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Duns Scotus and the Knowledge of the Singular Revisited

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In his *Ordinatio* John Duns Scotus writes:

I say that in the intellective part there is memory and remembering, properly so called. For presuppose that the intellect not only knows universals (which is true indeed of its abstractive intellection that the Philosopher speaks of, for that alone is scientific), but also that it can know intuitively what the sense knows (for the more perfect and higher cognitive power in the same subject knows what the inferior power knows) and that it can also know of sensations. (Both assumptions are proved from the fact that the intellect knows contingently true propositions and draws inferences from them, for to form propositions and to syllogize is proper to the intellect.)¹

This passage is typical of the way in which John Duns Scotus distinguishes abstractive cognition from intuitive cognition in the case of the intellect. I take this to be the basic text for Scotus's account of intuitive cognition and throughout this paper I shall call it the "*Ordinatio* text." We see here that one of the prime functions of intuitive cognition is to warrant the claims we make about contingent statements. Now, many contingent statements refer to singular items in the world. Such propositions as "Trixie is a cat" and "I am writing this sentence" are clearly making existential claims. However, in addition to their existential aspects, there is a further feature of propositions of this type that we must worry about, namely, the extent of the knowledge we have concerning the objects referred to by the singular terms in the propositions. That question leads to a famous problem in medieval accounts of intellectual cognition insofar as Aristotle repeatedly asserted that the intellect knows

universals while the sense knows particulars.² The fact of contingent propositions with singular terms referring to singular objects seems to sit uneasily with the division of labor that apparently underlies Aristotle's distinction between the objects of intellect and sense. How does the intellect come to a knowledge of the singular? However one answers this question, the issues of the existential warrant of contingent propositions and the access to knowledge about singulars need to be kept separate.

One interesting feature of the *Ordinatio* text is that it suggests that through intuitive cognition the intellect can know whatever the senses know. This claim raises several important issues. First, and most obviously, sensory cognition and intellectual cognition are quite different in that the latter operates without any organ while the former is organic. Moreover, if the objects of sensory experience are available to intuitive cognition, it would seem to make the existence of sensory powers redundant. Why bother with sensation if the intellect can just take a look around by itself? At the same time, worries arise about the scope of our knowledge of singulars. It would seem that we know more than the senses alone can provide. After all, we reason about singulars and that extends beyond the sensory powers of the lower animals.

Our ability to reason about and classify singulars raises the further issue of what we know about those singulars. What is it that we know when we assert that "Trixie is a cat" that encompasses more than Trixie's membership in the species "cat"? There are at least two very different possibilities here. One, we might know something about Trixie that differentiates her from every other singular in the world. In Scotus's terms, as we shall see, this would amount to knowing the "thisness" or *haecceitas* of Trixie. Second, though, we might just know Trixie as some aggregate of qualities that are not specific to her. On this possibility, we would not have any knowledge that could differentiate Trixie from any other cat possessing identical universal qualities.

In this paper, I want to present the outline of Scotus's account of our cognition of singulars showing that Scotus denies that we have any access to the thisness of singulars. However, that is not my sole project. In addition I want to show that Scotus's theory of intuitive cognition of singulars might best be understood by seeing how it relates to a persistent problem in contemporary philosophy concerning the status of propositions that make reference to singular material objects.³ I am aware

that the issue of intuitive cognition plays a rather peripheral role in Scotus's thought, although the *Ordinatio* passage, itself rather late, suggests that Scotus saw that his account of cognition required intuitive cognition to do rather a lot of important work.⁴ I shall first present the philosophical problem that I want to use in order to frame Scotus's discussion, then I shall turn to a consideration of Scotus's own view before returning to the way in which Scotus might present a solution to the problem of the reference of singular propositions.

THE PROBLEM OF SINGULAR PROPOSITIONS

In order to better understand the way that Scotus provides a striking and original way to think about this issue, I want to sketch out a context for his solution by examining an influential recent discussion of the problem. Thus, while it may appear that I am abandoning Scotus in what follows, it is only because I need to set out recent discussions in some detail. When I return to Scotus's own view below, we will be in a position to see the distinctive answer that he furnishes.

When I say, for example, that "The cat is gray" or, when pointing at a painting, say "That is beautiful," what is going on? On the simplest level, we seem to be predicating a general quality ("gray," "beauty") of a singular item ("the cat," "that painting"). Such propositions differ from those that predicate a general term of another general term ("Cats are mammals"). On further analysis, though, questions can be asked about the singular items as well. How does "the cat" pick out a unique referent? Is the foundation for "the cat" some unique property of an item that no other item shares or is it merely a reference to some collection of qualities gathered together? If the latter is all that we mean by "the cat," then there is nothing intrinsically unique to the referent; the same qualities could conceivably occur in some other item. More precisely, the question at hand is whether we differentiate between propositions that are purely qualitative and those that seem to have a peculiar reference to a particular object. Of course, on one influential view we should not make such a distinction. According to a standard reading of Frege, for example, to say "The cat is gray" is to refer to a contingent, purely qualitative property (gray). Moreover, on this view, proper names, indexicals, and demonstratives are themselves merely shorthand terms for the qualitative, non-particular constituents of the item to which the term "the cat" refers.⁵ However, this qualitative

view of propositions has been the subject of dispute in recent philosophical discussions. While the criticism of the qualitative view comes in many forms, I shall present it in what I take to be its most intuitively plausible and non-technical form.

In his important paper "The Problem of the Essential Indexical," John Perry presents the following example:

I once followed a trail of sugar on the supermarket floor, pushing my cart down the aisle on one side of a tall counter and back the aisle on the other, seeking the shopper with the torn sack to tell him he was making a mess. With each trip around the counter, the trail became thicker. But I seemed unable to catch up. Finally it dawned on me. I was the shopper I was trying to catch.

I believed at the outset that the shopper with a torn sack was making a mess. And I was right. But I didn't believe that I was making a mess. That seems to be something I came to believe. And when I came to believe that, I stopped following the trail around the counter, and rearranged the torn sack in my cart. My change in beliefs seems to explain my change in behavior.⁶

What is happening in this example? Perry takes it that his experience shows that individual propositions, those involving proper names, indexicals, and demonstratives, are different from purely qualitative propositions in that the former are constituted by an individual element and cannot be reduced to some qualitative description to explain their content. It will not do to substitute a series of accidental qualities in place of the indexical "I" in his example because no matter how extensive the description given is, it will not have the same content as the proposition containing the indexical. We can see the point most clearly if we recognize that what mobilizes the shopper to change his behavior is not the complex description, but his realization that *he* is making the mess. Although I will not argue for it here, I think that Perry is right to argue from this example to the conclusion that there is something special about individual propositions in that they are not all reducible to qualitative propositions. Much more needs to be said about the content of such propositions. For our purposes, though, it is sufficient to note that one of the primary issues is how we can know such content. It is not at all obvious that we observe such particularized properties. After all, what we can sense about the shopper seems in no way peculiar. Another way of stating this problem is to note that all the

conditions in the shopping story could be replicated by positing some identical twin or doppelganger with identical sensible intrinsic and extrinsic qualities. Yet each would, presumably, recognize the awareness that *he* was the shopper to be unique. So, the question at hand involves specifying what can ground that kind of cognitive awareness.

David Austin⁷ has constructed an example to demonstrate one of the theory's most severe problems. We are to imagine a test subject hooked up to a device consisting of a large opaque screen and two eyeholes. The eyeholes in turn are attached to separate tubes that each point to a large red piece of plastic that is of uniform color and equally illuminated at all points. Because the two tubes can be moved independently, the test subject does not know if the tubes are directed at the same object. So, through her right eye she sees a patch of red and through her left eye she sees a patch of red. She names the patch that she sees with her right eye "this" and the patch she sees with her left eye "that." Given that her eyes are focusing independently, she has two independent visual fields. Austin argues that the test subject will believe the following claims:

- 1) This is red and that is red.
- 2) This = this and that = that

However, she will not be so precipitous as to claim that:

- 3) This = that

At the same time, though, if we think about the content of these propositions, we run into difficulties. After all, the red patches are identical *qua* red patches. If we graphically represent the propositions that the test subject can consider, they would look as follows:

- a) This = this: $\langle \bullet = \bullet \rangle$
- b) That = that: $\langle \bullet = \bullet \rangle$
- c) This = that: $\langle \bullet = \bullet \rangle$

Thus, despite a plausible epistemic caution on the part of the test subject, it appears that she should believe, based on the content of the first two propositions that "This is that" and yet she knows perfectly well that she should not believe that "This is that." Here, obviously, is where things get complicated. Do we reject the intuitions that led us to posit individual propositions in light of the consequence that positing such propositions will

sometimes lead us astray? Is there some way to fix the theory of individual propositions? What we would need is some way to hold onto the idea that there is some unique content that precisely differentiates two otherwise qualitatively similar experiences.

Austin makes one suggestion for saving individual propositions that I want to consider. He points out that we typically think of belief as a two-term relation constituted by a thinking subject and a proposition. However, what if belief is not a two-term relation? Austin considers the possibility that belief might be analyzed best as a three-term relation. What would the three terms be? Well, obviously we need a believer and a proposition. Since we are not sure what would constitute such a third term, we can leave a precise characterization of the third term to the side for the moment, invoking instead a place-holder or variable. So, we have the test subject, her propositions that can all be graphically represented as " $\langle \bullet = \bullet \rangle$ " and some third term, call it "x." Such a third term opens up the possibility of our rejecting the conjunction of statements that would require someone to believe: 1) that "This is this" 2) "That is that" and 3) "This is that." In other words, whatever "x" is, it would identify uniquely the singular proposition over and above the content of the proposition by itself. Again, for the theory to have any bite, that is, in order to avoid twin or doppelgänger fixes, such a unique identifier ought to be grounded in some intrinsic property. Schematically, then, we could substitute instances of the variable "x" that are intrinsically distinct from each other and will destroy the apparent symmetry that generates the unwanted consequences of the two-term formula. Thus, there is no reason for someone to believe that $\langle \bullet = \bullet \rangle + r$ and $\langle \bullet = \bullet \rangle + s$ requires her to believe that $\langle \bullet = \bullet \rangle + t$. Despite the prospect of a solution to our problem that such a triadic analysis of belief brings forth, Austin remains skeptical because he sees no fitting candidate for our variable "x."⁸ Now, what I want to suggest is that Scotus provides us with a suitable candidate for the variable "x" in his theory of intuitive cognition of singulars. I turn to a sketch of his account of the knowledge of the singular in order to isolate the peculiar knowledge of the singular that we have through intuitive cognition.

SCOTUS ON KNOWLEDGE OF THE SINGULAR

I shall begin the discussion of Scotus on the knowledge of the singular with a brief detour through the metaphysics of the singular. Scotus, as is well known, argues that there must be a

principle that combines with the other realities present in singular objects by which those objects are singular. There are present, then, within any individual, various realities all of which are common. The common nature of a cat, for example, includes the common natures of animal, mammal, animate being, etc. Just as the nature "cat" is a more positive determination of the nature "animal," so too the individual difference is the positive determination of the nature "cat." By such differentiation, we arrive at that which can no longer be multiplied or instantiated elsewhere. The one cat in front of me is *this* cat and no other. This principle of individuation or positive determination is the "thisness" or *haecceitas* at the core of the individual and the hallmark of thisness is incommunicability.⁹ In principle, of course, this positive determination is intelligible. For example, Scotus tells us:

The singular includes the whole essential entity of [specific nature] above it, and in addition it has that ultimate grade of actuality and unity; and ... this added unity does not diminish but adds to the entity and the unity, and thus to the intelligibility. Also, the singular includes nothing that is not included in the universal except the aforesaid grade. But intelligibility is not excluded from it by reason of something included in the universal, because then the universal would not be intelligible *per se*; neither [is intelligibility excluded] by reason of the added grade of entity, because then God or a singular angel would not be intelligible *per se*; therefore, etc.¹⁰

There can be no doubt that the singular as such is intelligible as a positive determination of what is more common. Consequently, the thisness, or haecceity, provides some intrinsic determination that would differentiate two otherwise identical objects. Given the postulation of such an intrinsic determination, we also need an account of how this determining principle can become known. So while the metaphysical issue is straightforward, the issue about the way in which we know the singular must be considered. The striking fact that we shall see in the course of the paper is that Scotus in fact denies that there is any direct knowledge of the singularity of objects available to us. In spite of the intrinsic intelligibility of singulars, that intelligibility is inaccessible to us. Why? An adequate answer to this question will involve coming to grips with the general features of Scotus's account of cognition.

As a preliminary context for the discussion to follow, let me state up front that rather surprisingly intuitive cognition will

not be coming to our aid in understanding the haecceity of objects. In other words, whatever role intuitive cognition plays in Scotus's thought, it will not help us to know the individual natures of sensible, singular realities. In fact, Scotus denies that we can have any cognition of material singulars as they are singular, or as he puts it, we have no *per se* knowledge regarding the singular. Of course, we have knowledge about singulars in other respects, for example, their presence and existence, but we cannot know the singular as singular. Moreover, Scotus argues that this restriction applies to the cognitive powers of both the senses and the intellect. The former is rather surprising, since we tend to think that the operations of sense are directed at discreet sensible qualities. I sense *that* white, after all, not just any white at all.

Before looking at his argument in some detail, a caveat is in order. This discussion pertains to the knowledge of singulars that we can have in this life; that is, it is due to the fact that all intellectual knowledge has its origin in sensation.¹¹ It turns out that in the present life, the dependence on the sense powers, a dependence that can be explained either because of original sin or because of the natural harmony (*concordia*) of the powers of the soul, places severe restrictions on our ability to know material singulars.¹² There are two points mixed up in this contention. First, all intellectual cognition relies on imagination. As such, all intellectual cognition relies on phantasms that have no necessary connection with the existence and presence of the sensible object. Second, the fact that sensation itself does not get at the singular as singular suggests that the intellect's dependence on sensory experience is what keeps it from knowing the singular as singular. It is instructive to see how Scotus arrives at these restrictions.

A few preliminary distinctions are in order. Scotus distinguishes between two types of cognitional processes, namely, sensation and intellection. Sensation, in turn, can be divided into external sensation and internal sensation. External sensation concerns the sensible qualities existing in the singular object such as its color, odor, texture, and the like, while internal sensation concerns the sense perceptible whole, the phantasm. The crucial difference resides in the fact that external sensation is dependent on the presence of the object sensed. I cannot sense a cat unless a cat is present to my senses. Scotus states that the external sense is of the *simul totum*. This grasp of the whole at one moment thus includes both the perceptible qualities and

their existence.¹³ While, the internal senses, or more generally the imagination, can imagine sensible objects when they are not present, that is, they can abstract from existence, this abstraction from existence should not be confused with some sort of universality proper to the intellect. The phantasm represents the singular and its entire representative power is so invested.¹⁴ Scotus's worry here is to point out that the phantasm is not sufficient of itself to represent the universal; the precise manner in which sensation represents the singular remains unclear.

Just as there are two types of sensation, so too there are two types of intellectual cognition (*intellectio*). The first, which he calls "quidditative" (*quiditativa*), is that operation by which we consider those natures that are intelligible apart from their actual existence. This type of cognition can have as its object both what is universal and what is singular. In other words, there can be a knowledge of singulars that is not about their existence just as we can consider universals that do not as such exist. This kind of intellectual cognition is dependent on the phantasm and the phantasm, as we saw, itself carries no warrant for existence claims. The other type of cognition Scotus calls "vision" (*visio*). Vision, or more commonly intuitive cognition, concerns the existing object as existing. We must be careful here. We shall have to canvas both types of cognition in order to determine what sort of knowledge each provides concerning the singular. Here is how Scotus states the distinction between the two types of intellectual cognition:

There is a double intellection; one quidditative which abstracts from existence; the other, which is called "vision," is of the existent as existent. The first, although it is generally of the universal, it can be primarily of the singular. And whenever it is of the singular, it is of it primarily. For the singular of itself is not determined to existence, because it abstracts from it just as the universal does. The second intellection is of both together, i.e. of the singular insofar as it is existing. And in this way—explaining 'simul totum' [the whole at once] as Aristotle understands it—it does not include some accident but only existence, which does not pertain to the individual's formula, neither insofar as it is a quiddity, nor insofar as this singular participates in this quiddity.¹⁵

This passage shows Scotus underscoring the limited nature of intuitive cognition by pointing out that the existence reached in intuitive cognition is not part of the nature (*ratio*) of the object.

Because existence is neither a "quid" nor something participating in a "quid," he denies that the singular itself is an object of intuitive cognition in any primary way (*primo modo*). For an object to be an object *primo modo* it must be adequate to the cognitive activity and that takes place in the realm of quiddities, not by considering existence. It would be hard for Scotus to be more explicit: the singular nature, or thisness, of a material object is inaccessible to intuitive cognition and this contention is perfectly consistent with the *Ordinatio* passage that connects intuitive cognition with the underwriting of contingent existential propositions. An objection might be raised here concerning sensation to the effect that surely sensation is in contact with singular qualities intrinsic in singular items. It must, consequently, have some awareness of, or contact with, the thisness or haecceity of the sensible object. Nonetheless, Scotus explicitly denies that the senses can sense haecceity.¹⁶ Consequently, if we are to have knowledge of the individual nature, or thisness, of a material singular it will be through some abstractive cognitional process: all that intuitive cognition can warrant is a claim about existence.

While it looks, then, as if our most promising candidate for a knowledge of the singular will be found in abstractive cognition, it is important to remember the restrictions placed on abstractive cognition. Although the singular is intelligible *per se* in abstractive knowledge, it is not so intelligible to our cognitive powers in our present state. As a result, Scotus countenances no immediate, that is non-inferential, knowledge of either a material substance, such as this cat, or of the singularity of the substance, its *haecceitas*. All that he will allow is an increasingly distinct conceptual grasp of a material singular by a concept that grasps an exhaustive number of accidents of a substance. Scotus argues that anything that we know *per se* we know under some particular aspect (*ratio*) that can be used as a principle of identification in the absence of other differentiation. Much the same reasoning applies to the case of sensation. Vision, for example, knows color *per se*; whatever other differences there may be, any visible object can be identified as colored. However, sensation does not grasp a color's singularity. While this claim seems odd initially insofar as the gray I see in one cat and the gray I see in another cat are clearly different, Scotus is making a very subtle and plausible point. After all, there is nothing about any particular color I sense that makes that color as sensed incapable of being multiply instantiated, yet that criteria is crucial

for the notion of individual difference or thisness. Consequently, I do not ever sense a color that is singular in the relevant meaning of the term.

The most distinct knowledge we can have of a material object is available, then, when we can identify it most precisely. However, the most precise identifications available to us are not such as to get at the singularity of objects. This fact applies to both sensation and intellection as is clear from the following passage:

The most distinct intellection of the singular seems to be of some intention [concept] which the intellect knows distinctly; but positing such precisely, and prescinding from [all] time differences and the various degrees of intensity as well as all other accidents ["befalling"] such an intention, it does not seem that our intellect knows how to distinguish or differentiate this intention from the intention of any other singular of the same species that may be shown to it. . . . This whiteness may be put in the same place with that whiteness, and this remains this and that remains that, because this is not this by the fact that it is in this place. Does the sense discern that in the same place there are two whitenesses, if they are equally intense? It does not.¹⁷

It is clear from this thought experiment that neither the intellect nor the sense can penetrate into the singularity of realities; both must stop at a level of commonality that allows for multiple instantiations of the thing known or sensed. By extending the denial of distinct cognition of singularity to the senses, Scotus in effect places singularity out of our reach, at least in this life.

Other considerations are brought to bear by Scotus on our lack of knowledge of the substances of material objects. He argues that whatever affects a cognitive power immediately does so by its presence. Now, just as we can recognize darkness as the absence of light, we should be able to recognize the absence of substance when it is not present. This, of course, we cannot do. The point that Scotus is trying to make here is that if we wanted to claim that we could know a substance *per se*, we would have to posit a type of cognition that we do not in fact have. It is clear from experience, Scotus believes, that all of the knowledge we have of a substance arises from its accidents. His example of such an experience is the consecrated host. By all knowledge that we are able to have we are unable to discern the fact that the substance of bread is no longer present. There is no cognitive mechanism for discerning the absence of a substance when all of its accidents remain the same.¹⁸

Given that we have no direct, immediate, and *per se*, knowledge of either material substances or their singularity, what kind of knowledge of material singulars do we have? Scotus holds that our actual knowledge of material singulars arises by reflection (*reflexio*) on the phantasm.¹⁹ Scotus's explication of the notion of "*reflexio*" involves a progressive unfolding of specificity from the immediately given universals that are the first objects of the human intellect in its present state. The phantasm plays a major role in this process insofar as Scotus believes that there is "in" the phantasm a "confused something" (*confusum*). This phantasm potentially contains within itself either the substance with its accidents or simply many accidents somehow mutually related. When the intellect first understands, the agent intellect illuminates the phantasm and produces an intelligible species that is then known by the potential intellect. This intelligible species represents the universal, that is, the nature of the material singular as it is knowable.²⁰ In knowing the singular, the intellect abstracts each of the accidents present in the phantasm so that the nature is known with its proper accidents. To this knowledge, the intellect adds the notion of a subject with accidents and in this way comes to some sort of distinct knowledge of the material singular. This kind of knowledge is the most distinct knowledge of material singulars that we can have in this life. It is striking that this knowledge is nothing more than a concept of a cluster of accidents joined to the notion of a substance. Thus the singular is known by applying several universal aspects together into one concept. If we knew the singular in its real specificity we would know it in such a way that it would not be contradictory for the description to apply to any other object. Thus the knowledge that we have of the singular is always, paradoxically, a universal knowledge.²¹

It should be clear that all of this knowledge falls under the category of abstractive knowledge, that is, knowledge that is indifferent to existence. Scotus explicitly states that no real concept is caused in the intellect in this life except by those things that naturally move the intellect, and what moves the intellect is the combined activity of the phantasm and the agent intellect. They are, in fact, one integrated cause in the process of knowledge, producing one effect, namely, the intelligible species. Scotus explains the way in which phantasm and agent intellect are related by comparing it to the relation of mother and father in the production of a child. Both the mother and father play essential, but unequal roles in producing offspring. The

activity of the father is superior to that of the mother, he thinks, but the central point is that the mother does not receive her proper power in the process from the father, nor is the mother's power somehow latent in the father. Rather, neither separately is capable of producing a child. In the same way, the agent intellect does not give to the phantasm the latter's causal power. The phantasm is, in itself, intelligible and does not receive that intelligibility from the agent intellect. Moreover, the phantasm does not have any real effect on the intellect insofar as it exists in the extended sensitive power. So, Scotus concludes, they each have their own causal power and are related as superior cause (agent intellect) to inferior cause (phantasm) in the production of one effect (the intelligible species).²²

The phantasm, as a product of the imagination, is indifferent to existence. Accordingly, it would seem that all intellectual knowledge of the nature of the singular is both abstractive and universal in the sense that what we know about singulars is their communicable properties. Now, since our *Ordinatio* text explicitly says we can know and reason about contingent statements, there must at least be some intellectual access to the existence of the object in order to warrant such existential claims. We saw above that that was the role that intuitive cognition played. While intuitive cognition, both sensory and intellective, has no access to thisness, it does have access to existence. While, then, our sensory and conceptual knowledge of Trixie may be abstractive and consist of a progressive conjunction of universal attributes, the existential knowledge that we have that "Trixie is on the mat" must be the result of some non-abstractive intellectual process.

As we saw, Scotus juxtaposes the intellect's intuitive cognition with the cognition of external sensation. Both are of the *simul totum*. The five external senses reach the existence of sensible objects because there is a direct causal link between the external sensible object and the sensory representation of one of these sense powers. By contrast, abstractive sense knowledge, as we have seen, is the result of the activity of the imagination. Here the direct causal link is severed. The imagination is able to form phantasms that have no direct causal connection with external objects, whether because the external object is not currently present, or because the external object does not exist. Intellectual cognition must be modeled on these two types of sensory cognition: just as there is abstractive cognition in the intellect, so too there is intuitive cognition in the intellect.

Every thing that is part of the perfection of knowledge can pertain to intellectual knowledge with greater right than sense knowledge. Now the possibility of grasping the object in its reality is a part of perfection, whenever this would not be prejudicial to the power of attaining the object because of its imperfection. Therefore, the intellect can have an act whereby the object is grasped in its real existence, at least that object which is more noble or on a par with the intellect. And if one concedes that our intellect can grasp some existing object in this way, then with equal reason we could admit it is possible for any object, since our intellect has the capacity for receiving the knowledge of anything intelligible.²³

The major question involves the precise understanding of this intuitive intellectual knowledge. That we have such knowledge is expressly stated by Scotus. As our *Ordinatio* text shows, it is the ground for knowing true contingent propositions. The truth of such contingent propositions follows from the intuitive cognition of their objects, that is, the knowledge of their existence.

At this point a caution is in order. It might be thought that Scotus is proposing a rather straightforward view to the effect that whenever the senses are aware of some object, the intellect has a direct awareness of the same object. In fact, this was the way Scotus was read both by many later Scotists as well as by later thinkers in general. However, this is a misleading reading of Scotus's actual position.²⁴ Scotus is trying to explain how we can know existence when all of our intellectual knowledge apparently arises from intelligible species that are abstracted from the phantasm by the agent intellect. His answer is not that the intellect intuitively knows the existing object, but rather that the intellect is intuitively aware of the fact that the senses are perceiving an object. This claim may seem needlessly complex, or worse, may even seem to interfere with the directness of intuitive cognition. In fact, his most explicit account of the mechanism of such cognition occurs within the context of a discussion of intellectual memory. He explains that while the object initially known is not present in memory, there must be something present in the memory to account for the ability to remember past events and objects. What is present is a species, a species that was impressed by the intellect's awareness of the act of sensation, and is the result of intuitive cognition, not any activity of the agent intellect. This species is the proximate object of memory.²⁵ In other words, Scotus argues that the intellect can possess memory only

if the intellect has the ability to know intuitively the acts of the sensory power. It is important to stress that the intellect creates a species of the past sensory experience. The sense powers do not impress such a species on the intellect and consequently the intellect is directly aware of the activity of the senses. Moreover, it is the sensory act of which the intellect is aware, not some product of the experience. Thus, the intellect's intuitive cognition bypasses, as it were, the phantasm: a happy feature of the account given the abstractive nature of the phantasm. Scotus, then, avoids putting forth a theory in which the intellect is blocked from direct access to sensory experience. Nonetheless, he does block the intellect from direct access to the external object. While this may seem odd, it is consistent with his claim that in this life our intellectual cognition is dependent on sensory cognition.

Wolter has plausibly suggested that in fact Scotus's primary concern in the discussion of memory is to explain how we can extract a great deal of information out of a sense perceptible whole.²⁶ Memory plays the key role, since only if we can remember our sense experiences, can we think about different aspects of those experiences. The consequence, though, of such an emphasis is that the intellect reasons primarily about the universal content that can be abstracted from sense perception. It is only when we want to think about the existence of an object that we turn to a species in the intellectual memory impressed by the intellect's awareness of a past sensory experience of a then present and existing object. Nonetheless, he must have seen that what he was suggesting in his discussion of memory showed that intuitive cognition had wider scope than the issue of gathering information about an object previously known. The *Ordinatio* text shows Scotus aware of the expanded scope of intuitive cognition by stressing that it also grounds our contingent statements about the world and yet it does so without the intellect having any direct access to the external object. While it should be abundantly clear that we cannot know the singular as singular via intuitive cognition, nonetheless we can know that the singular exists and that we can predicate qualities of that singular via intuitive cognition.

Several points remain unclear. The most pressing is an explanation of the process by which sensory experience acts on the intellective memory. In addition, when Scotus states that the intellect produces a species, there is present an ambiguity insofar as he does not specify whether this production is the work of the agent or the potential intellect. These two questions take us

into the tricky area of Scotus's thought on the nature of the soul. After all, sensory experience takes place in the sense powers and they have much more in common with the body than they do with the intellect. By contrast, the intellect is immaterial. Scotus is quite clear in claiming that the subject that receives sensation is the sense organ and explicitly adds that sensation is not received in the soul itself. In fact, it is the organ, understood as a composite of the soul and some particular part of the body that is the subject of sensation. This understanding of the relation of sense power and soul allows Scotus the room to hold that the intellect can be aware of the activity of sense powers insofar as the one soul is also a component part of the sense powers.²⁷ This interpretation has the added bonus of cohering with his view of the relation of phantasm and agent intellect. Scotus holds that the agent intellect has no real action (*actio*) on the phantasm because the phantasm exists in the imagination and were the intellect to act on the phantasms it too would have to be extended (*extensum*). The phantasm, for its part, does not act on the agent intellect because that would imply some passivity on the part of the agent intellect and would mean that it receives something. If the agent intellect were receptive, though, there would be no need for the potential intellect. We saw above that the agent intellect and phantasm work together as ordered causes to produce the intelligible species. However, Scotus has no doubt that the agent intellect does the bulk of the work in this relation, with the phantasm concurring only "materially" (*materialiter*) or "virtually" (*virtualiter*), but not really.²⁸ So, just as the agent intellect is not acted on by the phantasm, so too the intellect is not acted on by the individual sensory experiences. The very notion of intuitive cognition bespeaks a kind of immediacy that would be lacking if the sensory experiences were causative of the intellect's production of a species. These considerations are sufficient to allow us to answer the second question as well. The species deposited in intellectual memory must be a product of the agent intellect in much the same way that the agent intellect produces an intelligible species based on the phantasm. The species resulting from intuitive cognition would be received in the potential intellect, which here must be read as identical to intellectual memory.

To sum up, when I see my cat, my senses operate in their usual fashion and the separate information of the senses is collated in an internal sense power. At this point two possibilities are present: I can use the phantasm to think about the nature of

cats or I can think about *my cat*. How do I do the latter? Again, there are two possibilities. I can create an increasingly exhaustive list of qualities possessed by my cat that in practice, if not in principle, will allow me to distinguish my cat from other cats I may encounter. Or I can think about my cat as present and actual before me. How do I do these two latter acts of thought? Both require recourse to the intellective memory and its species previously impressed by the act of intellectual intuitive cognition. How does the species differ from the phantasm in the inner sense power? Other than its metaphysical status (the phantasm in the inner sense will be in some manner material while that in the intellective memory will be immaterial) the species in memory is not abstractive. Recall that the phantasm in the imagination is in some sense “disconnected” from actual instances of perception. That is why I can imagine a gold mountain even though I have never seen one. By contrast, the species in the intellective memory has a direct connection to an act of sensation. The point is as follows: If I say “That’s my cat,” I can make the assertion only because I know that the object in front of me is my cat and that can happen only because I have sensed my cat and the intuitive awareness of my sensory act has left its species in my intellective memory. Now, when I think about my cat, there is both a universal content (“cat”) and a singular content expressed by the indexical pronoun (“my”). The universal content alone cannot be responsible for my knowledge of my cat as mine, so it must be the indexical content that is responsible and that latter content is dependent on the species resulting from my intuitive intellectual cognition of my sensory experience of my cat. Accordingly, I am suggesting that the species in my intellect that results from my sensory experience is responsible for the content that differentiates my experience from a qualitatively similar experience that someone else might have. It is not the thisness in the singular that indexes my cognition, because it is not known in this life by the senses or the intellect, but rather the fact that it is *my* cognition gives it the singular status necessary to allow for both existential judgements and the individuation of such judgments.

SINGULAR PROPOSITIONS, AGAIN

Returning to the problem raised earlier about the nature of singular propositions, I now want to propose that for Scotus intuitive cognition, and the species it leaves in the intellective memory, functions like the third element in the triadic theory of belief put forward by Austin. In other words, intuitive cognitions are

analogous to what I earlier called the variable in the analysis of individual propositions. Using the two tubes example again, the patch seen by the left eye and the patch seen by the right eye would be known intuitively in different experiences because the awareness of the two patches would result in two different species in the intellective memory. Schematically, then, we would have as representations of our sensory experiences:

$\langle \bullet = \bullet \rangle + \text{intuitive cognition/species}^1$

$\langle \bullet = \bullet \rangle + \text{intuitive cognition/species}^2$

The virtue of distinguishing the two cognitions in this way is clear. There is no reason to think that anyone who believes both of these would be committed to the belief that the two are identical. We avoid, consequently, the unfortunate result of mistakenly identifying that which should be distinguished. The unique identifier provided by the species generated in the memory suffices to differentiate the two propositions otherwise identical in content. In addition, not only does Scotus's account of intuitive intellectual cognition provide a solution to the problem of the identity of a third term in beliefs about singular propositions, it also suggests that he is committed to a notion of "wide-content" in the case of knowledge of singulars.

Consider a typical belief of the form "I believe *x*" where *x* stands for some proposition relating two terms. Such beliefs can be about propositions relating sortal terms, that is, universals or kinds ("Cats are animals") or they can be of singulars ("Trixie is a cat").²⁹ In the case of beliefs about singulars, the content will be wide just in case we cannot make sense of the item in question in terms of the content of only our minds. Thus, if someone believes that Trixie is a cat, on Scotus's account that can only be so because of some prior intuitive cognition of a sensory experience of Trixie. It is a quick step to conclude that we cannot have an intuitive cognition of Trixie without committing ourselves to asserting Trixie's existence. Consequently, then, our intuitive cognition in the intellect is dependent on the existence of the originating object in such a way that the intellect itself is not sufficient to explain the cognition. Such an implication can be drawn, I believe, from Scotus's discussion and it follows that, to borrow Putnam's striking phrase, he is committed to the thesis that the meanings we attribute to singulars are not just in the head.³⁰ That would not be the case, obviously, with our abstractive knowledge of Trixie since abstractive knowledge carries no existential commitment along with it.

CONCLUSION

I want to conclude with a bit of speculation about what may be standing behind Scotus's account of intuitive cognition. His primary worry, it seems to me, arises from the distinction between sensation on the one hand and intellectual cognition on the other. Once this distinction is made, a thinker must be very careful. Since the internal sense powers can be creative, that is, abstractive, we can have phantasms of both cats and gold mountains. If a theory of knowledge of the singular relies on some sort of intellectual reflection on the phantasm, we run into the problem of being unable, in principle at least, to discriminate between actually existing realities and merely imaginary ones. By appealing to an intellectual awareness of our acts of sensation, Scotus neatly displaces the problematic of the knowledge of the singular. Instead of having to rely on potentially misleading phantasms, we have a properly intellectual mechanism for making judgments about singulars. It is worth thinking about one rather significant lacuna in his teaching on intuitive cognition of the singular. Scotus fails to provide us with a description of the species produced by intuitive cognition. We saw before that there is a structural analogy between the agent intellect and phantasm on one side and intuitive cognition and prior sensory awareness on the other side. Now, the agent intellect produces an intelligible species based on the phantasm and that species represents universally the nature present in the item the phantasm represents. So, the intelligible species represents "cat," while the phantasm represents "Trixie," although the phantasmic representation carries no information about existence. While we now know that the species produced by the intellect via intuitive cognition carries information about existence, we are not told by Scotus what that species represents, or how it represents. I do not see how that species can function in the same way as the intelligible species derived from the phantasm, and that leads me to conclude that the species produced by intuitive cognition must represent a singular sensory experience. If so, we have here in a nascent form the positing of a type of species in the intellect that is representative of a singular, not a universal.³¹

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NOTES

1. *Ordinatio*, IV, D. 45, q. 3, tr. M. Adams and A. Wolter in "Memory and Intuition: A Focal Debate in Fourteenth Century Cognitive Psychology: Introduction, Edition, and Translation of Scotus' *Ordinatio* IV, d.45, q.3," *Franciscan Studies* 53 (1993-97), pp. 175-230. All references to other questions in the *Ordinatio* are based on the critical edition that is still in progress: *Ioannis Duns Scoti Opera Omnia*, edited under the direction of C. Balic (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanus, 1950-present).

2. See, for example, Aristotle, *De anima*, II, 5 (417b21-26); *Posterior Analytics*, I, 31 (87b37-39); *Physics*, I, 5 (189a2-8). For a good discussion of the issues surrounding knowledge of singulars and universals, see Joseph Owens, "The Universality of the Sensible in the Aristotelian Noetic," *Mélanges a la mémoire de Charles De Koninck* (Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1968), pp. 167-168, reprinted in *Aristotle: The Collected Papers of Joseph Owens*, ed. John R. Caton (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), pp. 59-73.

3. It must be noted that Scotus uses "proposition" in a different sense than contemporary philosophers. The latter use "proposition" to refer to that which is expressed by a declarative sentence while Scotus uses "proposition" as equivalent to a declarative sentence. Still, Scotus clearly privileges mental activity to spoken or written words and this warrants me to at least wonder if a problem about the "meaning" of propositions can be found in exploring the contents of thought and how they refer to objects.

4. Stephen Dumont ("Theology as a Science and Duns Scotus's Distinction between Intuitive and Abstractive Cognition," *Speculum* 64 [1989], pp. 579-99) has argued convincingly that Scotus's primary concern in the distinction between intuitive and abstractive cognition concerns the question of the notion of the scientific status of theology. Allan Wolter ("Duns Scotus on Intuition, Memory and Our Knowledge of Individuals," in *The Philosophical Theology of John Duns Scotus*, ed. M. Adams [Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990], p. 100) has stated that intuitive cognition should not be confused with existential judgments. Indeed that's true, but I hope to show that they do provide warrant for such judgments.

5. The literature on the topic of proper names, indexicals and demonstratives is vast. I have found the following resources most useful: Gregory McCulloch, *The Game of the Name* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Howard Wettstein, *Has Semantics Rested on Mistake?* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991); John Perry, *The Essential Indexical and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). My understanding of the issues surrounding proper names and the "Fregean" view was shaped by Wettstein's discussion.

6. John Perry, "The Problem of the Essential Indexical," *Nous* 13 (1979), p. 3 as cited in David F. Austin, *What's the Meaning of "This"? A Puzzle about Demonstrative Belief* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 12.

7. Austin, pp. 20–24.

8. Austin, pp. 112–115.

9. The literature on Scotus and individuation is large. My brief account here follows E. Gilson, *Jean Duns Scot: Introduction a ses positions fondamentales* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1952), pp. 444–477; A. Wolter, "John Duns Scotus," in *Individuation in Scholasticism: The Later Middle Ages and the Counter-Reformation 1150-1650*, J. Gracia, ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), pp. 271–98. The central text in Scotus concerning individuation is *Ordinatio* II, 3, 1.

10. *Questions on the Metaphysics*, VII, 15, 4 (vol. II: 257), tr. G. Etzkorn and A. Wolter, (St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: Franciscan Institute Press, 1997) 2 vols. The translation is based on the critical text found in *Quaestiones super libros metaphysicorum Aristotelis*, eds., R. Andrews, G. Etzkorn, G. Gál, R. Green, F. Kelley, G. Marcil, T. Noone, R. Wood (St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: Franciscan Institute Press, 1997), 2 vols.

11. *Opus Oxoniensis*, III, d. 14, q. 3, n. 9 (p. 306). The text can be found in *Opera Omnia*, ed. L. Wadding. Lyons, 1639 (Reprinted Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1968).

12. *Ordinatio*. I, d. 3, pars 1, q. 3 (p. 113).

13. *Questions on the Metaphysics*, VII, 15, 36 (vol. II: 264).

14. *Ordinatio* I, d. 3, pars 3, q. 1 (pp. 209–210).

15. *Questions on the Metaphysics*, VII, 15, 4 (vol. II: 258).

16. *Questions on the Metaphysics*, VII, 13, 26 (vol. II: 241). This claim is stated as an objection to a view Scotus is putting forth. However, he does not take issue with the claim in his response to the objection; indeed he seems to presuppose that it is correct.

17. *Questions on the Metaphysics*, VII, q. 15, n. 20 (vol. II: 259).

18. *Ordinatio*. d. 3, pars 1, q. 3 (pp. 87–88).

19. *Questions on the Metaphysics*, VII, q. 15, n. 8 (vol. II: 262–63).

20. For an overview of Scotus's teaching on intelligible species, see Leen Spruit, *Species Intelligibilis: From Perception to Knowledge* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), vol. 1, pp. 257–66.

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ordinatio* I, d. 3, pars 3, q. 2. For further discussion of the way in which the phantasm and agent intellect produce the intelligible species, see E. Gilson, *Jean Duns Scot*, pp. 529–32; I. Manzano, "El proceso cognoscitivo en J. D. Escoto," *Verda y Vida* 32 (1974), pp. 325–36.

23. *Quodlibetal Questions*, XIII, 8 in John Duns Scotus, *God and Creatures: The Quodlibetal Questions*, tr. F. Alluntis and A. Wolter (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 309. For the Latin, see *Cuestiones Cuodlibetales* (Obras del Doctor Sutil Juan Duns Escoto), ed. and tr. F. Alluntis (Madrid: Editorial Catolica, 1968).

24. Readings of this type are provided by S. Day, *Intuitive Cognition: A Key to the Significance of the Later Scholastics* (St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: The Franciscan Institute, 1947), pp. 39–139; C. Bérubé, *La connaissance de l'individuel au moyen âge* (Montreal and Paris: Presses de l'Université de Montréal and Presses Universitaires de France, 1964), pp. 199–202; K. Tachau, *Vision and Certitude in the Age of Ockham*, (Leden: E. J. Brill, 1987), pp. 69–75.

25. *Ordinatio*, IV, d. 45, 16–17. For a reading of Scotus along these lines, see E. Gilson, *Jean Duns Scot*, pp. 512–23; Wolter, “Duns Scotus on Intuition,” pp. 98–125, and Wolter and Adams, “Memory and Intuition,” pp. 177–79.

26. Wolter, “Duns Scotus on Intuition,” pp. 118–19.

27. *Quodlibetal Questions*, IX, pp. 26–40. Gilson (*Jean Duns Scot*, pp. 490–510) provides a good discussion of Scotus's account of the soul. At *Ordinatio* IV, d. 49, q. 11, Scotus explicitly identifies sensory cognition with the composite of organ and power and states that sensation requires an organ for its functioning.

28. *Ordinatio*, I, d. 3, pars 3, q. 1 (pp. 216–18). Gilson (*Jean Duns Scot*, p. 517) argues that the non-causal relationship between phantasm and agent intellect provides a foundation for the “autonomy” of the intellectual order.

29. For the sake of simplicity, I am only going to discuss the case of proper names in singular propositions, but I assume that a similar story could be told in the case of demonstrative adjectives and pronouns as well.

30. My discussion of wide content is dependent on the clear account provided by Gregory McCulloch, *The Mind and its World* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 175–90. It is worth noting, although discussion of the point is outside the scope of this paper, that Gilson's (*Jean Duns Scot*, p. 550) comment that there is little practical difference between Thomas Aquinas and Scotus on the issue of knowledge of the singular may be misleading. In fact, on this point about content, they seem very far apart since Aquinas argues that our intellect knows existing singulars by its reflection back on the phantasm. Now the phantasm is abstractive, that is, it is indifferent to existence. Thus, while Thomas accepts that we can make existential judgments about singulars, it is unclear how that happens given that the phantasm is intrinsically divorced from the existing singular itself. In fact, it appears that he will always be subject to a kind of skeptical pressure: how could I know that *this* phantasm of a mountain (Mt. Ventoux, for example) differs from *that* phantasm of a mountain (a gold mountain) as regards causal origin? For a brief account of Thomas's

view on knowledge of the singular, see my "Intellectual Knowledge of Material Particulars in Thomas Aquinas: An Introduction," in *Aquinas on Mind and Intellect: New Essays*, ed. Jeremiah Hackett (Oakdale, N.Y.: Dowling College Press, 1996), pp. 85–116. I hope to treat the issue of wide and narrow content in Aquinas's theory in the near future.

31. An early version of this paper was read at the International Congress of Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, Michigan in 1999. I want to thank the Department of Philosophy at Marquette University for granting me a reduced course load in Spring 2000 that allowed me time to rework the paper. An anonymous reader for this journal offered several suggestions for improving it, which I gratefully accepted; the remaining faults are, of course, entirely my responsibility.