential in reference to its acts of understanding and their contents and hence qualifies to be deemed a potential or possible intellect. His reasoning regarding the active character of angelic minds is that if the lesser intellect, human intelligence, has the ability to abstract and impress the intelligible contents of abstract ideas upon the potential intellect, so much the more must an angelic intelligence.<sup>13</sup>

We notice here immediately how Bonaventure's reasoning displays the widespread pattern of analyzing angels' intelligences in reference to the intellectual capacities of human beings, but more importantly how the force of his reasoning trades on the assumption that humans and angels belong to the same genus. For otherwise the inference rule upon which his argument is based, namely, *affirmando a minori*, would not apply.

abstractionem et proportionem, ad quae concurrunt tanquam dispositiva organum et medium et virtutes inferiores, et hoc non sit in angelo reperire; dicunt, quod nihil ab extra potest recipere." (Italics are from the original edition.)

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., q. 1 (2:119b): "*Causam* autem credo esse falsam, quia planum est, quod angelus habet intellectum *possibilem*, cum non sit purus actus. Planum etiam est, quod habet *agentem* maioris virtutis, quam si esset corpori alligatus. Si ergo alligatus potest abstrahere et possibili impingere, quanto magis intellectus liber et separatus hoc potest?"

The other theory that Bonaventure reports in his treatment of the question is one that is to be found in the theological writings of Richard Rufus,<sup>14</sup> though whether Rufus is the originator of that theory is far from certain. The theory accepts that only some of the items found in the angelic mind are derived from innate species, claiming that the intelligibles covered by such innate species are necessary and natural ones. Items that derive from voluntary or contingent causes are not cognized through innate species, but rather such species are acquired. Though the details of this theory are hard to pin down since the mode of angelic cognition regarding contingent matters is not specified, these are not the elements that Bonaventure objects to in regard to this second view. Rather he relies on the Scholastic axiom that two species of the same type cannot occur in the same subject; this axiom would not allow for a given human being to be understood by an angel through one species covering the necessary features of the human being and another species aligning with the contingent features inasmuch as the two species would be specifically the same. Apart from this metaphysical principle, Bonaventure also sees psychological difficulties: the angelic intellect would seem to be already in a state of actuality from the innate species and hence not receptive of the acquired species.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Richard Rufus, *Abbreviatio Sententiarum* II d.7 (Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana Vat. lat. 12993, fol. 165rb) as cited in Robert Kilwardby, *Quaestiones in librum secundum Sententiarum*, q.37 (ed. Gerhard Leibold, Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für die Herausgabe ungedruckter Texte aus der mittelalterlichen Geisteswelt 16 [Munich, 1992], 118 n. 36).

<sup>15</sup> Bonaventure, *In II Sent.*, d. 3 pars 2 a. 2 q. 1 (2:119b–120a): “Ideo est alia positio, quod angelus *quaedam* cognoscit per species innatas, ut puta necessaria et naturalia, et quae fuerunt cum angelo concreata; sed *fortuita* et *voluntaria* et *futura contingentia* intelligit per species acquisitas et receptas. Angelicus enim intellectus est *possibilis* respectu huiusmodi specierum; non tamen est tanta possibilitate possibilis, ut humanus, quia humanus est possibilis omnino propter *nuditatem*, et etiam possibilis propter *coniunctionem cum phantasmatis*; angelicus vero neutro

In his own approach to the problem, Bonaventure proposes that angels do know everything they know through innate species, but the reason is not that they cannot receive a species but rather because their intellects are sufficiently actualized for knowing things by the species with which God naturally endows them. The sufficiency for such species is shown by an analogy drawn with human awareness: we can know a given human being is of such and such a size at a given time simply by drawing on our (acquired) species to recognize the qualities of that human.<sup>16</sup>

modo, sed possibilis est respectu praedictorum cognoscibilium. . . . Sed haec positio videtur in se claudere duo opposita, scilicet quod angelus habeat species *universalium* et suscipiat post species *singularium*. Species enim singularium eiusdem speciei non differunt nisi numero, et impossibile est, accidentia eiusdem speciei diversa numero esse in eodem subiecto: ergo nullus intellectus potest habere plures species hominis; sed si habet unam innatam, non potest aliam eiusdem speciei recipere, sicut nec duae albedines sunt in eodem corpore. *Quod si dicas*, duarum albedinum similitudines esse in eodem aëre et diversa lumina eiusdem naturae, ut dicit Dionysius, et facies duorum hominum in eadem imagine; non est simile, quia idola et lumina in medio distinguuntur per suas origines, et diversae figurae possunt in genere figurae differre specie, aliter sufficit species figurae cum numero, sicut possum tres species omnino similes confingere. Et sic videtur dicta positio contraria implicare. — *Amplius*, si «species est totum *esse formale* individuorum», ut dicit Boethius, nec est individuatio nisi ex coniunctione formae cum materia; si species existens in intellectu omnino abstrahit a materia, nullo modo in eodem intellectu est ponere diversas species sive formas solo numero differentes. Et sic redit idem quod prius, scilicet quod, si intellectu angelicus habet omnium *universalium* species innatas, nullam ulterius speciem recipit, sed sufficienter per illas omnia cognoscit.”

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, q. 1 (2:120a): “Et ideo est tertia positio, quod angelus omnia cognoscit per species innatas, non quia *non possit* recipere species; tunc enim si Deus crearet aliquid novum in specie, necesse esset angelum ignorare; quod si falsum est, posset recipere. Et ideo haec non est ratio, sed hoc, quod Deus intellectum angelicum possibilem tot speciebus implevit, quod per illas poterat omnia cognoscere sine omni receptione nova. Et ideo dicitur intellectus angelicus esse in actu respectu rerum,



Now at first this sounds suspiciously similar to the views of Gueric de Saint-Quentin and hence no advance in the discussion at all. Indeed, the gist of the position seems to have been anticipated in an objection arguing that the knowledge of individuals so described is tantamount to a simple application of the relevant general concepts. But this rightly seems to the objector to be entirely out of the question since such an application would presuppose prior acquaintance with the individual to which the general concepts should be applied and hence would presuppose what should be explained.<sup>17</sup>

As we might expect, Bonaventure has a response to precisely this type of objection. In the body of the question, he carefully

non quia se ipso sit *in actu*, vel quia sit *actus*, sed per species factus est in actu. Et modus et intellectus istius positionis est hic. Deus enim in angelis concreavit species universales omnium fiendarum rerum, et per illas certum est, quod potest omnia *universalia* cognoscere; potest etiam et *singularia*, sed non nisi componat ad invicem, ut patet: si ego habeo penes me speciem figurae, speciem hominis, speciem coloris et temporis, et componam ad invicem; sine nova receptione speciei cognoscam individuum in propria natura.”

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., q. 1 sed contra 4 (2:118b-119a): “Item, si omnia cognoscit per species innatas, aut non cognoscit singularia, aut habet species omnium singularium. Primum est falsum et inconueniens, quod angelus singularia non cognoscat, cum hominibus specialibus ministret et ad specialia et singularia ministeria dirigatur. Si autem habet species omnium singularium, ergo cum possint augeri in infinitum, habebit species infinitas; aut fiet aliquando aliquod singulare, quod non poterit cognoscere. *Si tu dicas*, quod angelus cognoscit singularia per species universalium; *contra*: in specie universalium non distinguuntur: ergo non cognoscit distincte. *Praeterea*, species universalis non assimilatur cui libet singulari assimilatione perfecta: ergo perfectius cognoscit homo quam angelus. *Si tu dicas*, quod angelus appropriat illas species applicando ad singularia; *contra*: omnem applicationem non fortuitam praecedit cognitio; si enim non cognoscit illum cui applicat, quomodo vult illi speciem applicare? *Et iterum*, quare magis illi singulari applicabit speciem hominis quam asini? Ergo ante applicationem cognoscit singulare.”

points out that the combination and recombination of intelligibles derived from species would be without any foundation, resulting in deception, if the angelic intellect did not direct its gaze upon the item known and combine the specific ideas in reference to the features of the individual thing.<sup>18</sup> Although we might think that this still means something like the reception of the species from an individual, the replies to objections make it clear that Bonaventure has something quite different, and innovative, in mind. For example, in dealing with an objection that allowing angels to know individuals through innate species would entail that angels have equally clear knowledge of contingent and voluntary things, Bonaventure tells us,

For knowledge of such things, especially contingent ones, having innate species is insufficient unless the gaze of the angel turns itself (*convertatur*), and such conversion requires the existence of the thing either in itself or in its cause; it also requires the presence of the thing inasmuch as the angel's power is finite and needs to be in some approximation to the thing when it turns itself towards the external thing.<sup>19</sup>

That such conversion does not involve any reception of a species is clear from the reply to another objection alleging that any knowledge of individuals on the part of an angel would counte-

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., q. 1 (2:120a): "Sed quia talis compositio, nisi esset secundum certitudinem et correspondentiam ad ipsam rem, esset fictio et deceptio; ideo Angelus huiusmodi individua et singularia non cognoscit, nisi dirigat aspectum supra ipsum cognoscibile, et secundum illud quod est in re, ipse componat species in se; et tunc habet ita claram et certam cognitionem de re, sicut si speciem statim reciperet."

<sup>19</sup> "... ad cognitionem harum rerum particularium, et maxime contingentium, non sufficit habere species innatas, nisi aspectus angelicus convertatur; et conversio requirit rei *existentiam* vel in se, vel in causa; requirit etiam *praesentiam*, eo quod virtus angelica est finita, ideo in approximatione aliqua proportionali est, cum se convertit ad rem extra. Et ita patet, quod non propter hoc cognoscit futura, vel etiam contingentia" (ibid., q. 1 ad 2 [2:120b]).

nance the unwelcome consequence that an angel would have infinite knowledge:

. . . I say that an angel knows singular things through species by applying such to them and appropriating them accordingly. Whence through such appropriation it knows individuals distinctly and properly, but this neither requires that it receive new species nor that it have an infinite number, for singulars can be reduced to a finite number of universals, while finite species can be combined in an infinite number of ways. And thus it is that the angel never knows so many singulars that it cannot know more without any reception of a new species, yet not without turning the gaze of its mind upon the thing itself. From this turning its mind upon the thing, moreover, the angel does not receive any species from the thing since it is already in act thanks to the species it already has, but by directing its gaze at the thing it appropriates its knowledge and by appropriating its knowledge it combines the relevant species, knowing and perceiving the individual thing in its particular properties. . . .<sup>20</sup>

Bonaventure proposes, then, a mode of angelic intellectual knowledge of things that is directly aimed at the existence and presence of external things and involves the reception of no species. It is characterized by the metaphor of sight: the angel directs its gaze at the thing, not a representation of the thing in its own mind, and through such direct acquaintance with the thing applies to its content the relevant universals. This form of

<sup>20</sup> “. . . dico quod cognoscit singularia per species universalium *applicando* et *appropriando*. Unde per *appropriationem* proprie et distincte cognoscit, nec oportet novas species recipi, nec oportet infinitas esse, quia singularia ad numerum finitum universalium reducuntur, sed finitae species infinitis modis componi possunt. Et ideo nunquam tot singularia cognoscit angelus quin adhuc possint cognoscere plura sine receptione speciei novae; non tamen sine *directione aspectus* supra rem. Ex qua directione non recipit speciem a cognoscibili, cum sit in actu per speciem quam habet; sed dirigendo aspectum speciem appropriat et appropriando componit, et rem singularem sub sua proprietate cognoscit et percipit . . .” (ibid., q. 1 ad 3 [2:120b]).

direct intellectual knowledge unmediated by species is, of course, the famous doctrine of intuitive cognition in its essentials, the type of cognition that was subsequently to play a dominant role in epistemologies of the fourteenth century.<sup>21</sup> The earlier claims by Bonaventure regarding the presence of agent and possible intellects in the angelic minds now have their bearing: the possible intellect of the angel may be affected by the existence of the individual intelligible, and its active mind can intellectually isolate the intelligible species relevant to a given individual's ontological constitution. Bonaventure's notion of such immediate intellectual cognition should, accordingly, be seen as the starting point for a revolution in human philosophical psychology that was not to come into its own for half of a century. But the key point for us to notice is where this innovation occurs: in a text on the angels, not in a text dealing with human beings.

Such innovations do not always meet with a warm welcome and such was the fate of Bonaventure's doctrine. Neither Thomas Aquinas, who commented on the *Sentences* just a couple of years later and drew heavily upon Bonaventure's commentary, nor his fellow Dominican Robert Kilwardby seemed to understand the point that Bonaventure was not describing some reception of another species and that his doctrine was not susceptible to the objection that it presupposed rather than explained angelic knowledge of the individual.<sup>22</sup> What Bonaven-

<sup>21</sup> For a discussion of the systematic need for intuitive cognition, see Sebastian J. Day, *Intuitive Cognition: A Key to the Significance of the Later Scholastics* (St. Bonaventure, N.Y., 1947), 101–34; and John F. Boler, "Intuitive and Abstractive Cognition," *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Kretzmann et al., 465–71. For an effort to trace the background in Vital du Four and Matthew of Aquasparta, see John E. Lynch, *The Theory of Knowledge of Vital du Four* (St. Bonaventure, N.Y., 1972), 141–18.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In II Sent.*, d. 3 q. 3 a. 3 (ed. P. Mandonnet, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum* [Paris, 1929], 120): "Et ideo ad hanc positionem quidam addiderunt quod ex applicatione harum formarum

ture did do was to propose another mode of intellectual knowledge, one that might well be termed, as he tells us, a kind of direct experience on the part of the angels.<sup>23</sup>

universalium ad hoc particulare vel illud determinatur angeli cognitio ut hoc singulare cognoscat. Sed hoc iterum non videtur sufficiens: quia haec applicatio universalium causarum ad singulare, aut est ad singulare quod est in intellectu angeli, et sic haec positio supponeret illud de quo dubitatur, scilicet singularia esse in intellectu angeli; vel ad singulare quod est in re, sicut dicere videtur; ut si lux solis esset intelligens, intelligeret corpora ad quae radii sui applicantur. Hoc autem esse non potest: quia cum cognitio non sit nisi secundum assimilationem, impossibile est quod cognitio extendat se ultra id in quo est assimilatio. . . .” Kilwardby, *Quaestiones in II Sent.*, q. 37 (ed. Leibold, 117.28–118.32): “Sed contra. Ante illam applicationem aut novit singulare aut non. Si sic, ergo prius habuit speciem individui et non per formam universalem illud cognovit. Si non, ergo notitia eius de individuo esset fortuita tantum. Nesciret enim quare magis uni individuo applicaret formam universalem quam alii nisi a casu. Sed hoc falsum est. Ergo habet speciem individui apud se.” A similar misunderstanding of Bonaventure’s position may be found in the Franciscan William de la Mare. See his *Scriptum in secundum librum Sententiarum*, d. 3 q. 9 (ed. Hans Kraml, Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für die Herausgabe ungedruckter Texte aus der mittelalterlichen Geisteswelt 18 [Munich, 1995], 70.82–85): “Si tu dicas sicut ipsi dicunt quod dirigit [angelus] aspectum super ipsum cognoscibile, tum quaero: aut dirigendo aspectum aliquid recipit aut nihil. Si recipit, habeo propositum; si nihil recipit, ergo frustra dirigit magis super illud quam super aliam rem.”

<sup>23</sup> Bonaventure, *In II Sent.*, d. 3 pars 2 a. 2 q. 1 ad 1 (2:120b): “Sic et angeli multa didicerunt, tum ex propria industria, tum ex revelatione, tum ex experientia.”

THE SECOND SKETCH:

MEDIEVAL DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY IN  
THOMAS AQUINAS, HENRY OF GHENT, AND DUNS SCOTUS

LONG before John Locke's *Essay on Human Understanding* put forth the idea that gauging our intellectual resources and limits could be accomplished by tracing the origins of our thought through the "plain, historical method,"<sup>24</sup> medieval philosophers discussed the origins of our intellectual lives. There were several classical texts that suggested the theme to them: the opening section of Aristotle's *Physics* with its claim that our knowledge begins in a confused state and eventually achieves clarity, similar remarks in his *Metaphysics* and *De anima*, and perhaps most influentially, a text from the first book of Avicenna's *Metaphysics* stating that being and thing are the first items of human intellectual awareness.<sup>25</sup> The catalyst, however, for the prolonged discussion of the theme throughout the thirteenth century was the fairly obscure Franciscan theologian Guibert de Tournai.<sup>26</sup> Guibert maintained in his didactic work *Rudimentum doctrinae*, written sometime in the 1240s, that God is the first object of human intellectual awareness in the present life. There can scarcely be any doubt that this doctrinal position

<sup>24</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Kenneth P. Winkler (Indianapolis and Cambridge, 1996), 4.

<sup>25</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 7.1 (1028a32–b1), *De anima* 1.1 (402b7–9; 402b19), and *Physics* 1.1 (184a10–b14). Avicenna, *De prima philosophia* 1.5 (ed. S. van Riet, *Avicenna Latinus: Liber de philosophia prima sive Scientia divina*, 3 vols. [Louvain and Leiden], 1:31–32): "Dicemus igitur quod res et ens et necesse talia sunt quod statim imprimuntur in anima prima impressione, quae non acquiritur ex aliis notioribus."

<sup>26</sup> Wouter Goris, "Die Anfänge der Auseinandersetzung um das Ersterkannte im 13. Jahrhundert; Guibert von Tournai, Bonaventura und Thomas von Aquin," *Documenti e studi* 10 (1999): 363–64. The original text of Guibert is found in Camille Berubé et Servus Gieben, "Guibert de Tournai et Robert Grosseteste: Sources inconnues de la doctrine de l'illumination suivi de l'édition critique de trois chapitres du Rudimentum doctrinae de Guibert de Tournai," in *S. Bonaventura: 1274–1974*

was theologically motivated by the consideration that God should be the source of our knowing, just as he is the source of our being, and that he should function as first in our knowing (the gnoseological Alpha) in the present life, just as he shall function as the ultimate object of cognition in the life to come (the gnoseological Omega). But there can be scarcely any doubt either that Guibert's thesis, along with the illuminationist epistemology in which it was embedded, sparked a widespread discussion among Latin authors.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, the reactions began as early as the 1250s in Thomas Aquinas's *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, continued in Henry of Ghent's *Summa quaestionum ordinariarum*, and reached their critical height in Duns Scotus's various *Sentences* and Aristotelian commentaries. Not all the reactions were negative or critical. Henry of Ghent largely agreed with Guibert's thesis once it was suitably qualified. Nor did all those appropriating the theme of *Deus ut primum cognitum* subscribe, as Henry of Ghent did, to an illuminationist epistemology: an instructive example along these lines is Richard of Mediavilla, a Franciscan opponent of divine illumination.<sup>28</sup>

(Grottaferrata [Rome], 1973), 627–54. The first scholar to note the importance of Guibert for the thought of Aquinas was Francis Ruello, "La doctrine de illumination dans le traité *Super librum Boethii De Trinitate* de Thomas d'Aquin," *Recherches de science religieuse* 64 (1976): 341–57.

<sup>27</sup> On the theme of God as First Known, see Wouter Goris, *Absolute Beginners: Der mittelalterliche Beitrag zu einem Ausgang vom Unbedingten* (Leiden and Boston, 2007), who traces the theme through Henry of Ghent into Scotus and Richard of Conington; Martin Pickavé, *Heinrich von Gent über Metaphysik als erste Wissenschaft: Studien zu einem Metaphysikentwurf aus dem letzten Viertel des 13. Jahrhunderts*, *Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters* 91 (Leiden and Boston, 2007), 151–67; and the earlier study by Matthias Laarmann, *Deus, primum cognitum: Die Lehre von Gott als dem Ersterkannten des menschlichen Intellekts bei Heinrich von Gent (†1293)*, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters*, n.F., 52 (Münster, 1999), 272–311.

<sup>28</sup> Richard of Mediavilla, *In I Sent.*, d. 3 a. 3 q. 2 (ed. L. Silvestri, *Super quatuor libros Sententiarum Petri Lombardi quaestiones subtilissimae*, 4 vols.,

Our story begins, as so much philosophy does in the later thirteenth century, with the thought of Thomas Aquinas. The question of what is first known is considered in Aquinas's comparatively early *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, in connection with his treatment of the thesis of divine illumination, the knowability of God, and the knowability of the Trinity. He argues in his rejection of illumination that our agent intellects and natural powers are proportioned to the sensible things which we know best and it is through such sensible things that we come to know God, to the extent we do, by knowing the Cause through its effects. Such knowledge is largely negative, telling us more of how creatures fall short of God and more what God is not like than what he is like. It is in the third article of the first question that Thomas turns his attention to Guibert's thesis that God is first known. Aquinas actually considers two different versions of the thesis: the first is likely his own version of Guibert's main thesis; the other may represent Aquinas's construal of some of Guibert's views in combination with those of Bonaventure.

Aquinas rejects the thesis in either of its formulations. He dismisses Guibert himself on theological grounds: such a position encounters serious difficulties distinguishing natural knowledge from that of the beatific vision. If we understand the thesis more broadly as claiming that we know not God but some divine influence within our minds (apparently Thomas's rendition of Bonaventure's idea of the human intellect cooperating with the

[Brescia, 1591], 1:46b): "Respondeo quod, quamvis omnis cognitio quam habemus de Deo per naturam sit valde in generali, tamen una magis est in generali quam alia. Cum enim intelligimus ens in communi non descendendo ad ens creatum vel increatum, intelligimus Deum in-tellectione generalissima, inquantum intelligimus aliquid commune sibi et cuilibet creaturae, non communitate univoca, sed analogia." For an interpretation of this text, see Laarman, *Deus, primum cognitum*, 363–64 and his correction of the earlier study of Palmaz Rucker, *Der Ursprung unserer Begriffe nach Richard von Mediavilla: Ein Beitrag zu Erkenntnislehre des Doctor solidus* (Münster in W., 1934).



divine light), then the thesis is discountable based upon the Aristotelian principle that self-knowledge is always naturally posterior to knowing external things.<sup>29</sup>

Thereafter Aquinas presents his own views regarding what is first known. We may understand the question “what is first known,” Thomas tells us, either in regard to sense and intellect or in regard to the intellect alone. Sense has the sensible singular item as its first object of awareness; intellect has as its first object of knowledge the first item abstracted by the agent intellect. Here Aquinas, following Avicenna, argues for a parallelism between sense and intellect: just as in sense cognition, the first item of awareness is what is most common (we perceive something is an animal before becoming aware that it is human), so in the intellect what is more common, being and unity, are first known, even if being is grasped through the reception of the essence of a given sensible item in the intellect.<sup>30</sup>

Aquinas’s treatment of these issues in the *Super Boetium* accords well with his general position on the proper object of the intellect. The proper object is, of course, what a given cognitive power primarily aligns with and is moved by, as, for example, sight aligns with and is moved by the feature of color. Aquinas’s

<sup>29</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, q. 1 a. 3 (ed. Leonina 50:87a–b).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. (87b): “. . . intellectus autem agens non facit intelligibilia formas separatas, que sunt ex se ipsis intelligibiles, set formas quas abstract a phantasmatis; et ideo huiusmodi sunt que primo intellectus noster intelligit. Et inter hec illa sunt priora, que primo intellectui abstracta occurrunt; hec autem sunt que plura comprehendunt: uel per modum totius uniuersalis, uel per modum integralis; et ideo magis uniuersalia sunt primo nota intellectui, et composita componentibus, ut definitum partibus definitionis. Et secundum quod quedam imitatio intellectus est in sensu, qui etiam quodammodo abstracta a materia recipit, etiam apud sensum singularia magis communia sunt primo nota, ut hoc corpus quam hoc animal.” Cf. Avicenna, *Liber primus naturalium: tractatus primus de causis et principiis naturalium*, c. 1 (ed. S. van Riet [Louvain-la-Neuve and Leiden, 1992], 11).

official position is that the essence or quiddity of a material substance is the proper object of the human mind, and although at times Thomas does say things such as quiddity is both the proper and first object, on balance he maintains a distinction between these two.<sup>31</sup> The quiddity of the material thing is the first item received in the possible intellect, but the first feature that we notice about it is being, the most common feature of all. In this way Aquinas has our knowledge begin with transcendentals and proceed to categorical items, but he insists that such common or general knowledge is also indeterminate.<sup>32</sup> Comparing such knowledge to a state halfway between utter ignorance and complete knowledge, he argues that we have confused knowledge of things through the concept of being and then come eventually to distinct knowledge of them.

Henry of Ghent was a frequent reader of the work of Thomas Aquinas and was inclined to agree with him regarding the claim

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.85.5 (ed. Leonina 5:341a): "Cum enim intellectus humanus exeat de potentia in actum, similitudinem quandam habet cum rebus generabilibus, quae non statim perfectionem suam habent, sed eam successive acquirunt. Et similiter intellectus humanus non statim in prima apprehensione capit perfectam rei cognitionem; sed primo apprehendit aliquid de ipsa, puta quidditatem ipsius rei, quae est primum et proprium obiectum intellectus; et deinde intelligit proprietates et accidentia et habitudines circumstantes rei essentiam"; *ibid.* 1.88.3 (5:368b): "Primum autem quod intelligitur a nobis secundum statum praesentis vitae, est quidditas rei materialis, quae est nostri intellectus obiectum, ut multoties supra dictum est."

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* 1.5.2 (ed. Leonina 4:58a): "Primo autem in conceptione intellectus cadit ens, quia secundum hoc unumquodque cognoscibile est, in quantum est actu, ut dicitur in IX Metaphys. Unde ens est proprium obiectum intellectus et sic est primum intelligibile, sicut sonus est primum audibile; *ibid.* 1.87.3 ad 1 (ed. Leonina 5:361b): "Ad primum ergo dicendum quod obiectum intellectus est commune quoddam, scilicet ens et verum, sub quo comprehenditur etiam ipse actus intelligendi. Unde intellectus potest suum actum intelligere. Sed non primo: quia nec primum obiectum intellectus nostri, secundum praesentem statum, est quodlibet ens et verum, sed ens et verum consideratum in rebus materialibus . . . , ex quibus in cognitionem omnium aliorum devenit."

that our intellectual knowledge begins in an indeterminate and confused state. What chiefly separates Henry's teaching from that of Aquinas is not simply that Henry posits truth rather than being as the proper object of the intellect, but, much more significantly, he proposes that God is the first object cognized within the initially indeterminate knowledge. Distinguishing between what is naturally pre-thematically known and what is known through the exercise of our powers of inference and judgement, Henry argues that when we grasp being in its most indeterminate sense, that which is negatively undetermined, we are actually aware of God himself:

Therefore since our mind naturally conceives first what is indeterminate prior to the determinate . . . our mind in understanding any good thing at all understands in it naturally first the good undetermined by negation; this is the good that is God. And just as this is the case with the good, so with all the other properties understood about God from creatures. We should say then, absolutely speaking, that within the scope of the most general manner of understanding what God is in reference to its first two degrees, what God is is the first object that has to be understood on the part of the human intellect from creatures. This happens in such a manner that nothing can be known in or from creatures (that is the true, the good, the beautiful, the just, being, unity or something determinate of this sort existing through matter or a supposit) unless something is understood already, though sometimes temporally simultaneously, naturally prior, which is simply and indeterminately true, good, beautiful, being, unity, and so on. The result is that in God himself there is found both the beginning and end of our cognition; the beginning in reference to our most general knowledge of him, the end as far as the direct and particular vision of him. Hence God is the beginning and the end of all things in their being known, just as he is their beginning and end in their being of nature. And just as nothing else can be perfectly known unless he is previously perfectly known, so too nothing can be known however imperfectly unless he is previously known, at least in the most general manner; for example, man or white or something else cannot be known unless that is the case. For nothing of such things in a

creature is even understood as such, unless first we understand and are aware of it under the notion of being and unity and all of the other first intentions; so the fact that something is a being or one, which are necessarily conceived about something by means of a first impression (at least by a priority of nature), [is so conceived] about it prior to anything, such as the fact that it is white or human.<sup>33</sup>

And in answering an objection, Henry tells us,

In all general intentions of things whenever you understand one of them simply – for example, being, true, good – you first under-

<sup>33</sup> “Ergo, cum semper intellectus noster naturaliter prius concipit indeterminatum quam determinatum, . . . intellectus noster intelligendo bonum quodcumque in ipso naturaliter, prius cointelligit bonum negatione indeterminatum, et hoc est bonum quod Deus est. Et sicut de bono, ita et de omnibus aliis de Deo intellectis ex creaturis. Absolute ergo dicendum quod in generalissimo modo intelligendi quid est Deus, quoad primum et secundum eius gradum, quid est Deus est primum obiectum quod ab humano intellectu ex creaturis habet intelligi, ut nihil possit cognosci in creaturis et ex creaturis, quia verum, bonum, pulchrum, iustum, ens, unum, aut aliquid huiusmodi determinatum existens per materiam, aut per suppositum, nisi naturaliter prius, licet quandoque simul duratione, cognito eo quod est simpliciter et indeterminatum verum, bonum, pulchrum, ens, unum, et huiusmodi, ut, scilicet, in ipso Deo sit principium et finis nostrae cognitionis: principium quoad eius cognitionem generalissimam, finis quoad eius nudam visionem particularem, ut sic sit principium et finis omnium rerum in esse cognitivo, sicut est principium et finis earum in esse naturae. Et sicut nihil aliud potest perfecte cognosci nisi ipso prius perfecte cognito, sic nec aliquid potest cognosci quantumcumque imperfecte, nisi ipso prius saltem in generalissimo gradu cognito, ut homo aut album aut quodcumque aliud. Nihil enim talium cognoscitur in creatura aut intelligitur ut tale, nisi prius cognoscendo et intelligendo ipsum sub intentione entis et unius, et caeterarum primarum intentionum, ut quod sit ens aut unum, quae necessario prima impressione, saltem prioritate naturae, concipiuntur de quolibet, antequam concipiatur aliquid eorum quia album aut quia homo” (Henry of Ghent, *Summa quaestionum ordinariarum*, a. 24 q. 7, ed. J. Badius [Paris, 1520; rpt. St. Bonaventure, N.Y., 1953], fol. 144r H).

stand God, but you do not notice it; and so long as you abide in that simple understanding, you continue to understand God. But if you start to add qualifications to what was simply conceived, you fall back to the level of understanding the creature.<sup>34</sup>

Such indeterminate awareness of God furnishes us, according to Henry, with the starting point for our distinct awareness of creaturely being; the latter, in turn, is what allows us to achieve, in due course, distinct knowledge of both simple concepts and propositions.

How? Henry actually gives an overview of the process in an earlier article of the *Summa*. In a text that is practically a commentary on *Physics* 1, he outlines the stages of our knowledge from a confused knowledge of general notions and specific natures to a confused awareness of propositions. After such a period of confused knowledge, we come to distinct knowledge through a process of division (*via definitiva*), using discursive reasoning. Arriving at such distinct knowledge is needed for the starting point of art and science which are genuinely universal.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> "In omnibus ergo generalibus intentionibus rerum cum aliquam illarum intelligis simpliciter, ut ens, verum, bonum, primo Deum intelligis, etsi non advertis, et quantum steteris in illo simplici intellectu, tantum stas in intellectu Dei. Si autem modo aliquo quod simpliciter conceptum est determines, statim in intellectu creaturae cadis" (*ibid.*, a. 24 q. 7 ad 2 [ed. Badius, fol. 144v K]).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, a. 1 q. 12 (ed. G. A. Wilson, *Summa (Quaestiones ordinariae)*, art. I-V, in *Henrici de Gandavo Opera omnia* 21 [Leuven, 2005], 187–89): "... quia «innata est nobis via sciendi ex nobis notioribus», quae sunt confusa magis, procedendo «in notiora naturae» quae sunt distincta et determinata magis, et hoc per hunc modum. Homo enim sibi acquirit notitiam primo de terminis et quidditatibus rerum in generali primo cognoscendo et considerando quid dicitur per nomen. Ex quibus terminis componendo et dividendo secundo concipit prima principia complexa sub esse confuso, et secundum quod homo magis est dispositus in lumine naturalis intellectus et ingenii subtilitate, tanto perfectius prima principia, tam incomplexa quam complexa, ab initio concipit. Omnes tamen generaliter ab initio ea sub esse confuso concipiunt, licet unus magis distincte et minus confuse quam alter. Sed postmodum

We may be surprised at the extent to which Henry emphasizes sense cognition, memory, and experience in the ideogenetic process, especially if we remember the opening articles of Henry's *Summa* with its quite sophisticated arguments for the necessity of divine illumination. But we must realize that Henry distinguishes knowing the transcendentals, which correspond to the divine attributes and essence, from making certain judgements regarding particular creatures, which are made in reference to the divine exemplars' influence upon the mind. In a word, divine illumination does not operate at the level of Henry's epistemology in which we find his doctrine of God as first known.

Such is the situation when we arrive at the time of Duns Scotus. Two major thinkers, Thomas Aquinas and Henry of Ghent, had advanced the theory that our knowledge of things begins with indeterminate cognition bearing upon transcendentals and terminates at distinct knowledge of items in their species and genera. Though both thinkers also emphasized the importance of sense cognition in the development of human

paulatim determinant ea omnes semper magis et magis. . . . Et haec confusa notitia principiorum in quantum huiusmodi habetur primo via sensus, memoriae et experientiae, quae consistit in singularibus, in quorum notitia non consistit ars aut scientia. . . . Principium dico extra terminos artis consistens, antequam intellectus ex ipsis universale abstrahat, quod existens in anima intra terminos artis consistens . . . et tunc maxime quando intellectus in illo universali abstracto naturam et causam rei cognoscit et veritatem videt. Tunc enim primo determinatam notitiam principii habet. Sed tamen ante ipsam ab eius notitia confusa, tam in complexis quam in incomplexis, incipit rationis discursus, primo ad cognoscendum veritatem quidditatis terminorum in principii incomplexis, quorum notitia determinata acquiritur inquirendo via definitiva ex confusa cognitione definiti in significato nominis, elicendo cognitionem eius determinatam in definitiva ratione. . . . Et tunc primo, quando termini sic cognoscuntur in definitiva ratione, intelligitur veritas et quidditas rerum, ex ipsis concipitur intellectus determinatus primorum principiorum complexorum, sicut prius eorum intellectus indeterminatus concipiebatur ex ipsis terminis cognitis in confusa nominis significatione."

understanding, the elements of confused and distinct cognition are not arranged in a very organized way. To remedy this situation and to clarify more precisely the stages of intellectual cognition is Scotus's self-appointed task.

We see his initial efforts in his *Quaestiones super secundum et tertium De anima*. In this text, he has already arrived at the trichotomous division which allows him to distinguish carefully different aspects relating to what is "first" known. We may speak of what is first in perfection or best among the things we know and in this case, speaking absolutely, God is the first known, though sensible things are if we understand "best" in relation to our own cognitive powers at present; we may speak of "first" as what aligns precisely with the human mind as its proper object (Scotus's term here is "adequate"), and in that sense being is first; or we may speak of "first" in the most usual way as chronologically first, that is, what is first known in the order of time and generation.<sup>36</sup>

One of Scotus's observations in regard to the question of what is first known in the order of time is that the distinction between confused and distinct cognition itself needs to be clarified. Thomas in particular, according to Scotus, had failed to note a capital point in regard to whether the term "confused" refers to the

<sup>36</sup> Scotus, *Quaestiones super secundum et tertium De anima*, q. 16 n. 8 (ed. T. Noone et al., in *B. Ioannis Duns Scoti Opera Philosophica* 5 [St. Bonaventure, N.Y., and Washington, D.C., 2006], 147); q. 21 n. 6 (208-9); idem, *Ordinatio* I d. 3 pars 1 q. 1-2 n. 70 (*Ioannis Duns Scoti Opera omnia*, ed. Vaticana [1950-], 3:48-49); *Lectura* I d. 3 pars prima q. 1-2 n. 90 (ed. Vaticana 16:259); *Ordinatio* I d. 3 pars 1 q. 3 n. 183 (ed. Vaticana 3:111); *Lectura* I d. 3 pars 1 q. 1-2 n. 93-94 (ed. Vaticana 16:259-60); *Ordinatio* I d. 3 pars 1 q. 3 n. 117-18 (ed. Vaticana 3:72-73). See Hubert Klug, "Das Objekt unseres Selbstandes und die okkulte Erkenntniskraft unserer Seele nach dem seligen Johannes Duns Skotus," *Franziskanische Studien* 14 (1927): 69-71; Basil Heiser, "The *Primum Cognitum* According to Duns Scotus," *Franciscan Studies* 2 (Sept. 1942): 193-216; and José Ignacio Alcorta, "De ente ut primo cognito secundum Scotum," in *De doctrina Ioannis Duns Scoti, Acta Congressus Scotistici Internationalis, Oxonii et Edinburgi 11-17 Sept. 1966 celebrati* (Rome, 1968), 2:93-103.

character of the object of cognition or the mode of awareness on the part of the intellect that knows.<sup>37</sup> We may say that I have a confused awareness of Socrates when I am aware of him as animal rather than as human; at another level, we may say that I am confusedly aware of animal when I am aware of a given animal simply as substance. As a term of intellectual awareness, a *confusum* is a universal or integral whole that contains essential or constitutive parts and to be aware of those parts through such a more general notion is to be aware of them confusedly. But, as Scotus points out, this does not mean that all of our awareness of such more general notions, or *confusa*, is always itself confused or indistinct. We may eventually have distinct knowledge of the genus animal—a knowledge to be had in zoology and biology; in such a case, we have distinct cognition of something confused in the sense of a general whole. Likewise, there may be notions of the widest scope, transcendental notions, that simply cannot be confusedly known since they have no wider notion in turn in reference to which they could be so known.

Once this clarification of confused (or indeterminate) cognition and distinct (or determinate) cognition is in place, the answers to what is known first become fairly straightforward. The first item of sense awareness is whatever moves the sense most forcibly, say, a given patch of whiteness. In the present state, the human intellect will be moved through such an act of sense cognition to a confused awareness of whiteness as the most particular species, given that the process involved is natural and a nature produces its most perfect effect unless it is prevented

<sup>37</sup> Scotus, *Quaestiones super secundum et tertium De anima*, q.16 n.27 (ed. Noone et al., 154): “Thomas faciens illud argumentum deceptus fuit per hoc quod non distinxit inter cognoscere aliquid confuse et distincte et distinctum. Verum enim est quod cognoscere aliquid confuse, scilicet minus universale, est medium inter ignorantiam puram et cognitionem eius distinctam, et sic cognitio alicuius confusa prior est cognitione eius distincta. Sed propter hoc non sequitur quod cognitio confusi, id est magis universalis, sit prior cognitione distincti, id est minus universalis, nisi loquendo de cognitione distincta.”



by something incidental. Such a confused intellectual state is an ongoing one but eventually we enter a phase of distinct intellectual awareness. In the order of distinct intellectual cognition, being is what is first known and all our distinct intellectual cognition—cognition in which we know exactly the essential elements of the objects of our awareness—begins from the concept of being inasmuch as being enters into the description or definition of whatever we know.

This general position, while ordering the sequencing clearly and distinguishing between a phase of confused and distinct intellectual cognition, is nonetheless beset with difficulties of its own. Scotus must explain how we can pass from the stage of confused to distinct cognition without allowing, as Thomas and Henry do, that being itself can be confusedly known. That is the entire thrust of his critique of the earlier authors, for they seem to him to have distinct cognition arise from something not distinctly known. To return to the text in Avicenna that figures in so much of this literature, how can we know being and thing first and not always have distinct cognition of being if being can only, as Scotus expressly maintains, be distinctly known?

Scotus's answer to this question involves the introduction of another distinction among the types of cognition. From the time of Robert Kilwardby's commentary on the *Sentences*, there is a tradition of Latin authors who were conscious of a use of habitual knowledge that did not correspond to the one familiar to us from Aristotle whereby habits are produced by temporally prior acts of the same sort. As Kilwardby remarked, there is another sense of habitual knowledge coming from the writings of Augustine that describes such knowledge as an object present in the mind without any conscious awareness of the object.<sup>38</sup> Such

<sup>38</sup> Kilwardby, *Quaestiones in II Sent.*, q. 37 (ed. Leibold, 120.114–19): “. . . [haec distinctio] est similis illi qua distinguitur apud philosophos scientia ut habitus, scientia ut actus. Non tamen est eadem, quia illi non ponunt esse habituales scientiam nisi eorum quae aliquando intellecta fuerunt actuali cogitativa, nec ponunt forte quod illa intelligantur quae

latent objects of knowledge can be present prior to even the first actual awareness of them. This use of habitual knowledge may be seen in the theological literature at precisely Scotus's period at Oxford in the disputations of the Oxford Dominican theologian Hugo Sneyth.<sup>39</sup> The distinctive feature of such habitual knowledge is that it is actually present in the soul and is able to cause actual awareness once its content is attended to, but is not itself the product of previous acts of intellectual cognition; Sneyth uses the analogy of the presence of the soul to itself to explain how an intelligible could be actually present to the mind but not necessarily an item of actual or occurrent cognition.

Drawing upon this tradition, Scotus proposes in the *Lectura* that Avicenna's famous saying is referring to habitual knowl-

solum habitu sciuntur. Quorum contrarium vult Augustinus in praedictis locis et lib. XIV *De Trinitate* cap. 13." Kilwardby is referring to the doctrine of *notitia abdita* in Augustine's texts.

<sup>39</sup> Zbigniew Pajda, *Hugo Sneyth et ses questions de l'âme* (Paris, 1996), 92: "Si de habituali, dico quod homo nouit quodam modo habitualiter animam suam per essencie presenciam tamquam illud quod est principium operacionis uitalis, cognicione dico et confusa, ut patebit. Sicut enim quis ex presencia alicuius habitus sciencie potest exire in actualem cognicionem rerum cognoscibilium per illum habitum, ita homo ex hoc ipso quod essencia anime est sibi presens tamquam principium motus uitalis absque omni aliquo habitu potest exire in cognicionem eius: et hoc est proprium cognicionis habitualis." Both Hugo and Scotus are drawing upon the teaching of Aquinas. See Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, q. 10 a. 8, "Utrum mens se ipsam per essentiam cognoscat aut per aliquam speciem" (ed. Leonina 22:321b.234-34): "Sed quantum ad habitualement cognicionem sic dico quod anima per essentiam suam se videt, id est, ex hoc ipso quod essentia sua est sibi praesens, est potens exire in actum cognicionis sui ipsius; sicut aliquis ex hoc quod habet habitum alicuius scientiae, ex ipsa praesentia habitus est potens percipere illa quae subsunt illi habitui." A physical analogy employed by Hugo is found in the arts masters' commentaries on the *De anima*. See Maurice Giele, Fernand Van Steenberghe, and Bernard Bazán, *Trois commentaires anonymes sur le traité de l'âme d'Aristote* (Louvain and Paris, 1971). Giele's Anonymus writes only on the first two books of Aristotle's *De anima*. Of interest is a pair of questions he poses

edge, not actual knowledge.<sup>40</sup> The intelligible content of being

on book 2 q. 12, "Utrum aliquis possit habere habitum scientiae et non considerare tamen," and q. 13, "Utrum habens habitum, cum sit actu considerans, alteratur aliquo modo: Dico ad primum [i.e., the first question]. Contingit aliquem habere scientiam in habitu, non tamen considerare in actu, ut contingit aliquid habere formam gravitatis ut habitum quemdam, non ut actum. Sic in proposito, et hanc comparisonem in littera tangit Aristoteles. Unde contingit aliquem habere formam in prima perfectione, ita quod non in postrema. Et hoc contingit duabus ex causis quas tangit littera. Nam scientia in habitu, etsi sit principium actualis considerationis, non tamen est sufficiens, quia nisi habens habitum voluerit, ex scientia in habitu non exit in actum, scilicet in actualem considerationem: ut habens habitum aedificandi potest non aedificare, eo quod non habet voluntatem aedificandi. Ita quod voluntas est unum quod exigitur ad reducendum habitum scientiae ad actum. Item, scientia in habitu est principium per quod innascitur actualis consideratio; sed in isto principio potest cadere impedimentum, sicut in forma gravis sursum, potest cadere impedimentum, nam potest detineri. Impedimentum autem in proposito est occupatio qua occupatur homo circa exteriora, ut circa victui necessaria vel circa delectabilia et consimilia" (88:20–89:36).

<sup>40</sup> Scotus, *Lectura* I d. 3 pars 1 q. 2 n. 80–81 (ed. Vaticana 16:255): "Nunc videndum est quid sit primo cognitum cognitione habituali et virtuali. Ubi primo sciendum est quod voco cognitionem 'habitualem' quando obiectum est praesens ut sufficienter actus intelligendi possit terminari ad ipsum, cognitionem autem 'virtuaalem' voco quando aliquid includitur in alio, et ideo intelligi potest ad intellectionem illius; et perfectius cognoscuntur quae cognoscuntur virtualiter quam quae habitualiter. Dico igitur quod in cognitione habituali et virtuali confusum est prius cognitum prioritate originis, sive cognoscitur ut obiectum 'habitualmente,' sive ut partes in toto 'virtualiter.' Quod probatur per simile: si sit forma aliqua perficiens materiam, virtualiter includens alias formas, eodem ordine perficit materiam sicut si essent aliae formae distinctae, sicut dicunt ponentes tantum unam formam: primo perficit secundum rationem formae universalioris. Cum igitur istae formae habituales, si essent distinctae, natae essent perficere intellectum ordine quodam, ita quod confusum prius, quia intellectus noster procedit ab imperfecto ad perfectum,—igitur eodem modo nunc, si includuntur plura in eodem, universalius erit prius cognitum habitualiter. Ad hoc

comes into the intellect along with the confused occurrent knowledge of the whiteness, to return to our example. But, as we may gather from Scotus's texts dealing with the mental word,<sup>41</sup> after a considerable period of confused cognition which works its way gradually up the Porphyrian tree, we distinctly

est auctoritas Avicennae I Metaphysicae cap. 5: 'Ens et res sunt quae primo imprimuntur in anima prima impressione,' et loquitur ibi de impressione habituali. — Et eodem modo quae sunt propinquiora eis, sunt prius nota habitualiter quam quae sunt remotiora."

<sup>41</sup> Scotus, *Ordinatio* I d. 27 q. 1–3 n. 74–78 (ed. Vaticana 6:92–94):

"74. Secundum declaro sic, quia intellectus noster non statim habet notitiam perfectam obiecti, quia secundum Philosophum I Physicorum innata est nobis via procedendi a confuso ad distinctum; et ideo primo, ordine originis, imprimitur nobis notitia obiecti confusa, prius quam distincta, — et ideo est inquisitio necessaria ad hoc ut intellectus noster veniat ad distinctam notitiam: et ideo est necessaria inquisitio praevia verbo perfecto, quia non est verbum perfectum nisi sit notitia actualis perfecta.

75. *Sic ergo intelligendum est quod cognito aliquo obiecto confuse, sequitur inquisitio — per viam divisionis — differentiarum convenientium illi; et inventis omnibus illis differentiis, cognitio definitiva illius obiecti est actualis notitia perfecta et perfecte declarativa illius habitualis notitiae quae primo erat in memoria: et ista definitiva notitia, perfecte declarativa, est perfectum verbum.*

78. ". . . Et secundum hoc ponitur iste ordo: primo est habitualis notitia confusa, secundo actualis intellectio confusa, tertio inquisitio (et in inquisitione multa verba de multis notitiis habitualibus virtualiter contentis in memoria), quam inquisitionem sequitur distincta et actualis notitia primi obiecti cuius cognitio inquiritur, — quae notitia 'actualis distincta' imprimit habitualem perfectam in memoriam, et tunc primo est perfecta memoria, et assimilatur memoriae in Patre; ultimo, ex memoria perfecta gignitur verbum perfectum, sine inquisitione mediante inter ipsam et verbum, — et ista gignitio assimilatur gignitioni verbi divini perfecti, ex memoria paterna perfecta. Nullum ergo verbum est perfectum, repraesentans verbum divinum (quod potissime investigat Augustinus), nisi istud quod gignitur de memoria perfecta sine inquisitione media inter talem memoriam et tale verbum, licet nec illa memoria possit haberi in nobis — propter imperfectionem intellectus nostri — nisi praecedat inquisitio." (Emphasis is mine.)

and actually cognize the notion of being that has been distinctly present within our minds in habitual cognition. Thereafter we return down the Porphyrian tree, returning after much study and thinking to know items belonging to the most particular species. Hence it is that Scotus maintains that being is the first thing known both in the order of actual (or occurrent) distinct and habitual cognition. In a word, we find in Scotus's account of human knowledge a developmental and transcendental psychology,<sup>42</sup> one heavily indebted to both Thomas and Henry while simultaneously critical of each of them.

If we reflect upon what this sketch from medieval philosophical psychology has to tell us, we see that the theological context has prompted the discussion quite clearly in the cases of Guibert and Henry. To the extent that Guibert's thought, moreover, has controlled the reference points, the theological context has actually been present throughout the discussion of what is first known. The theological context must also be seen, however, as present in Thomas and Scotus, despite their denial that God is what is first known, for they both must account for how God relates to and is knowable through the object(s) that we primarily know. Additional study of their thought would reveal, furthermore, that they both make certain accommodations in their accounts of human understanding that allow an intellectual activity such as the beatific vision to be possible, though this would be perhaps more clearly evident in the case of Scotus than that of Aquinas.

<sup>42</sup> Timothy B. Noone, "Scotus on Mind and Being: Transcendental and Developmental Psychology," *Acta philosophica* II 18 (2009): 249–82.

THE THIRD SKETCH:  
SCOTUS ON CHRIST'S NATURAL KNOWLEDGE

OUR final sketch is taken from Scotus's account of Christ's natural knowledge. As in the case of the angels, we may find our expectations do not reflect medieval ones. Medieval theologians made a firm distinction between what Christ knew or could know through his natural powers connected with his human nature and what he did or could know on account of seeing all things in the divine Word. Scotus is no exception on this score, asking in the *Lectura*, the *Reportationes Parisienses*, and in the *Ordinatio* about whether and how Christ knew everything in its proper type and whether in this connection his knowledge developed.<sup>43</sup>

To follow all the details of this discussion does not concern us, but a quick overview is that Scotus takes an extreme position here by denying that Christ learns anything in the order of abstract cognition. Contrary to what Aquinas, Bonaventure, and even Henry of Ghent, not to mention Ambrose and Augustine, had maintained, what Scotus proposes is that Christ's knowledge advanced only in the order of intuitive cognition.

The Subtle Doctor's description of intuitive and abstractive cognition is perhaps clearer in this discussion than anywhere else in his writings. Abstractive cognition is the type of intellectual awareness that prescind from the order of time, targeting solely the essences of the things known. As such, abstractive cognition may be concerned with either natures, whether generic or specific, or singulars in their singularity. Intuitive cognition is the type of intellectual cognition that directly concerns either natures or individuals as existing. In its most perfect

<sup>43</sup> Scotus, *Lectura* III d. 14 q. 3, "Utrum intellectus animae Christi novit omnia in genere proprio a principio" (ed. Vaticana 20:341-56); *Ordinatio* III d. 14 q. 3, "Utrum anima Christi novit omnia in genere proprio" (ed. Vaticana 9:459-74); *Reportatio Parisiensis* III-A d. 14 q. 3, "Utrum anima Christi perfectissime novit omnia in genere proprio" (Oxford, Merton College 62, fol. 253v).

form, the latter type of cognition can only be obtained in the actual presence of the thing known. As Scotus expresses the point, acquaintance with the terms of a contingent proposition, such as "Peter is sitting" cannot yield knowledge of the truth or falsity of the proposition in marked contrast to an abstractly known necessary proposition such as "every whole is greater than its parts," whose truth can be known through acquaintance with its terms. What this means for Christ's knowledge is that if we set aside knowledge through the Word which precontains all things, Christ could only know the contingent truth of a proposition such as one bearing upon his own crucifixion in the presence of the actual events.<sup>44</sup>

The mechanics of Christ's cognition are determined, in general, by Scotus's wish to attribute as perfect a mode of cognition to him as would be consistent with his creaturely human nature. Such a manner of cognition involves, Scotus thinks, one parallel with, though distinct from, the one found in the natural cognition of the angels. The angels, in Scotus's view, have innate (or naturally infused) intelligible species supplied by God that allow them to know things, though their thinking involves discursive reasoning and they naturally have possible and agent intellects that function in regard to knowing individuals. Likewise Scotus holds that Christ's mind, endowed though it is with agent and possible intellects, has naturally implanted within it species that are equivalent to what the agent and possible intellects would normally produce.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Scotus, *Lectura* III d. 14 q. 3 n. 153 (ed. Vaticana 20:354): "Et ideo nec hanc omnium in genere proprio habuit Christus; et sic non prius quam crucifigeretur vidit se crucifixum nisi in Verbo."

<sup>45</sup> Scotus, *Reportatio Parisiensis* III-B d. 14 q. 3 (textus ex codice Barcelona, Arxiu de la Corona de Aragó, Ripoll 53 [=H], fol. 36va-vb): "Responsio: igitur ad quaestionem dico quod anima Christi habuit omnem perfectionem cognitionis, sive intuitive sive abstractivae, quae potest convenire alicui intellectui creato. Unde dico ad rationem istam quod prima propositio est falsa naturaliter quando dicitur 'in quocumque est potentia habens illam, potest in effectum.' Potest enim praeveniri a cau-

Two difficulties are present in Scotus's theory of Christ's knowledge and he is challenged on both by his contemporaries. The first is the need to account for Christ's knowledge of a potentially infinite number of individuals; the other is to render plausible the idea that individuals could be known even by Christ in terms of their individual essences. In both of these respects, Scotus's replies yield fascinating results for his doctrine of knowledge and thereby our inquiry.

Scotus obviously struggled to resolve the first problem. In the *Ordinatio*, he proposes three potential solutions, before indicating that the third is the one that is most plausible; this is the one that will merit our detailed attention. The first of the two solu-

sis fortioribus vel a contrario vel si potentia illa sit in termino actus sui, licet quantum est in se possit potentia, non tamen passum semper habet terminum ad quem. Unde non potest agens potentia in subiecto aliquo non-carente [carente *H*] termino actus. Sed non tunc potentia esse de se sufficiens sine passo vel termino. Sed impedimentum est quia vel potest ab aliquo fortiori causa praeveniri vel propter non-carentiam [carentiam *H*] termini, ut dictum est. Ita dico in proposito de intellectu agente et possibili qui sunt rationes perficientis naturae, non tamen semper possunt in terminum etc. . . . Ista autem species respectu quidditatum [quibus *H' corr. in H*] habuit anima Christi ex infusione et ideo istas non potuit acquirere, non ex imperfecto intellectus agentis, ut dictum est, sed quia praeventus fuit intellectus eius a superiori agente ut cognosceret habitualiter singulas quidditates." *Reportatio* 2A.11.2 (Oxford, Merton College 61, fol. 159v): "Probo antecedens—primo quod [angelus] habet intellectum agentem: quia potentia activa quae non est imperfectionis in natura creata, si inest inferiori in natura intellectuali, potest convenire superiori intellectuali; sed anima nostra inferior est angelo; igitur cum intellectus agens sit potentia activa quae non dicit imperfectionem, ipsa potest competere angelo. . . . Exemplum ad hoc: si Deus creasset animam plenam formis, adhuc nihil minus [sic] haberet intellectum agentem et possibilem. Licet enim Deus causaret immediate omnem speciem in anima mea nihil minus haberem intellectum agentem et possibilem, quia non propter hoc auferret unde possem naturaliter acquirere cognitionem rerum, et si ipse non immediate creasset cognitionem, sicut patet de anima Antichristi." Cf. *Ordinatio* III d. 14 q. 3 n. 110 (ed. Vaticana 9:467).



tions to the problem of knowing a (potentially) infinite number of individuals is to allow Christ to know individuals only potentially — or, as Scotus puts it, confusedly — through the species of the specific nature; the second is to allow that Christ's intellect has an infinite number of species but to emphasize that these are received and mostly habitual at any one time.<sup>46</sup>

The third and most acceptable alternative is to allow that Christ has concreated with his intellect only the species of a finite number of individuals and the remainder he can come to know through the exercise of his own intellectual powers. That is to say, Scotus argues that Christ's intellect could gain knowledge of individual natures in a manner similar to the way in which angels do by encountering the individual and, after such intuitive cognition of the individual, abstracting through the agent intellect its singularity.<sup>47</sup> This third alternative neatly avoids positing an infinite number of species in Christ's mind, while not reducing Christ's knowledge of individuals to a con-

<sup>46</sup> Scotus, *Ordinatio* III d. 14 q. 3 n. 109 (ed. Vaticana 9:466): "Sed hoc modo, scilicet per abstractionem et habitualiter, vel non novit omnia singularia sub propriis rationibus, — puta si non habet species infusas nisi quidditatum, quia illae non sunt rationes cognoscendi singularia sub propriis rationibus. . . . Vel si ponatur abstractivae et habitualiter cognoscere singularia quantum sunt cognoscibilia ab intellectu creato, concedendum est cuiuslibet singularis speciem propriam esse in illo intellectu, et ita plures species eiusdem speciei et etiam infinitas species respectu infinitorum singularium possibilem."

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* n. 110 (ed. Vaticana 9:466–67): "Quod si alicui non videtur attribuenda esse huic animae confusa cognitio singularium nec distincta infinita per species infinitas, potest dicere quod haec anima novit habitualiter et abstractivae aliqua singularia per proprias species infusas, — et alia non novit habitualiter, potest tamen ea nosse habitualiter si illa fiant in existentia reali, eo modo quo dictum fuit in II libro distinctione 9 quod angelus potest acquirere notitiam aliquorum obiectorum per actionem intellectus eius circa illa obiecta"; Scotus, *Lectura* III d. 14 q. 3 n. 143 (ed. Vaticana 20:351): "Et tunc vel oportet dicere quod anima Christi singularium aliquorum habet cognitionem abstractivam et aliquorum potest acquirere. . . ."

fused knowledge of them. What it opens up, however, is a new manner of organizing the relationship between abstractive and intuitive cognition, a matter we shall address after seeing Scotus's solution to the second problem, namely, the ability for any human mind to know abstractly individual essences.

The second objection claims that to attribute to Christ any abstractive natural knowledge of individuals simply exceeds human intellectual capacities.<sup>48</sup> Scotus denies this claim in its entirety. He takes it as given that the objector believes an individual is intelligible in its own right. What is at stake is how our intellects work presently and how they might work in principle. If the individual is intelligible in its own right and our intellect is moved by any intelligible or being, then an individual should be intelligible in principle even for us. The trouble is that, whether because of original sin or some other unspecified cause, whatever moves our intellects in the present life to an act of abstractive intellectual knowledge must be present in the imagination. Yet to be present in the imagination it must arise from the sense and, strangely enough, this is, for Scotus, the ultimate source of the difficulty. Properly speaking, the sense does not discern the individual but the repeatable feature that belongs to a given individual; sight picks upon a given patch of blue not as this blue precisely but as blue.<sup>49</sup> The result is that it is only repeatable features that structure even our sense experience and hence that form our imaginations, memory, and understanding. If, however, our intellects could gain access to the individual's inner intelligibility, the individual's intelligibility, its individual

<sup>48</sup> Scotus, *Ordinatio* III d. 14 q. 3 n. 123 (ed. Vaticana 9:473): ". . . quod non poterat competere Christo, sicut nec nobis, et nos sumus eiusdem speciei cum eo, et nos non possumus cognoscere singularia. . . ."

<sup>49</sup> For a recent excellent study of this point of Scotus's epistemology, see Giorgio Pini, "Scotus on the Object of Cognitive Acts," *Franciscan Studies* 66 (2008): 281-315. Pini's study confirms the earlier and acute observations of Alain de Libera, *La querelle des universaux: De Platon à la fin du Moyen-Âge* (Paris, 1996), 337-39.

essence, would become disclosed; this access would doubtless be parallel with our sense awareness of an individual but would not be parasitic upon it, as in the present life.<sup>50</sup>

Now we have reached the point of what all of this has to do with changes in epistemology at the beginning of the fourteenth century. If we reflect for a moment upon what Scotus is telling us with his third solution to the problem of how Christ knows singulars, he is allowing for the possibility that a human mind endowed with ordinary human powers could gain direct access to individuals through intuitive cognition and then, once the features of the individual were cognized as present and existing, abstract the intelligible contents without attending to their actual existence, i.e., cognize those contents abstractly. True, Scotus is only allowing for this possibility in Christ to explain a quite unusual problem, and he is only claiming that it happens in Christ and not generally. But the simple fact is that Scotus's solution opens up the prospect for a quite different account of human intellectual cognition.

We may see the point theoretically before we name the person involved in the actual historical shift. If we generalize Scotus's theory of Christ's knowledge regarding individuals, we could say that we might propose an epistemology that began with direct intellectual acquaintance with individuals and then allowed for their features to become known in abstractive awareness

<sup>50</sup> Scotus, *Ordinatio* III d. 14 q. 3 n. 123 (ed. Vaticana 9:473-4): "... respondeo: ista negatio cognitionis singularium non inest nobis quia repugnat intellectui nostro — cognoscemus enim singularia sub propriis rationibus, in patria, sub eodem intellectu sub quo modo sumus (ut Deum sicuti est in se et nos ipsos, aliter non essemus beati; sed pro statu isto intellectus noster nihil cognoscit nisi quod potest gignere phantasma, qui non immutatur immediate nisi a phantasmate vel phantasiabili. Entitas autem singularis non est propria ratio gignendi phantasma, sed tantum entitas naturae praecedens illam entitatem singularem: illa enim entitas singularis non esset nata immediate movere aliquam potentiam cognitivam nisi intellectum; et quod nostrum nunc non moveat, est propter connexionem eius ad phantasiam."

through isolating the intelligible contents of the individuals as already intuitively known. In the case of Christ's knowledge, Scotus does not need the human intellect of Christ to know by way of such abstraction any of the specific or generic natures displayed in the individual inasmuch as Christ's intellect is already acquainted with such natures through innate intelligible species; he only needs Christ's mind to come to know the individual's singularity or individual essence. But the fact is that in cognizing any given individual intuitively Christ's intellect (or, for that matter, the angelic intellect) would have access to the same specific and generic content and hence could know that content. The person who was to take epistemological speculations in precisely this direction is, of course, William of Ockham, Scotus's great successor and critic. Though Scotus's and Ockham's ontologies are quite different, I think that the continuity of their epistemological thinking here needs to be noticed.

A final point worthy of mention is that the developmental psychology that exercised so much of Scotus's attention is, it turns out, a conditional one. It is how the human mind works at present. Indeed, the fact that Scotus does not allow Christ's intellect to know in a confused manner with regard to abstractive cognition indicates the extent to which the pattern of gradual intellectual awareness arriving at distinct knowledge is based upon the present situation of our intellects. Were they capable of directly cognizing individuals and their natures, our intellects could and would operate quite differently. The actual progress of our knowledge in the present state seems to be tied up with the interrelation between our intellects and the power of the imagination. We might say, then, that Scotus's developmental psychology is exclusively limited to present circumstances and gives us only glimpses of other possibilities for human intelligence.

\*  
\* \*

AT the outset of this lecture I proposed that the theological context for medieval epistemology explained many of its features including its creativity. I do hope that I have made a case for this claim. We have seen the first steps in the direction of what would become the doctrine of intuitive cognition when we examined Bonaventure's doctrine of angelic knowledge of individuals. We saw much the same kind of creativity in the rather elaborate schemes of developmental psychology in Thomas, Henry, and Scotus. Finally, we got a glimpse at one of the steps in reversing the relationship between intuitive and abstractive cognition, the move characteristic of Ockham, in Scotus's treatment of Christ's knowledge of individuals. In all these cases, of course, much more detailed study could be given to the particular doctrines, but the general sequence of the Scholastic contributions is quite clear, as is the extent to which Scholastic authors were going beyond anything suggested to them in the received philosophical literature. The sketches we have made by no means exhaust the material relating to the epistemology of high medieval philosophy. One could readily choose other examples and tell a more complex or simpler story. But even if we were to choose other authors, the same constants, I believe, would emerge.

This point can be made briefly by appealing to two examples that extend the subjects we have been treating into other forms of literature. If we consider commentaries on the *Physics*, a commonplace among them by in the final decades of the thirteenth century is the consideration of confused and distinct knowledge. Some of the commentaries even treat the relationship between the *Physics* passage and the dictum of Avicenna regarding being as first known.<sup>51</sup> But if we turn to Walter Burley's *Physics* commentary, we find precisely the elaborate and sophisticated set of

<sup>51</sup> Pseudo-Sigerius de Brabantia, *Quaestiones super libros Physicorum*, lib. 1 q. 6 (ed. Philippe Delahaye, *Les philosophes belges* 15 [Louvain, 1941], 26–27).

distinctions we encountered in dealing with Scotus: the distinction between confused cognition and knowing something *confusum*.<sup>52</sup> This reimportation into philosophical literature of a discussion originating in theological works is something more than a historical curiosity; it is a testimony to what even medieval arts masters thought about the epistemological ideas of the medieval theologians. A second and even clearer example is John Buridan's writings. Unlike Burley, Buridan was an arts master all of his life, growing old in the arts contrary to the medieval adage. Yet in his epistemology, and that of his Parisian contemporaries, we find discussion, whether with acceptance or (in the case of Buridan) rejection, of the distinction between intuitive and abstractive cognition.<sup>53</sup> Such a distinction has only a slight basis in the writings of Aristotle; it is fundamentally a distinction advanced in the works of theologians. Yet even teaching Aristotle by the middle of the fourteenth century involved employing such a distinction among modes of cognition. This should be seen, again, as a sign of the value assigned to medieval theologians' epistemological speculations on the part of those whose chief task was to teach the ancillary discipline of philosophy.

Gilson's approach to medieval philosophy, while extremely valuable in general terms, does not seem capable of addressing the variations in doctrine we have seen. Bonaventure's own semiotic metaphysics<sup>54</sup> does not figure much in his explanation

<sup>52</sup> Walter Burley, *Quaestiones super Physicam*, lib. 1 q. 3-5 (Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College 512, fols. 110vb-111rb). This commentary is one of, perhaps, three by Burley upon the *Physics* and is, according to the most recent scholarship, likely an Oxford work and written around 1307. See Edith Dudley Sylla, "Walter Burley's Practice as a Commentator on Aristotle's *Physics*," *Medioevo* 27 (2002): 301-71, especially 305-11. I would like to thank Dr. Silvia Donati for making available her transcription of the Cambridge manuscript.

<sup>53</sup> Jack Zupko, *John Buridan: Portrait of a Fourteenth-Century Arts Master* (Notre Dame, 2003), 197-203.

<sup>54</sup> Christopher Cullen, *St. Bonaventure* (Oxford, 2006), 76.

of angelic knowledge of individuals, nor do the sharp differences in the metaphysics of natures and the doctrine of individuation enter into the account of developmental psychology we saw in Thomas, Henry, and Scotus. Perhaps most telling of all, the two chief protagonists of fourteenth century philosophy, Scotus and Ockham, are quite close on what a human intellect could do were it as perfect as Christ's, even though the metaphysical pictures of the world that they would draw are quite opposed. Rather the unity and diversity behind the discourses we have examined seem to arise from the shared concern to address issues of human cognition within the broader framework provided by such comparative cases as angelic knowledge and Christ's knowledge. The metaphysical differences between the authors treated here neither determine altogether nor are entirely irrelevant to how they handle issues of cognitive theory. Metaphysics leaves the more limited inquiry into how finite minds work largely to its own devices.