

## SINGULAR COGNITION (*Metaphysics VII*, qq. 14 and 15)

### Some basic concepts

#### Species

A *species* is a causal intermediary between act of cognition and its object. It has representational content, but was not thought of (generally, or in standard cases) as itself an (or the) object of cognition. Species were generally understood to be caused by the object.

Species come in various kinds:

*Species in medio*: the species in the medium between the object and the cognizer. The representational content is particular. (Denied by those such as Ockham who thought immediate action at a distance was possible.)

Sensible species: species inherent in the organs of sensation. The representational content is particular. (Some thinkers – perhaps Aquinas – thought that the inherence of such a species was just what it is to sense. Others – e.g. Scotus – thought that the species was merely an intermediary, not identical with the act of sensation.)

Phantasm: a kind of unified sensible species, including more than one sense modality, and perhaps stored in the memory.

Intelligible species: species ‘inherent’ in the intellect. The representational content is particular. (Some thinkers – e.g. Aquinas – thought that the inherence of a species ‘in act’ (not just ‘in habit’) is just what it is to have intellectual cognition. Others – e.g. Scotus – thought that the species was merely an intermediary, not identical with the act of cognition.)

#### Intuitive/abstractive cognition (see q. 15, n. 18)

Abstractive cognition ‘abstracts from existence’.

Intuitive cognition ‘is of the existent as existent’.

For Scotus, abstractive cognition ‘is generally with respect to universals’, though need not be; intuitive ‘is of the *simul totum*, the singular as existent’.

Contrasting case: for ‘Aristotle’, sensation has the singular as its object, knowledge (*scientia*) has the universal as its object’ (q. 15, n. 2).

#### Abstraction

Generally: generating representations of universals from phantasms. This was usually thought to be done by the agent intellect, and the universal representations – usually intelligible species – were thought to inhere in the possible intellect. Scotus has this, but (as n. 18 already suggests) he has a wider understanding of abstraction too.

## The 'polished' account (*Metaphysics VII, q. 15*)

Basic view: the singular is intelligible, but not to us in our current state.

### Structure of the question

nn. 1-11: objections

nn. 1-4: the singular is not intelligible

nn. 5-8: the singular is intelligible even in our current state

nn. 12-32: Scotus's view

nn. 12-18: article 1: the singular is intelligible

nn. 14-15: it's intelligible *per se* (i.e. because it's a being)

nn. 16-17: it's intelligible primarily (i.e. it's what is first understood)

n. 18: how this latter claim relates to intuitive and abstractive cognition

nn. 19-32: article 2

nn. 20-30: neither the sense nor the intellect has *de re* cognition of the singular in this life – i.e. determinately of this particular, rather than of this or that particular. (The cases are both particular substances and particular accidents)

nn. 31-2: two ways of having some sort of knowledge of a particular substance along with its accidents, the first rejected.

nn. 33-41: replies to objections

nn. 33-40: replies to nn. 1-4

n. 41: very brief replies to nn. 5-8

### Some key passages

n. 18: see *supra*

n. 20: We can't distinguish two particulars indiscernible other than by haecceity (so: no difference of time, degree, accident), so we don't have *de re* cognition of the singular. This goes for sense and intellect. We do have singular cognition in the sense that what's cognized is not a universal or common nature. (There's a disagreement in the literature on this: contrast Pini and King.)

'Intuitive cognition, in so far as it is intuitive cognition, is *not merely* of the singular, but is essentially of the existent nature, as existent' (*Reportatio IV*, d. 45, q. 3, n. 13).

n. 21: We can count such particulars without cognizing the 'unity of singularity' – the haecceity, or the particular *de re*.

nn. 25-6: Angels have *de re* cognition of singulars, we don't, because singularity is the *ratio agendi* in the case of merely intelligible action (i.e. action that results in cognition), but not in natural action. Cognition in our case, but not in the angelic case, involves natural action. So this seems to block our having *de re* cognition of singulars.

n. 32: we can have some cognition of a singular substance by bundling up substance and accidents – assemble the universal concepts into one complex concept.

n. 36: Scotus's interpretation of the Aristotelian view: sense is of the particular in the sense that it necessarily has the *simul totum* as its object – the existent as existent. (Recall that for Scotus only particulars exist.) Intellect can have the abstracted universal as its object, sense can't.

n. 41: 1, 2, and 4 are about the contrast between the common and the particular, and we can have this without *de re* cognition of the singular. 3 and 5 are about the nature in the particular, which can be known. 6 is about an instance of the bundle talked about in n. 32. In none of these cases do we need *de re* cognition of the particular.

### **The 'draft' account (*Metaphysics VII, q. 14*)**

Basic thing: this discussion seems to deny that the singular can be the object of intellectual cognition. But it denies that the reasons for this are those posited by Aquinas (i.e. that the object of the intellect is the quiddity of material substance (see n. 18), and that the principle of individuation (matter) hinders intelligibility (see n. 19)).

This discussion also lacks the distinction between intuitive and abstractive cognition.

### **Structure of the question**

nn. 1-7: objections: the singular is intelligible.

nn. 8-17: body of the question

nn. 8-9: preliminary observations: if we could remove all impediments in the object, the singular could be known

nn. 10-12: singular can be represented but not known.

n. 13: if singular can be known, universal can't be. Consequent false.

n. 14: if singular can be known, then various mechanical worries about the generation of a universal species.

nn. 15-17: if singular can be known, then we could have two species of the same kind in the intellect. But we can't.

nn. 18-25: replies to the initial objections (nn. 1-7) if we take Aquinas's view that the object of the intellect is the quiddity of material substance.

(note n. 24: immaterial singulars could be known – e.g. by God)

nn. 26-31: replies to nn. 18-25.

n. 26: to n. 19, singularity isn't the cause of non-intelligibility (see n. 8 + nn. 18 and 24).

n. 27: to n. 20

nn. 28-31: to n. 21

The discussion seems incomplete, and Scotus never replies to nn. 1-7.

**Key bits**

n. 29: distinguish the object of a cognitive act from the cause of that act. God could impress a species in the sense or the intellect, but God wouldn't be the object of that act.

**Bibliography**

Peter King, 'Thinking about Things: Singular Thought in the Middle Ages', in Gyula Klima (ed.), *Intentionality, Cognition, and Mental Representation in Medieval Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press)

Giorgio Pini, 'Scotus on the Objects of Cognitive Acts', *Franciscan Studies*, 66 (2008), 306