

OCKHAM ON MEMORY AND THE METAPHYSICS OF HUMAN PERSONS

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This paper explores William Ockham's account of memory with a view to understanding its implications for his account of the nature and persistence of human beings. I show that Ockham holds a view according to which memory (i) is a type of self-knowledge and (ii) entails the existence of an enduring psychological subject. This is significant when taken in conjunction with his account of the afterlife. For, Ockham holds that during the interim state—namely, after bodily death, but prior to bodily resurrection—we retain and recall our embodied experiences. This entails that the subject of our embodied psychological states can survive in a disembodied state and continue to engage in characteristic rational activities—a claim that appears to run against Ockham's own commitment to a hylomorphic conception of human beings (as essentially material). A central aim of this paper is to explore the prospects for reconciling Ockham's account of interim memory with his account of human beings.

Keywords: Ockham, Memory, Metaphysics, Persons, Self-knowledge, Medieval, Hylomorphism, Afterlife.

Like any medieval thinker, Ockham takes it as given that we are *persons*, that is, beings capable of certain distinctive rational activities such as thinking, willing, remembering, and self-awareness.¹ He likewise takes it as given that we are persons of a *specific kind*, namely, human. As such, we are unlike God and the angels in being material—or embodied—persons. Like most medieval Aristotelians, Ockham is committed to a hylomorphic conception of our human nature. On this conception, human beings, like other material beings,

¹ Here and in what follows, I am not using 'person' in the traditional sense employed by medieval philosophers especially in connection with discussions of Incarnation or Trinity. (According to this sense, a 'person' is defined as an individual substance, or 'suppositum', with a rational nature.) Rather, I use 'person' in the modern sense to refer the entity (whatever its nature) that serves as the subject of rational activities such as thinking, willing, first-person reference, etc. Using the notion of person in the latter way allows me to distinguish between a human being, on the one hand, and a human person, on the other (or, at least, it allows for the possibility that that which serves as the subject of psychological activity is not itself a human being).

are composed of matter and form—namely, of a body and a rational soul.² Finally, like most medieval Christian theologians, Ockham is committed to the view that the rational soul is not only immortal, but is even capable of disembodied existence for an interim period—namely, after death, but prior to bodily resurrection. These latter commitments, namely, to hylomorphism on the one hand, and the possibility of disembodied souls, on the other, raise an obvious puzzle for any Christian Aristotelian: what should we say about our status as human beings during this interim state? Can we, as human beings, exist in a disembodied state? The hylomorphic conception of humans as *body-soul composites* appears to preclude this possibility. After all, if death consists in the separation of the soul from the body, it would appear that human beings cease to exist at death. (Let us call this view ‘cessationism’.) On the other hand, if the rational soul survives bodily death and continues to support (without interruption) all of its characteristic rational activities (such as thinking, willing, and even, according to Ockham, remembering its embodied experiences), we might naturally conclude that human beings survive bodily death after all. (Call this view ‘survivalism’). In this paper, I explore Ockham’s views about human beings and the interim state.³ His account of the interim state is interesting in its own right, but it also serves as a unique vantage point vis-à-vis some of his broader views in philosophy of mind—in particular, his theory of memory, and his distinctive brand of hylomorphism about human beings.

Ockham’s views about the interim state emerge indirectly in the context of a discussion about memory in the disembodied or ‘separated’ soul. In this context, Ockham is concerned with a question about whether the separated soul can have memory of its embodied experiences. As we will see, he answers in the affirmative. But because, on his view, memory requires the existence of an enduring subject of psychic activity, it turns out, I claim, that memory in the separated soul entails the survival of the human person during the interim

² The gloss on ‘form-matter’ as ‘body-soul’ is, of course, an oversimplification. For Ockham, as for many medieval thinkers, the relationship between matter, body, and soul is complicated. For example, a living body can’t be straightforwardly identified with *the matter* of a hylomorphic composite. Rather a living body is itself a hylomorphic compound—indeed for Ockham, it is a composite of prime matter and the form of corporeity. Moreover, because Ockham accepts a view according to which we possess a plurality of substantial forms, on his view, the body is informed by both a sensory and a rational soul.

³ This question about the status of human beings during the interim state has been widely discussed in connection with Thomas Aquinas’s treatment of the matter. Indeed, I take the labels ‘survivalism’ and ‘cessationism’ from that debate. Representative defenses of standard Thomistic survivalism include: Brown 2007; Eberl 2009; Oderberg 2012; and Stump 2006. A non-standard version of Thomistic survivalism can be found in Brower 2014, ch. 13. The leading defender of cessationism (or what often is labelled ‘corruptionism’ in this literature) is Patrick Toner (see Toner 2009). For further references to treatments of these issues in the Thomistic literature, see Nevitt 2014 and Toner 2012. There is no evidence for thinking that Ockham develops his account of interim memory in response to Aquinas’s treatment of the interim status of human persons.

state. Interestingly, however, this does not entail that the human being survives.⁴ Indeed, while Ockham expressly allows that *I* (as the enduring subject of my thoughts and memories) exist during the interim state, he also holds that human beings cannot survive bodily death. Thus, Ockham is, I claim, implicitly committed to a cessationist account of human beings during the interim state. As is perhaps clear, Ockham's view of the interim state has implications for his broader account of our nature as human beings—implications, I tease out toward the conclusion of my discussion.

In what follows, I rely on Ockham's discussion of memory in the separated soul in *Reportatio* 4.14.⁵ Here, Ockham defends his account by first setting out his theory of memory in general. My own discussion will, therefore, have roughly the same structure. I begin (in § 1) with an overview of Ockham's theory of memory. Next, I turn (in § 2) to his account of memory in the separated soul, focusing in particular on its implications for his views about (i) our interim survival as human persons and (ii) our broader nature as human beings. As will be clear, my reading entails that, on Ockham's view, *I* am not identical to a human being, but rather to an immaterial soul. And this will be true of me both when I exist in an embodied and a disembodied state. I conclude (in § 3), therefore, by sketching the resulting picture of Ockham's conception of our status as human beings.

I. OCKHAM ON MEMORY

Ockham offers different accounts of memory over the course of his career. In what follows, I consider his most mature treatment of memory.⁶ To appreciate the details of that account, however, it will be useful to have before us the basic terminology and conceptual apparatus he uses to frame it. As will

⁴ As indicated above (n. 1), I use the expression 'human person' in a metaphysically neutral sense to refer to *whatever* it is in us that serves as the subject of rational activities such as thinking, willing, first-person reference, etc. I use the term 'human being' to translate the Latin expression '*homo*'. This latter expression (as used by Ockham) is a natural kind term referring to rational animals. Unlike 'human person', therefore, 'human being' is not metaphysically neutral: it refers to entities of a specific metaphysical type (namely, entities comprised of both a body and a rational soul).

⁵ All citations to Ockham's philosophical works (= 'Oph') are to Ockham 1967-1986 and citations of his theological works (= 'OTh') are to Ockham 1974-1988. Unless otherwise noted, all translations of Latin texts are my own.

⁶ What I am calling his 'most mature' theory is, nevertheless, a view developed at a fairly early stage in his oeuvre—namely, at Rep. 4.14. The account Ockham offers here does, however, represent his final express treatment of memory. In a slightly earlier discussion, namely, the one he offers at Rep. 2.12–3, Ockham proposes an alternative account of memory. It appears, however, that Ockham abandons this earlier account in favour of the version we find in Rep. 4.14. For my purposes, neither the details of Ockham's earlier treatment of memory, nor his reasons for jettisoning it, are salient. Those issues have been explored in detail by others. See, for example, Adams 1987, pp. 515–25, Perler 2020, and Wolter & Adams 1993.

become clear, Ockham construes memory as a type of self-knowledge. For the same reason, it will be necessary to start with a brief sketch of his account of self-knowledge and what is needed from his broader cognitive theory to understand it.

1.1 Background: cognition and self-knowledge

For Ockham, self-knowledge occurs as a kind of second-order perceptual judgement. In his own terminology, such knowledge depends on ‘reflexive’ acts of ‘intuitive cognition’ where the latter notion corresponds (roughly) to our own notion of perception. More precisely, for Ockham, intuitive cognition is a type of cognition that grounds our judgements regarding present, local, contingent, matters of fact.⁷ Thus, judgements grounded in intuitive cognition constitute a kind of perceptual knowledge: they constitute immediate, non-inferential knowledge about our immediate environment.⁸

One of the more controversial aspects of Ockham’s account of intuitive cognition is his claim that this mode of cognition occurs not only at the level of the senses, but also at the level of intellect. He postulates intuitive cognition at the level of intellect, largely in order to explain our capacity for self-knowledge. As Ockham sees it, self-knowledge is best understood on analogy with ordinary perceptual knowledge. Thus, just as knowledge regarding our immediate *external* environment is grounded in intuitive cognitions of it, the same holds true for knowledge regarding our current, subjective states. Ockham defends this position by appeal to what he takes to be obvious phenomenological and epistemological parallels between perceptual knowledge and self-knowledge. Just as perceptual awareness of extra-mental objects is utterly direct, so also is awareness of our own states. What is more, self-knowledge, like ordinary perceptual knowledge, is both evident and non-inferential in nature.⁹ Hence, it must be the case, he reasons, that we have some form of direct perception-like awareness of our own states—namely, the sort of awareness that can only be afforded by the postulation of acts of self-directed intuitive cognition. However, since self-knowledge includes knowledge of our mental or intellectual states (such as acts of thought and volition), and since such states are not

⁷ For a general presentation of Ockham’s account of intuitive cognition vis-à-vis his broader cognitive theory, see Stump 1999. For a more detailed presentation of the role of intuitive cognition in Ockham’s theory of self-knowledge, see Brower-Toland 2012.

⁸ That such judgements constitute knowledge is signalled by the fact that Ockham describes them as ‘evident’, where, for him, the notion of *evidentness* is indicative of a state’s epistemic privilege. For discussion of Ockham on evidentness, see Choi 2019.

⁹ As Ockham insists: ‘[T]his is evidently known to me: “I am thinking” (*intelligo*). [...] But the fact that it is evidently cognized requires intuitive cognition. [...] Given there is no contingent truth from which “I am thinking” follows necessarily... it cannot be *evidently* cognized [by inference] from something prior’ (Ord. I Prol. q.1.a.1; OTh I, 40).

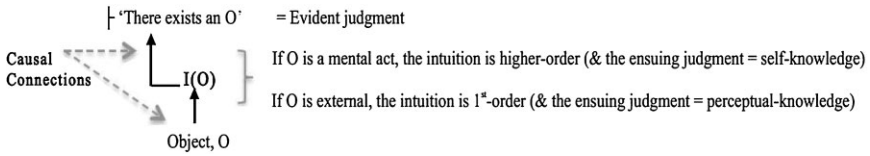


Figure 1. The General Structure of Perceptual knowledge.

accessible via the senses, it must be that there exists intuition at the level of intellect.

Ultimately, then, Ockham’s account of self-knowledge is a higher-order iteration of his general theory of perceptual knowledge. To see this, consider Figure 1 (below), which represents (*very* schematically) the structure of perception and perceptual knowledge in general.

As the diagram shows, in ordinary cases, perception begins with some worldly object—call it ‘O’. Under ordinary circumstances, the presence of the object will produce in a (relevantly proximate) cogniser an act of intuitive cognition—call it ‘I(O)’.¹⁰ This cognition in turn leads to the formation of an act of judgement—which Ockham often refers to as ‘assent’—regarding the existence and perceptible features of the object intuited. (In the diagram, I represent the mental act of judgement using the judgement stroke.) This same structure applies whether the object in question is external or internal. If the object is external, the intuition in question is a ‘first-order’ act. But if the object of the intuition is itself a mental state, the intuition is a higher-order act (or what Ockham calls a ‘reflexive’ act). And just as a first-order intuitive cognition causes a first-order judgement regarding its object (e.g. \vdash ‘John exists’), so too a higher-order or reflexive intuitive cognition causes a higher-order judgement regarding its object (e.g. \vdash ‘a perception of John exists in me’ \vdash ‘I’m seeing John’).¹¹ According to Ockham, moreover, these self-attributing judgements, insofar as they are grounded in intuitive awareness, constitute knowledge—in this case, self-knowledge.¹²

¹⁰ See Rep. 2.12–3, OTh V, 258. As indicated above, mere proximity by itself isn’t sufficient for the occurrence of cognition. For an act of cognition to occur appropriate background conditions (presence of requisite lighting, sufficient attention on the part of the cogniser, etc.) must be in place.

¹¹ It is not altogether clear why Ockham thinks he is entitled to the *self*-attributing component of this judgement. It would seem that the higher-order intuition grounds merely a judgement to the effect that there exists a first-order state, but not the further claim that such a state exists *in me*. See Schierbaum 2014 for further discussion of this issue.

¹² For ease of presentation, I have left off the distinct roles Ockham gives to bodily senses and intellect in his account of perception. On Ockham’s view, typically, perception involves *two* acts of intuitive cognition: one at the level of the senses, and a second at the level of intellect. Thus, strictly speaking, perception of some (extra-mental) object begins with a *sensory* intuitive awareness of it. This, in turn, occasions an intellectual intuitive cognition of the same object. See Ord. I, Prol. q.1, OTh I, 27.

So much for background. Let's turn to Ockham's account of memory.

1.2 Memory

Ockham recognises several different notions of 'memory'. Most salient for our purposes, however, are the two he singles out in the following passage:

[M]emory is taken in two ways. In the first, it is taken for a power having some habit or quality remaining from a past act, in virtue of which such power can [come to have] an act that is similar to and of the same character as the past act. ... In another way, it is taken for a power that can [be exercised] in an act of remembering strictly speaking, [which act arises] by means of a habit generated from past acts ... [B]y means of such a habit, I subsequently evidently cognise, via the act of remembering, that I saw this and I heard that (Rep. IV.14, OTh VII, 297–8).

The two notions of memory that Ockham identifies here correspond to two species of what philosophers nowadays refer to as 'declarative' memory—namely, memory of facts and information. Indeed, as I'll explain, the distinction Ockham marks in this passage approximates the contemporary distinction between the two main types of declarative memory, namely, semantic and experiential.¹³

To see this, note that the first of Ockham's two notions of memory refers simply to a power or capacity to store and retrieve given representational contents. Memory in this sense, as he puts it, 'is a power...to have an act that is similar to and of the same character as a past act'. Taken in this way, the content of memory is not restricted to the past, nor is it limited to events with which one has had any personal experience.¹⁴ Rather, memory includes our retention and recall of all kinds of information: facts (about the past, present, or even those that are timeless), concepts, or any other sort of knowledge. What Ockham has in mind here is what, in contemporary terminology, goes by the label 'semantic' memory' and refers to our capacity for long-term retention and processing of ideas and concepts.

Unlike the first, Ockham's second notion of memory does pertain to the past *as past*.¹⁵ Indeed, memory in this sense is not merely about the past as such, but about the subject's *own* past experience. Thus, the second—and, Ockham thinks, *the strict and proper*—notion of memory is autobiographical in nature. As he says above, 'remembering strictly speaking' is remembering 'that I saw this and that I heard that'. What Ockham refers to as memory

¹³ For an overview of the contemporary taxonomy of memory, see Michaelian & Sutton 2017.

¹⁴ Even if the *content* of memory in this first sense is not restricted to the past as past, as Ockham's remarks make clear, this sort of memory does depend on the occurrence of a past act with the same representational content.

¹⁵ As Ockham explains elsewhere, 'the intellect may regard the present as present, the future as future, and, so also the past as past, but it does this [latter] by only means of *memory properly so-called*' (Rep. IV.14, OTh VII, 299).

in the strict sense qualifies as what nowadays is referred to as ‘experiential’ (or ‘personal’ or ‘episodic’) memory. Hereafter, I shall be concerned *only* with Ockham’s account of memory in the strict and proper sense, namely, with experiential memory.

With regard to this type of memory, Ockham holds that episodes (or ‘acts’) of experiential memory are such that they always take as object the subject’s own prior *conscious* experiences.¹⁶ As he explains:

Although people are used to saying that ‘the past as past’ is the object of remembering, still this is not its object. Rather, its object is a proposition such as ‘such-and-such act existed [in me]’, or ‘I saw this’, or ‘I heard this’, or ‘I was there then’, etc (Rep. IV.14, OTh VII, 312).

To take one of Ockham’s own stock examples: suppose I reflect on a lecture that I recently heard my colleague, John, give. According to Ockham, what I call to mind in this act of remembering isn’t the event of John’s lecturing itself. Rather my remembering features my own (past, conscious) mental state or states—namely, my seeing and hearing the lecture. In this sense, memory is always self-referential. Indeed, on Ockham’s analysis, a given act of remembering takes the form of a self-attributing judgement. Thus, the object of an act of remembering is a proposition about oneself—in particular, one’s own past mental states. As Ockham explains, ‘The principal total object with respect to an act of remembering is a certain [self-attributing] proposition...for example, “I saw this here”, “I heard this there”, “I heard that John lectured on such a day”’ (Rep. IV.14, OTh VII, 296).¹⁷

Clearly, then, for Ockham, remembering is a species of self-knowledge. Indeed, he is quite explicit about this—even though he recognises that such a view might prove controversial. At one point, for example, he admits that an opponent may be inclined deny that personal memory of past events must, in all cases, be self-reflexive:

You may say that I have an act of remembering not only with respect to propositions in which my own [mental] act is a term, but also in which the activity of another person is a term. For example, I remember ‘the master lectured in the school at that time’, or ‘he debated’, and so on (Rep. IV.14, OTh VII, 296).

In response, however, Ockham insists that if a given act or state merely represents a past event as past, it does not, thereby, qualify as an act of memory—at

¹⁶ Whereas, in English, we often use ‘memory’ to refer both to the power for recollection and for an occurrent episode of recollection, Ockham language isn’t similarly ambiguous. For him, ‘memory’ (*memoria*) refers just the power for recollection, whereas he speaks of episodic remembering as ‘acts of remembering’ (*actus recordandi*). I shall attempt to follow his usage.

¹⁷ In this, Ockham is adopting the view of his predecessor, Duns Scotus. Indeed, Ockham refers explicitly to Scotus as a source for his own views at Rep. IV.14, OTh VII, 287. For more on Scotus’s account of memory, see Wolter 1990, pp. 98–122 and Wolter & McCord Adams 1993.

least not in *his* strict sense. At best, it is ‘an evident cognition that follows from a memorative cognition’. As he explains more fully:

[Suppose] I have one mental act that relates to this proposition: ‘I heard the master debate at that time’ and another act that relates to this proposition: ‘the teacher, in disputing, shouted or sat in the chair’. The first cognition is properly speaking, an act of memory. The second is an evident cognition that follows on the memorative cognition. After all, I do not evidently cognise that the teacher shouted in disputing unless I heard him dispute and shout at that time, and unless I saw him at that time—in which case, I can speak to that (Rep. IV.14, OTh VII, 296).

Thus, while allowing that memory can reliably yield knowledge (i.e. ‘evident cognition’) about some past event (say, that John shouted in lecture yesterday), this sort of knowledge—even when it is grounded in reflection on my own first-person experiences—does not itself qualify as memory. And this precisely because it is not about my past experience of those events.

As a type of self-knowledge, then, an act of remembering is structured as a higher-order judgement. But whereas self-knowledge regarding my current mental states takes the form of assent to a present tense self-attributing proposition, an act of remembering is assent to a past-tense self-attributing proposition. Moreover, as is the case with self-knowledge of one’s current states, remembering is likewise causally and epistemically dependent on such acts of higher-order intuition. As Ockham explains, ‘the evident cognition by which the intellect assents to the proposition “I saw this”, or “I heard that” (etc.) *is caused* by intuitive cognition of those [states]’.¹⁸ In other words, the self-attributing judgement that is itself the act of memory is causally dependent on the past occurrence of higher-order awareness of past acts of seeing and hearing. For, if I had not been conscious of my seeing and hearing at the time these states occurred, I would not now be disposed to recall them.

In this way, Ockham draws explicitly on his account of higher-order intuition to explain the formation of an act of memory:

It was established earlier that the intellect intuitively sees its own act and can thereby evidently cognise that its own act exists. On the basis of that evidently cognised propositional act, a habit is generated—a habit inclining one to evidently cognise that that act existed. And that latter act [viz., the one to which the habit gives rise] is the act of remembering (Rep. IV.14, OTh VII, 298).

In light of all of this, we may represent Ockham’s account of the formation and structure of memory (say, leading to the act of remembering John’s lecture) along the lines shown in Figure 2 below.

As the diagram illustrates, acts of memory depend causally on prior acts of higher-order intuition. Thus, taking the example above, it is precisely because

¹⁸ Rep. IV.14, OTh VII, 312.

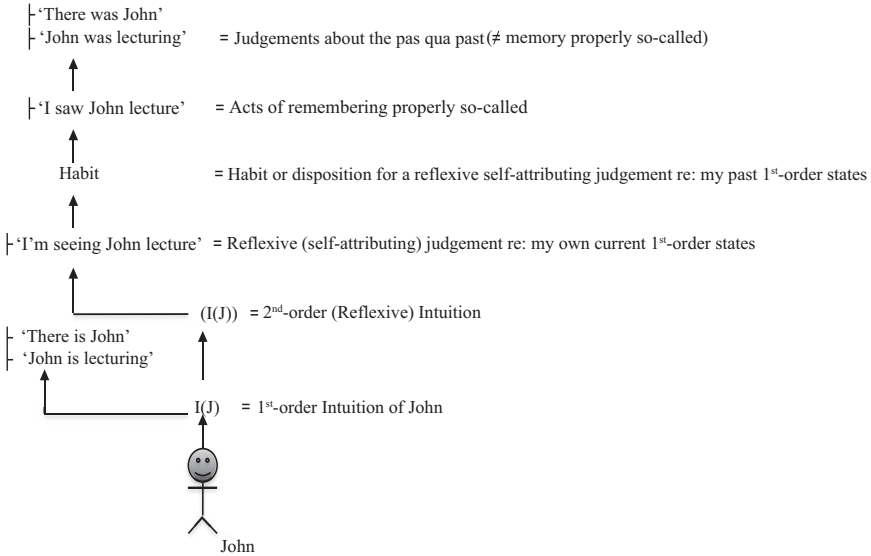


Figure 2. The Structure of Memory.

I am, at the time of John’s lecture, *consciously* seeing and hearing that lecture that I acquire a habit or disposition for subsequent acts of remembering this experience. (And, it is in virtue of possessing such a habit or disposition that I have the capacity for subsequent episodic acts of remembering.) But, as we’ve now seen, my consciously seeing and hearing the lecture is explained, on Ockham’s view, by higher-order awareness of first-order intuitive cognitions and by ensuing self-attributing beliefs involving those first-order states. As Ockham explains in the passage just above, it is the formation of such self-attributing beliefs that immediately generates in me a disposition for subsequent acts of remembering those first-order states.¹⁹

What all this goes to show is that, for Ockham, memory entails the existence of certain causal and psychological connections between my present self and my past perceptions, actions, and experiences. Remembering not only *represents* the occurrence of those past states, but the very existence of a given memory is *causally dependent* on their occurrence. What is significant about Ockham’s account of these connections between one’s present self and

¹⁹ Ockham’s account of what serves as the immediate cause of the formation of the disposition is slightly more complicated than I’ve presented it. As noted earlier, Ockham vacillates between alternative accounts of memory: on one, the cause of the dispositional state is the higher-order judgement that constitutes (present-tense) self-knowledge; on the other, the cause is *both* the higher-order judgement and the higher-order intuition that precedes it. (For details, see Adams 1987, pp. 515–25.) That said, both alternatives are compatible with the foregoing causal claim.

one's past experiences is that the account clearly presupposes the continuous existence of a single subject of thought and psychological activity.²⁰ After all, for me to entertain a memory is for me to form a judgement about *my* past mental states: *I* remember that *I* perceived (or thought, or felt, or desired) such-and-such. Clearly, then, for Ockham, the subject of an occurrent episode of remembering is identical to the subject of the past state featured in the memory. In fact, this is a point on which Ockham is explicit: 'an act of remembering necessarily presupposes a [prior] act in the one remembering... and this is because an act of remembering relates to a past act *in the one remembering*' (Rep. IV.14, OTh VII, 309–10). What is more, his account of the mechanisms by which memory is formed guarantees this result. As he points out, the habit that currently disposes a subject for an act of remembering 'is generated from a past act *in the one that remembers*' (Rep. IV.14, OTh VII, 310). Thus, if I am currently disposed to remember some past mental episode, it is only because that past episode occurred *in me*. And this is because, as we have seen, higher-order cognition of one's occurrent states is such that it structures the intellect so as to dispose it (via the formation of a habit) for subsequent memory of those very states.

It is this feature of Ockham's account of memory that is particularly salient when it comes to his views about the interim state. After all, if remembering in general requires an enduring subject of psychic activity, so too does memory during the interim period.

II. OCKHAM ON INTERIM MEMORY AND INTERIM SURVIVAL

Although Ockham doesn't directly discuss the question of the status or survival of human beings during the interim state, he does discuss questions about the possibility of interim memory. In particular, he considers 'whether the separated soul has memory—occurrent and dispositional—of things it knew when it was embodied'. In this section, I begin (§ 2.1) by exploring his answer to this question and elucidating how his answer entails a commitment to the survival of the human person. I then go on (in § 2.2) to argue that Ockham is not, nevertheless, committed to survivalism about human beings.

II.1 *Interim memory*

Ockham's view about the possibility of interim remembering was by no means uncontroversial. As Ockham himself acknowledges, memory is typically un-

²⁰ Insofar as Ockham presupposes a hylomorphic conception of human beings, he takes for granted that what serves as the enduring subject will be either the hylomorphic compound itself or one of its constituents.

derstood as a power that is identified with or dependent on faculties located in the body.²¹ Thomas Aquinas, whose views Ockham explicitly considers and rejects, is typical in this regard. Aquinas follows Aristotle in holding that memory is primarily a function of the sensory part of the soul.²² Thus, for Aquinas, ‘if in the notion of memory we include that its object is the past as past, then memory will not be in the intellective part, but only in the sensing part’ (ST I.79.6).²³ In fact, Aquinas holds that even the act of remembering purely intelligible content involves some contribution from the sense faculties since retrieving such content requires us to make recourse to sense-based images (*phantasms*) stored in the internal senses.²⁴ But, clearly, if the power associated with memory is located in, or dependent on, bodily sense faculties, then interim memory is impossible.

As Ockham sees it, however, memory properly so-called is not—indeed *cannot be*—located primarily in the senses or the sensory soul. After all, as Ockham understands it, an act of memory of this sort is structured as a kind of self-reflective awareness, namely, awareness of one’s past mental states. Like most of his contemporaries, however, Ockham holds that only the intellect is capable of self-reflexive awareness.²⁵ Hence, memory must have its locus in the intellect. Here’s Ockham:

With regard to the second way of speaking about memory [namely, as memory properly so-called], I say that as much as it is certain that it exists in the intellective part, it is not, however, equally certain that it exists in the sensitive part. The former claim [about it existing in the intellect] is proved, since any power that can cognise its own act to be past (or to have occurred before now) has memory properly speaking. But the intellect is of this kind. [...] [As for] the second claim [about memory in the sensory part of the soul], I say that memory is not in the sensitive part properly speaking. This is proved, since memory relates to its own act as a partial object, but no sense perceives its own act. Therefore, etc (Rep. IV.14, OTh VII, 298–9).

²¹ For an overview of medieval theories of memory, see Bloch 2014; Coleman 1992; and Müller 2015.

²² Aquinas does allow, however, that the capacity for semantic memory can be ascribed to the intellect. On his view, the intellect can retain and recall intelligible content (i.e. intelligible species). See his discussion at ST I.79.6.

²³ See Aquinas 1888-1906. Ockham cites this very passage, noting along the way that what Aquinas says in this context ‘seems to be the view of the philosopher, in *De memoria et reminiscencia*’ (Rep. IV.14, OTh VII, 290). It’s worth noting, however, that Aquinas’s view is somewhat more complicated than the foregoing remarks suggest. In fact, in the very same context (in response to a preliminary argument), Aquinas allows that, in fact, the intellect can cognise *its own* individual acts, and cognise them as past. Hence, in this sense, intellect can include memory of the past as such.

²⁴ See Aquinas’s discussion in *De memoria et reminiscencia*, Lectio II, nn. 316–20. For an English translation of this work see Aquinas 2015.

²⁵ This is a point on which Ockham has the advantage over his opponents. Even Aquinas, in commenting on Aristotle’s definition of memory, notes its reflexive character. See his discussion at *De memoria et reminiscencia*, Lectio I, nn. 307–8. Yet, Aquinas himself typically reserves reflexive awareness for to the intellective power.

As this passage makes clear, it is not merely the reflexivity of memory that precludes its being seated in the sensory part of the soul, but also the fact that acts of memory represent a given event as *past*. On Ockham's view, as on that of most of his contemporaries, sensory representations are not conceptual in content. Hence, they cannot represent some thing or event as *past*. For these reasons, Ockham insists, memory properly so-called 'is not in the sensitive part' of the soul.

That said, Ockham does acknowledge that our intellectual states and dispositions often depend, causally, on certain associated corporeal states and dispositions with the result that changes in the bodily states inevitably impact our intellectual capacities. Given this, Ockham admits that 'we cannot be certain whether the [habits acquired while embodied] remain in the separated soul or not' (Rep. IV.14, OTh VII, 282). When it comes to habits of memory, therefore, the fact that memory is affiliated with intellect does not, by itself, entail that the separated soul retains the capacity for memory of embodied states.

Even if it can't be proven, however, Ockham goes on to offer a number of dialectical considerations in favour of the existence of interim remembering. The first such consideration is the fact that the intellect's causal dependence on associated bodily states is merely a contingent feature of human psychology—a feature that, Ockham hypothesises, 'perhaps owes to original sin'. But, given this, it may likewise be that God also 'ordained it that, in the separated soul, he would conserve such habits [as those it possesses while embodied], and therefore the very same habits remain in the separated soul' (Rep. IV.14, OTh VII, 282). So, it is at least possible that 'when the soul is separated from the body, God ... concurs with the soul in conserving its habits in the absence of any corporeal qualities' (Rep. IV.14, OTh VII, 282). In such a case, the intellect—i.e. the separated soul—would (with divine assistance) retain memory of embodied experiences.

Secondly, Ockham thinks theological considerations provide considerable weight in favour of the *actual* existence of interim memory.²⁶ In particular, he thinks evidence for the existence of interim memory can be found in both Christian tradition and Christian scriptures. In connection with evidence of the first sort, Ockham cites St. Jerome's injunction—'Let us learn on earth things of which knowledge will remain to us in heaven'—as evidence from authority to the effect that we retain in the afterlife knowledge gained in this life. As evidence from scripture, Ockham makes passing reference to the parable

²⁶ Ockham admits that this cannot be 'proven by natural reason' and that it lies outside the bounds of experience 'so long as we are in this [embodied] state'. As he explains, 'so long as we are in this [embodied] state, we do not know by experience whether this disposition is corrupted in a soul separated from the body. Therefore, we cannot be certain whether the [acquired habits] remain in the separated soul or not' (Rep. IV.14, OTh VII, 281).

in Luke's gospel involving the rich man ('Dives') and Lazarus.²⁷ In the parable, Abraham speaks to the disembodied soul of Dives and enjoins him to 'recall that you received good things in your life, just as Lazarus received bad things'. The implication, of course, is that Dives, even in his disembodied state, can recall experiences from his embodied life. Such considerations lead Ockham to come down firmly on the side of the existence of memory in the separated soul.

II.2 *Interim survival?*

As is perhaps already clear, Ockham's commitment to the existence of interim memory together with his analysis of memory in general has immediate implications for his broader views about our post-mortem status as human persons. After all, on Ockham's analysis of memory, the bearer and subject of a current act of remembering is identical to the subject of the past experience featured in the memory. And, obviously, if memory *in general* presupposes an enduring subject of psychic activity, so too in the case of interim memory. The existence of interim memory, therefore, entails that the subject and bearer of one's conscious *embodied* states *survives* the transition to the interim, disembodied state.

Ockham's analysis of memory also entails that *I* survive. Ockham uses the first-person pronoun 'I' to refer to the primary subject and bearer of our interim mental states. For instance, when, during the interim state, I recall being bodily present at my colleague's lecture, I form a thought like this: 'I heard John lecture back in the day'. It follows that *I* (the one who heard John lecture) survive during the interim state to remember doing so. Clearly, then, Ockham's commitment to interim memory entails *some* form of survivalism. What remains unclear, however, is what we should say about the nature and status of the entity that thus survives in a disembodied state.

While Ockham doesn't address this question directly, his answer is fairly obvious. It is the intellect or the rational soul alone that survives. After all, it is the soul—not the body, or the soul-body composite—that survives and (with God's help) retains its capacity for thought and remembering. The soul is, therefore, the most obvious—indeed, apparently the *only*—contender for serving as the subject of postmortem thought, agency, and memory. For the same reason, it is the rational soul to which the first-person pronoun featured in interim memory refers. Hence, it follows that, on Ockham's view, I am identical to my rational soul.

And, of course, if this identity relation holds between my soul and me after death and during the interim state, so too does it hold during life. For, on

²⁷ See Ockham's discussion at Rep. IV.14, OTh VII, 282. The story of Dives is also treated by Aquinas, who draws much the same conclusion from it. See Brower 2014, ch. 13 and Van Dyke 2014.

Ockham's analysis, the subject of ante- and post-mortem mental activity must be identical. It follows, therefore, that if the rational soul is the principle bearer and first-person subject of disembodied mental states, so also for embodied mental states. Hence, I survive bodily death precisely because I am (even when embodied) identical to my immaterial soul.

Even if Ockham is clearly committed to the interim survival of *human persons* (that is, the survival of the enduring subject of human thought, memory, and self-awareness), his credentials as a proponent of survivalism *tout court* are far from clear. As I defined it at the outset of the paper, survivalism is a view about the post-mortem status of *human beings*. Thus, the survivalist holds that a *human being* does not cease to exist with the dissolution of the body, but rather survives in the interim state.²⁸ When it comes to the question of the survival of the human being, however, Ockham sides with the cessationist. On his view, the composite substance that is the living human being ceases to exist at bodily death. And Ockham (like all parties to this debate) takes it as given that a rational soul is *not* a human being—it is merely a proper part of a human being.²⁹ Indeed, on his view, even the abstract expression 'humanity' signifies the whole composite of body and intellective soul rather than the proper constituents of such a whole.³⁰ Thus, insofar as humans are identical to a *composite* of soul and a body, human beings cannot survive in the interim state.³¹ Even if *I* (namely, the enduring subject of first-person thought and other rational states) survive bodily death and, hence, continue to exist in the interim state, I do not survive in the interim state as a human being. For Ockham, then, the survival of the human person is not sufficient for the survival of the human being.

²⁸ Accordingly, the survivalist is committed to the view that a human being continues to exist after bodily death as an entity composed merely by one of its proper parts—namely, the rational soul. Indeed, this is precisely the line taken by those who defend a survivalist interpretation of Aquinas. See, for example, Eberl 2009 and Hershenov 2008. This is not an alternative that is available to Ockham. For Ockham, a whole (including a composite substance) is nothing in addition to its conjoined parts. Hence, for him, it's not possible for a hylomorphic composite to survive the loss of its matter. For Ockham's views on parts and wholes, see SPN 1.19, OPh VI, 987–99. His reductionism about substance is clearly expressed at QV 6.2, OTh VIII, 207–91.

²⁹ In SL I.5 (OPh I, 17), for example, Ockham expressly points out that insofar as a soul is only a proper part of a human being, the proposition 'The soul is not a human being' is true.

³⁰ Ockham maintains (in SL I.7; OPh I, 25, for example) that 'humanity' (*humanitas*) is a term that 'signifies a nature composed of body and intellective soul' rather than any proper constituent of such composite wholes. Likewise, the term 'human being' (*homo*) signifies the same composite nature that the term 'humanity' does (though, for theological reasons, Ockham thinks the term 'human being' has a further connotation that 'humanity' lacks, namely, that the body-soul composite is either self-subsistent or sustained by a further subject). For more on his account of the natural and metaphysical definitions of 'human being', see Quodl. 5.15, OTh IX, 538–42.

³¹ This result fits with what Ockham wants to say about Christ's status during the triduum (i.e. the 3-day period after Christ's death and before his bodily resurrection, during which his soul existed and his (dead) body, but the two were not united as a composite whole), namely, that during this period Christ is not a human being. See SL 2.2, OPh I, 251.

III. CONCLUSION: OCKHAM ON HUMAN PERSONS AND HUMAN BEINGS

As is by now clear, Ockham's account of interim memory has far-reaching implications for his broader views about our nature and status as human beings. As we have seen, this account entails that the soul survives during the interim state and retains all of its characteristic mental activities. Insofar as these activities include remembering its own embodied experiences, it follows that *I*, as the first-person subject of those embodied experiences, likewise survive in the interim state. Ockham is, therefore, committed to holding both that immaterial souls are persons (i.e. subjects of psychic activity) and that I am identical to my immaterial soul—even when I'm embodied. Like any good hylomorphist, however, Ockham takes *human beings* to be composite substances: namely, substances composed of a rational soul united to a body. Thus, on his view, 'it is impossible that a human being exist without a rational soul *and a body* existing' (*SL* I.35, *Oph* I, 99). It follows from this that, on Ockham's view, I am not identical to a human being. Rather, I am identical to a *proper part* of a human being.

If all of this is right, it turns out that human beings are not, *strictly speaking*, persons. For it is the soul, not the human being, that is the primary subject of of thinking, willing, remembering, and self-reflection.³² Indeed, in other contexts, Ockham specifically notes that 'the soul, not the human being, is the primary subject of its accidents' (*Expos Phys.* VI, 1, *Oph* V, 456). For, as he explains, 'I do not call 'primary subject' that which is subject [to some accident] only because a part of it is the subject of the accident, rather I call that in which the accident exists primarily because of itself—and not through a part of it—the 'primary' subject' (*Expos Phys.* VI, 1, *Oph* V, 456). Furthermore, Ockham holds that the primary subject of any property or accident is such that it can possess and sustain that accident on its own. But, as we've now seen, on Ockham's view, the soul can sustain various kinds of rational activity absent the body, but the converse is not true. Hence, on his view, the human being is, at best, only secondarily or derivatively the subject of psychological

³² In fact, this result also follows independently from Ockham's reductionism about substance. For, if, as Ockham supposes, a whole is nothing over and above its parts, then a whole cannot plausibly be understood to be a distinct or primary subject of any inherent form. Applying this specifically to the case of human beings and their psychological properties, it's clear that the composite substance, i.e. the human being, cannot serve as the primary subject or bearer of mental states. This is a point Ockham calls attention to in the course of arguing (against Scotus) for his reductionist account of substance: 'All the operations and real passions that belong to a composite belong to it through the parts to which [these properties] first belong—for example, understanding, willing, and sensing [belong to the composite] through the soul; laughing, descending, and such like [belong to it] through the body' (*QV* 6.2, *OTh* VIII, 216–7).

states and activities.³³ For the same reason, the composite human being is only a person in a derivative sense—that is, only insofar as a part of it is the proper subject of acts of thinking, willing, remembering, and so on.

It's fair to say, that the foregoing represents both an interesting and distinctive spin on the traditional hylomorphic approach to human nature. For, while Ockham adopts the standard hylomorphic conception of human beings, he nevertheless expressly rejects the standard assumption that goes with it: namely, that *we* are human beings. Of course, insofar as this is a rather counter-intuitive result, it may appear that what makes Ockham's view distinctive is also what makes it distinctively implausible. After all, it is natural to assume that when we say things like 'I am a human being', we speak truly. Yet, as we've seen, on Ockham's view, it is not—*strictly speaking*—true that I am a human being. The furthest he can go is to allow that this proposition (uttered by me) 'Susan is a human being' is true since, on his view, a proper name refers to an individual substance and, hence, to a hylomorphic compound.³⁴ But, then, it looks like Ockham's view yields a further implausible result, namely, that this proposition (uttered by me) is false: 'I am Susan'.

Determining whether and to what extent Ockham has resources to accommodate various common-sense claims and intuitions regarding our nature and status as human beings is a project that goes beyond the scope of this paper. I want to conclude, however, by briefly gesturing in the direction of the prospects for such a project.

To begin, it is worth observing that while, on Ockham's view, I am not identical to a hylomorphic composite and, hence, not a human being, nonetheless, on his semantics I can truly assert the following: 'I am human'. And this is because, for Ockham, a given sentence is true just in case its subject and predicate expressions supposit (i.e. refer to or stand for) the same thing. Thus, the truth of a sentence depends on the overlap of the extension of its constituent terms. Hence, while Ockham insists that the common noun 'human being' (*homo*) supposits for the whole composite substance (and, hence, for both the soul and the body existing as united), he also holds that the associated adjectival expression 'human' (*humanum*) supposits for a part of a human being.

³³ As Ockham explains in Ord. I, Prolog. 6 (OTH I, 144–5): 'I call 'primary subject' [of a passion] that which can suffice for it [viz., the passion] even when all else is excluded and when it is excluded nothing [can suffice]. For example, the intellective soul is the primary subject with respect [the passion of] 'being susceptible of learning', since even if everything else is excluded, the soul is susceptible of learning. But nothing can be susceptible of learning if the intellective soul is excluded. A human being is the subject of its passions, but not nevertheless the primary subject of them. Rather, it is the secondary subject because if a human being is destroyed, the soul is still susceptible of learning.'

³⁴ Ockham is quite explicit in insisting that a proper name, such as 'Socrates', refers to the individual human being and not to any part of said human being. As he says: 'Socrates is a nature composed of a body and an intellective soul' (SL I.7, OPH I, 26). Thus, Socrates ceases to exist when the human being that is Socrates ceases to exist.

Indeed, he specifically highlights these expressions ('human'/'human being') as an example of a case in which terms related as concrete/abstract forms of a given expression function in such a way that

the concrete term supposits for a part of a thing and the abstract supposits for the whole, or vice-versa as, for example, in the case of 'soul' (*anima*) and 'ensouled' (*animatum*). For a human being is ensouled, but he is not a soul and so 'ensouled' supposits for the whole human being, whereas 'soul' supposits for a part of it. But in the propositions 'A soul is human' and 'A soul is not a human being', the term 'human being', which is abstract, supposits for the whole and 'human' for the soul, which is a part (SL I.5, OPh I, 17).

Thus, inasmuch as 'soul' and 'human' supposit for the same thing the following is true: 'the soul is human'.³⁵ Not only that, but inasmuch as I am identical to my rational soul it follows that 'I am human' is likewise true.

There is, moreover, reason to think that Ockham even allows for an extended sense in which 'I am a human being' and 'I am Susan' count as true. To see this, we may start by noting a certain flexibility in Ockham's usage of the notion of essence or 'quiddity'.³⁶ As Ockham recognises, in general, to speak of the essence or 'quiddity' of a thing we designate 'everything which belongs to the essence of a thing'. Thus, the quiddity of human beings is its matter and intellective soul. Ockham allows, however, that we may also take the notion of 'quiddity' as referring to 'the ultimate form by which something is distinguished from every other thing'. In this sense, the intellective soul itself, insofar as it is the ultimate form, or principal part of the composite substance, is the quiddity of a human being. This allows for a similar flexibility in the predication of the term 'human being'. Strictly speaking, it refers to the composite substance (i.e. 'everything that belongs to the essence' of the human being), but it can also, in an extended sense, refer just its 'ultimate part', namely, the rational soul. If this is right, however, then there is a sense in which 'I am a human being' turns out to be true after all.

A similar case could be made, it would seem, for proper names. For, according to Ockham, the rational soul is not only that in virtue of which one is a human being, it is also that in virtue of which one is (and remains over time) this very human being. Consider, for example, Ockham's account of personal identity in connection with the case of bodily resurrection. According to Ockham, after the interim period, a disembodied soul—say, Socrates's soul—will be eventually reunited to a body but—as Ockham emphasises—this body will not consist of the same matter as Socrates's body before death.³⁷ In this

³⁵ What is more, inasmuch as the rational soul is essentially disposed to be united to a body, and, hence, essentially disposed to be part of a human being, this would appear to be true even of a disembodied soul.

³⁶ At Rep. IV.13, OTh VII, 263, for example, Ockham 'sets out a certain distinction concerning quiddity', namely, three distinct senses of the term. I'm grateful to Claude Panaccio for calling my attention to this point and this passage.

³⁷ See Rep. IV.13, OTh VII, 260.

respect, the resurrected individual will not be identical to the original. And yet Ockham thinks we can ‘easily say’ say not only that resurrected individual is Socrates, but also that he is ‘numerically the same human being’ as the one who died.³⁸ For, according to Ockham, a substance can be said to be the same so long as it retains its ‘specific principal part’.³⁹ In the case of human beings, as we’ve already seen, this is the rational soul. In light of all of this, we might expect that here too Ockham would allow for an extended sense in which ‘Socrates’ applies to the soul insofar as it is ‘the principal part’ of the composite substance to which the name properly applies.

To be sure, all of this is somewhat speculative. I have found no explicit treatment of the semantics of first-person pronouns in Ockham, nor have I found any explicit allowance for an extended sense of proper names such that ‘Socrates’ might continue to refer when Socrates’s rational soul is separated from his body. This is not surprising given that, as I noted at the outset, Ockham does not explicitly take up questions about the status of human being during the interim state. That said, it is worth noting that one does find explicit treatment of such issues among Ockham’s contemporaries and successors. For example, John Buridan—an immediate successor to, and (in some respects) a follower of, Ockham—describes a position very much like the one I am attributing to Ockham. Indeed, he even begins to tease out the semantic implications (or, better, complications) of such a position. I shall close, therefore, with the relevant passage from Buridan:

Others say that although a name is imposed first to signify the composite substance, it is, nevertheless, transferred to signify the form and sometimes to supposit for it, due to its great preeminence over matter [...]. So then, insofar as the name ‘human being’ signifies the composite, this human being always will exist, but it will not always be a human being due to the connotation [of the term, namely, that ‘human being’ not only signifies the substantial parts of a human, but connotes their union], as was said. But, insofar as ‘human being’ signifies the form, the human being will always exist, and will always be a human being, and will never be corrupted (*Questiones De anima* III.6, n. 26).⁴⁰

What is significant about the view described in this passage is that while it embodies a cessationist account of the human being, it nevertheless allows for

³⁸ As Ockham says: ‘in the resurrection the human being will not be identical in every way before and after the resurrection. For according to everyone, there is not in an unqualified sense numerically the same matter in the one resurrected as was had before resurrection. [...] Nevertheless, it can easily be granted that the human being is, nevertheless, numerically the same in number since the intellective soul, which is a simple form, remains in the whole and in every part of the whole.’ (Rep. IV, 13, OTh VII, 264).

³⁹ To be clear, Ockham is not saying the principal part is itself the substance (e.g. he’s not saying that the soul is the human being). Rather, the claim is that so long as any substance retains that part, it is the same substance.

⁴⁰ See Buridan 2023. A detailed discussion of Buridan’s treatment of this question can be found in Zupko 2007.

a sense in which ‘human being’ is truly predicable of the human soul, despite the fact that a soul is not, properly speaking, human being.⁴¹ For, as Buridan explains, there is a primary and secondary sense of the term ‘human being’, which while it is ‘imposed first to signify the composite substance, nevertheless, is transferred to signify the form and sometimes to supposit for it, due to its great pre-eminence over matter’. Hence, strictly speaking, a human being ‘will not always exist’ since the composite substance ceases to exist upon bodily death. Nevertheless, there is a derivative sense in which it can be said that the human being—Socrates, say—survives bodily death, insofar as his principle (or ‘preeminent’) part continues to exist. And in this sense, it can be said that ‘the human being will always exist, and will always be a human being’.

Here we have an account much like the one I have ascribed to Ockham: namely, an account on which the rational soul itself—insofar as it is the principal part and the ultimate form of the composite human being—may itself be truly (if only in an extended, improper sense) designated by the term ‘human being’. For the same reason, we have an account on which it is true (if only in an extended, improper sense) for me to assert ‘I am a human being’ both when I exist in an embodied and a disembodied state. Presumably, much the same case could be made for a similarly extended use of proper names.

Admittedly, nothing in this passage amounts to a detailed (or, really, even a rough) working out of the semantics of the view in question. However, the view Buridan describes hews fairly closely to the view I have attributed to Ockham and, in that respect, his discussion lends plausibility to the attribution itself. For my purposes here, that is sufficient.⁴²

⁴¹ It is worth noting, that nothing in this strategy counts against the cessationist account of the interim status of human beings during the interim state. To allow for a non-standard usage of ‘human being’, according to which the signification of the term may be ‘transferred’ from the whole to a part, does not thereby entail survivalism about human beings. In fact, in this same passage, Buridan (relying on Aristotle’s authority makes clear) that in this respect the term human being is equivocal. For, while it may apply both to the composite substance and to intellectual soul by itself, nevertheless, it does ‘not [do so] by a single account’.

⁴² I first began work on this paper in 2015 as part of a Templeton Funded writing workshop, ‘Exploring the Interim State’ organised by Tim Pawl and Kevin Tempe. I presented versions of this paper to philosophy departments at Rice University and at Colorado State University, discussed it with the Montreal area Colloquium on Ancient and Medieval Philosophy, and presented it at the Brackenridge Philosophy Symposium, and the 2018 Cornell Colloquium in Medieval Philosophy. I’m grateful for fruitful discussions with audience members on these occasions, but special thanks go to Uriah Kriegel, Stephen Menn, and Marilyn Adams for particularly helpful questions, comments, and discussions. I am also very grateful to Jeffery Brower and Claude Panaccio, both of whom gave excellent feedback along the way.

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