

Thinking of Particulars

The Aristotelian Background

Two Questions from Scotus

- * Is the singular intelligible *per se*? (QMA vii 14)
- * Is the singular intelligible to us *per se*? (QMA vii 15)
- * A question in return: why are these questions questions?
 - * It might seem as plain as day that when you think of Dr Illy, founder of the Illy Coffee Co of Trieste, you are thinking of a single human being and that that your success in so doing bespeaks the fact that he he intelligible *per se* and not *per accidens*, both to you and everyone else.
 - * So, what is the issue?

The Hylomorphic Background

* Two Extensions:

* Perception (αἴσθησις/αἴσθησις)

* Thought/Thinking (νοῦς/νόησις)

Perception

- * S perceives o if and only if: (i) S has the capacity requisite for receiving o 's sensible form; (ii) o acts upon that capacity by enforming it; and, as a result, (iii) S 's relevant capacity becomes isomorphic with that form.

Thought

- * *S* thinks *o* if and only if: (i) *S* has the capacity requisite for receiving *o*'s intelligible form; (ii) *o* acts upon that capacity by enforming it; and, as a result, (iii) *S*'s relevant capacity becomes isomorphic with that form.

Thinking of (a) Stone

- * One consequence of form-reception: the object of thought remains, so to speak, where it was.
- * For it is not the stone which is in the soul, but its form. (*De Anima* iii 8, 431b29–432a1; cf. iii 4, 429a27)

An Intended Contrast?

- * Aristotle conspicuously does not feel the need to tender the same observation where perception is concerned.
- * Still, he does say:
 - * It is necessary to grasp, concerning the whole of perception generally, that perception is what is capable of receiving perceptible forms without the matter, as wax receives the seal of a signet ring without the iron or gold. It acquires the golden or the metallic seal, but not insofar as it is gold or metal. In a similar way, perception is also in each case affected by what has the colour or taste or sound, but not insofar as each of these is said to be something, but rather insofar as each is of a certain quality, and corresponding to its proportion. (*DA* iii 12, 427a17-23)
- * So, the general parallel holds, but with a difference: perhaps the object of thought was all along, in some sense, without the matter—though, of course, this might be meant in many ways.

A Possible Explanation

- * Objects of perception are perforce ‘with their matter’—are, that is, material beings, and so particulars.
- * Recall:
- * Again, some things are one with respect to number, some with respect to form, some with respect to genus, some with respect to analogy: in number things <are one> whose matter is one, in form things <are one> whose account (λόγος) is one, in genus things <are one> whose scheme of predication is the same, and with respect to analogy things as many things <are one as are> related as one thing to another (1016b31-35).
- * ἔτι δὲ τὰ μὲν κατ’ ἀριθμόν ἐστιν ἓν, τὰ δὲ κατ’ εἶδος, τὰ δὲ κατὰ γένος, τὰ δὲ κατ’ ἀναλογίαν, ἀριθμῶ μὲν ὧν ἡ ὕλη μία, εἶδει δ’ ὧν ὁ λόγος εἷς, γένει δ’ ὧν τὸ αὐτὸ σχῆμα τῆς κατηγορίας, κατ’ ἀναλογίαν δὲ ὅσα ἔχει ὡς ἄλλο πρὸς ἄλλο.
- * The thought is that things one in number (ἀριθμῶ) are precisely those whose matter makes them one in distinction to their being one in form (εἶδει).

A Further Contrast

- * For this or another reason, Aristotle tends to hold that perception is of particulars, whereas thought is of universals.
- * So, for instance:
 - * In what is capable of perceiving, the first change is brought about by the parent; what is born also already has perception, just as we have knowledge. Actually perceiving is spoken of in a way similar to contemplation. But there is a difference: what is capable of producing this actuality, the object of sight and hearing and so on for the remaining objects of perception, is external. The reason is that actual perception is of particulars, whereas knowledge is of universals, which are in a sense in the soul itself. Consequently, reasoning is up to oneself, whenever one wishes; but perceiving is not up to oneself, since it is necessary for the object of perception to be present. This holds in the same way for the types of knowledge which concern objects of perception, and for the same reason, namely that the objects of perception are particulars and are external. (*De Anima* ii 5, 417b23)

Again

- * So, since demonstrations are universal, and it is not possible to perceive these, it is evident that it is not possible to understand through perception either; but it is clear that even if one could perceive of the triangle that it has its angles equal to two right angles, we would seek a demonstration and would not, as some say, understand it; for one necessarily perceives particulars, whereas understanding comes by becoming familiar with the universal. (*Posterior Analytics* i 31, 87b37–88a7)

So, the Official View

- * Perception is of material objects; material objects are particular; hence, perception is of particulars.
- * Thought is of intelligible forms; intelligible forms are universals; so, thought is of universals.

Some Unruly Passages I

- * One must also draw a distinction concerning potentiality and actuality. For we have just now been speaking of them without qualification. In the first case, something is a knower in the way in which we might say that a human knows because humans belong to the class of knowers and to those things which have knowledge; but in the second case, we say directly that the one who has grammatical knowledge knows. These are not in the same way potential knowers; instead, the first one because his genus and matter are of a certain sort, and the other because he has the potential to contemplate whensoever he wishes, so long as nothing external hinders him. Yet another sort of knower is the one already contemplating, who is in actuality and strictly knowing this A. In the first two cases, then, those knowing in potentiality come to be knowers in actuality, but the first one by being altered through learning, with frequent changes from a contrary state; and the other, from having arithmetical or grammatical knowledge and not actualizing it to actualizing in another way. (*De Anima* ii 5, 417a)

Some Unruly Passages II

- * For knowledge, like knowing, is spoken of in two ways—as potential and as actual. The potentiality, being, as matter, universal and indefinite, deals with the universal and indefinite; but the actuality, being definite, deals with a definite object,—being a ‘this’, it deals with a ‘this’. But per accidens sight sees universal colour, because this individual colour which it sees is colour; and this individual *A* which the grammarian investigates is an *A*. For if the principles must be universal, what is derived from them must also be universal, as in demonstrations; and if this is so, there will be nothing capable of separate existence—i.e. no substance. But evidently in a sense knowledge is universal, and in a sense it is not. (*Metaphysics* M 10, 1087a)

One Unhappy Argument I

1. In thinking (νόησις), reason (νοῦς) becomes one in form with the object of thought.
2. If x and y are one in some form ϕ , then ϕ is common to both x and y .
3. If some one form ϕ is common to both x and y , then ϕ is universal.
4. If (3), then unless ϕ is individuated *per se* by some matter, thinking (νόησις) is of universals alone.
5. In thinking (νόησις) (unlike perception (αἴσθησις)), ϕ is not individuated *per se* by some matter.
6. Hence, thinking (νόησις) is of universals alone.

An Unhappy Argument II

1. S has *de re* thought regarding some object o only if S is directly acquainted with o .
2. S is directly acquainted with an object o only if S does not think of o under any mode of presentation ϕ .
3. Necessarily, if S thinks of any object o (with the possible exception of reflexive I-thoughts and bare indexicals), then S thinks of o under some mode of presentation ϕ .
4. So, (with the possible exception of reflexive I-thoughts and bare indexicals) S never has *de re* thought regarding any individual object o .
5. If S has never *de re* thought regarding some individual object o , then (with the possible exception of reflexive I-thoughts and bare indexicals) S never thinks of individuals as individuals.
6. Hence, S never thinks of individuals as individuals.