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chapter 7

Activity and Subjectivity: Olivi on the Soul and Self-Consciousness

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1 Introduction

There is an important, but little noticed, connection between Olivi's views about the active nature of the soul, on the one hand, and his views about the first-person character of conscious experience, on the other.[1] In what follows, I propose to elucidate this connection by arguing for two distinct, but related claims. First, I argue that Olivi's conception of the soul as essentially active and essentially reflexive entails a commitment on his part to a kind of innate, perpetual self-knowing. Second, I argue that, for Olivi, this permanent, active self-reflexivity plays an essential role in explaining the subjective character of our conscious states. Taken together, these claims show that, on Olivi's view, it is only because the soul is the primal, self-reflexive source of its cognitive activity that it experiences itself as both the principle source and first-person subject of its episodic states.

In order to set the stage, I begin, in section two, by situating Olivi's discussion vis-à-vis the broader, later medieval debate about consciousness and self-knowledge.[2] This done, I turn, in section three, to defend the first of my two claims, namely that Olivi's views about the active nature of the soul motivates his commitment to a kind of innate, perpetual mode of self-know-

1 On Olivi's view of the active nature of the soul and the freedom of the will, see also chapter eight by José Filipe Silva in this volume.

2 I shall, at points, speak of medieval discussions of mind's reflexive awareness as "consciousness." While speaking of reflexive awareness in this way frames it in a terminology foreign to medieval discussions themselves, it is fair to say that the phenomena targeted in medieval treatments of mental reflexivity shares a great deal in common with what, in contemporary philosophy, goes under the heading of "phenomenal consciousness." This will be made clearer in the discussion to come, but a full defense of this claim—especially in connection with Olivi—can be found in Susan Brower-Toland, "Olivi on Consciousness and Self-knowledge: The Phenomenology, Metaphysics, and Epistemology of Mind's Reflexivity," *Oxford Studies in Medieval Philosophy* 1 (2013): 136–171.

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ing.3 Thus, I argue that, for Olivi, this mode of self-knowing requires two things: the soul functioning as a sufficient (i.e., independent) source of its reflexive awareness, and the soul's being permanently engaged in reflexive activity. Finally, in section four, I defend the second of my two claims by drawing out the connection Olivi's sees between the soul's permanent, active reflexivity, on the one hand, and the subjective character of our conscious experience, on the other.

2 Background

In general, Olivi's approach to issues in philosophical psychology is characterized by a broad antipathy for the influence of Averroist interpretation of Aristotle, accompanied by an express fidelity to authority of Augustine.4 His treatment of the soul and its knowledge of itself are no exception to this rule. Indeed, as we shall see, he develops and defends his account of the soul and self-knowledge explicitly in opposition to the neo-Aristotelian views defended by Thomas Aquinas and others.5 In order to better appreciate the basic shape of Olivi's account, it will be useful to frame it against the background of the larger thirteenth-century debate between neo-Aristotelians and neo-Augustinians on the nature of reflexive awareness—a debate that not only precedes and motivates his account, but also shapes the way he argues for it.

2.1 *Augustine & Avicenna, Aristotle & Aquinas*

In very broad terms, the dialectic of the thirteenth-century debate about self-knowledge is shaped by two seemingly opposed approaches: one associated

3 In this, my argument dovetails nicely with that of José Filipe Silva, who argues, in chapter eight, that Olivi's notion of freedom is grounded in his views about the active nature of the soul's powers.

4 For the influence of Augustine on Olivi's thought see, Juhana Toivanen, "Peter John Olivi," in *The Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine*, ed. K. Pollmann and W. Otten (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 976–978.

5 That Olivi is both aware of Aquinas's treatment of self-knowledge and develops his own account specifically in response to it has been persuasively argued by Dominic Whitehouse, "Peter Olivi on Human Self-Knowledge: A Reassessment," *Franciscan Studies* 72 (2014): 173–224. That said, my aim here is not *prove* that Olivi's account of subjectivity is developed *specifically* in response to Aquinas (though I suspect it to be true). It is sufficient, for my purposes, that Olivi's discussion is a response to the broadly neo-Aristotelian approach prevalent in his day—an approach that Aquinas certainly represents.

with Augustine and with certain Neoplatonic thinkers, the other associated with Aristotle and the broader Aristotelian commentary tradition. What is perhaps most definitive of the Augustinian approach is the contention that self-knowledge is something that belongs naturally or essentially to the mind or intellective soul as such. By contrast, on the Aristotelian approach the intellect's self-knowledge is taken to be contingent on the episodic occurrence of other, lower cognitive activities such as sense perception. Although much could be said about these different approaches, the traditions they draw from, and the various tensions among them, for present purposes I frame the difference between the Augustinian and Aristotelian approaches in terms two sets of opposed theses: *Sufficiency* and *Permanence*, on the one hand, *Dependence* and *Intermittence*, on the other.

Let us start with the Augustinian theses. Augustine's views about mind and self-knowledge are most fully developed in the latter books of his *De trinitate*. Here, Augustine attempts to systematically articulate and defend a trinitarian account of the nature of the human mind. In particular, he aims to give an account of the mind as the *imago Dei* and, hence, in the image of the divine trinity.6 According to this account, the human mind is such that it bears a three-fold reflexive relation to itself, namely, "it always remembers itself, always understands itself, and always loves itself."7 On his view, this essential reflexivity entails that "nothing is more present to the mind, than the mind itself."8 Thus, whereas cognition of entities in the extra-mental world comes by way of representations formed on basis of our sensory experience, the same cannot be said when it comes to mind's cognition of itself. "The mind," Augustine contends, simply "knows itself through itself."9 However, if the mind is always immediately present to itself and by itself suffices for knowledge of itself, it follows that the mind's very nature includes its capacity for self-knowledge. Medieval thinkers often express this Augustinian point as matter of the mind's ability to know itself "through its essence" and take it as involving a commit-

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6 English translations of *De trinitate* (hereafter *Trin*.) are from Augustine, *The Trinity*, ed. J.E. Rotelle, trans. E. Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991).

7 See, e.g., *Trin*. 14.9. This thesis is the conclusion at which Augustine arrives at end of book ten of *Trin*.—see, e.g., *Trin*. 10.18. However, he returns to it and further expounds it in book fourteen. For discussion of this thesis see Charles Brittain, "Intellectual Self-Knowledge," in *Le De Trinitate de saint Augustin: exégèse, logique et noétique*, ed. E. Bermon and G. O'Daly (Paris: Vrin, 2012), 322–339; Gerard O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1987), 209–211.

8 *Trin*. 10.10.

9 *Trin*. 10.10. Again, in *Trin*. 10.12, Augustine claims that mind knows itself "for no other reason than that it is present to itself."

ment to what we might refer to as the "Sufficiency thesis" (or, for convenience, just "Sufficiency")—namely, the thesis that the mind or rational soul is itself sufficient for awareness of itself.10

However, if the mind is always immediately present to itself and by itself suffices for knowledge of itself, a second thesis appears to follow immediately from this: namely, that reflexive awareness is, in some sense, a permanent or perpetual feature of human psychology.11 Call this the "Permanence thesis" (or "Permanence" for short). Permanence not only appears to follow directly from Sufficiency, but likewise appears to be expressly endorsed by Augustine. After all, as we have seen, Augustine claims that "the mind *always* remembers itself, *always* understands itself, and *always* loves itself" (my emphasis). Indeed, insofar as these reflexive relations are constitutive of the trinitarian structure of the human mind, they must be understood as a permanent or fixed feature of it. In this way, Augustine's authority appears to require commitment to not only to Sufficiency, but also to this further thesis about the permanence of self-knowing. For convenience, we may set these twin theses out as follows:

> *Sufficiency*: The rational soul is sufficient in itself for knowledge of itself.
> *Permanence*: Reflexive knowing is a permanent or fixed feature of the rational soul.

It is worth noting that thirteenth-century thinkers found further support for each of these two Augustinian theses in Arabic sources such as Avicenna's *Liber de anima*. Indeed, Avicenna's so-called flying man argument (or, some-

10 Insofar as I am focusing exclusively on the soul with respect to its rational powers—namely, will and intellect, I shall use "mind," "soul," and "rational soul" interchangeably. In calling the intellect's knowledge of itself "self-knowledge," I do not mean to commit myself to the view that Olivi identifies the human person exclusively with the rational soul. Indeed, I do not think this is the case. However, because Olivi's account of the metaphysics of human beings—and, in particular, his account of the soul, its powers, and their various relations to the body—is extremely complicated, and because nothing in my discussion requires taking a stand on these matters, I set them to one side. For discussion of Olivi's account of the soul see Robert Pasnau, "Olivi on the Metaphysics of Soul," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 6 (1997): 109–132; and Mikko Yrjönsuuri, "The Soul as an Entity: Dante, Aquinas, and Olivi," in *Forming the Mind: Essays on the Internal Senses and the Mind/Body Problem from Avicenna to the Medical Enlightenment*, ed. H. Lagerlund (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007), 59–92. A discussion of Olivi on the relationship of the soul to its powers can be found in Can Löwe, "Bonaventure on the Soul and Its Powers," *Vivarium* 59 (2021), 10–32.

11 There are some thinkers who endorsed sufficiency but rejected permanence. More on this below.

times "floating man"), seemed to lend particular support to both Sufficiency and Permanence. At the heart of the flying-man argument is a thought experiment featuring a man who has been brought into embodied existence lacking memory, any act of the imagination, and likewise devoid of any sensory input or bodily experience.12 Avicenna argues, however, that even in such a state, the flying man would nevertheless, on some level, be aware of his own existence. Avicenna's Latin successors eventually come to connect the thought experiment to Augustinian texts and employ it as a kind of proof of the soul's ability to cognize itself autonomously and wholly independently of contributions from lower, sense faculties.13 And, of course, if self-knowing occurs without any bodily "input," then simply being a soul must be sufficient for self-knowledge. For the same reason, Latin readers also took Avicenna to endorse a kind of innate, perpetual form of self-knowing.

At the same time, however, a very different approach to self-knowledge—a very different set of theses—gains support from the Greek and Arabic commentary tradition associated with Aristotle's *De anima*.14 On the Aristotelian picture, the intellect has intellective cognition of itself in the same way that it has intellective cognition of other things.15 And the way it cognizes other things is via the intellect's reception of intelligible species, which are themselves received as a result of a process of abstraction from information present in sensory representations. In this regard, the intellect's access to itself appears to depend on the activity of lower, sense-based faculties.16 If this is right, however, Aristotle appears committed to the rejection of both Sufficiency and Permanence.

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12 Avicenna, *Liber deanima* 1.1, 36–37 and 5.7, 162–163. For a fuller discussion of this argument see Deborah Black, "Avicenna on Self-Awareness and Knowing that One Knows," in *The Unity of Science in the Arabic Tradition*, ed. S. Rahman, T. Street, and H. Tahiri (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), 63–87.

13 For discussion of the Latin reception of Avicenna's flying man argument including in Olivi, see Juhana Toivanen, "The Fate of the Flying Man," *Oxford Studies in Medieval Philosophy* 3 (2015): 64–97.

14 For a helpful summary of the broadly Aristotelian approach to self-knowledge and, in particular, its reception in medieval commentaries on Aristotle's *De anima*, see chapter two of Michael Christensen, *Intellectual Self-Knowledge in Latin Commentaries on Aristotle's De Anima from 1250 to 1320*, PhD diss. (Saxo Institute: University of Copenhagen, 2018).

15 Aristotle's claim in *De anima* (hereafter *De an.*), 3.4, 430a2 that "the intellect is intelligible like all other intelligibles" (Aristotle, *Deanima*, trans. C. Shields [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016]) serves as a proof-text both for the claims that (1) the intellect can in some way reflexively cognize itself and (2) its cognition of itself occurs in a way analogous to its cognition of other things.

16 In Aristotelian epistemology, knowledge takes its start in sense perception. As Aristotle explains in *De an*. 3.8, all knowledge depends on both the senses and the activity of the

Moreover, the Aristotelian conception of the nature of the intellect itself appears to rule out the possibility of any kind of independent, perpetual intellectual self-knowing. For, Aristotle supposes that the intellect is, in itself, sheer potentiality and he further supposes that actuality is prior to intelligibility. From these assumptions, however, it follows that the intellect is not *of itself* intelligible.[17] Rather, to be intelligible at all the intellect must first be actualized. However, on the Aristotelian view, the intellect is actualized by engaging in intellective cognition of something other than and external to itself. For the same reason reflexive awareness cannot be a permanent or essential feature of the Aristotelian intellect. Rather, self-knowing can only occur episodically as the intellect is actualized by its reception of species from lower sense faculties.[18] Thus, the Aristotelian approach appears to require commitment to a set of theses directly opposed to Augustinian Sufficiency and Permanence. We may call the opposing Aristotelian theses "Dependency" and "Intermittence" and understand them as follows:

Dependence: The rational soul is not sufficient in itself for knowledge of itself.

Intermittence: Reflexive knowing occurs only episodically in the rational soul.

These competing Augustinian and Aristotelian theses about self-knowledge form the immediate backdrop and context for discussions of self-knowledge in the period in which Olivi is writing. While not every author of the period directly engages questions about how to interpret or to reconcile these authorities, there are a number of thinkers who do. Thomas Aquinas, for example, explicitly attempts to develop an account that accommodates the central elements of both of these authorities. Because Olivi's own position is in no small

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phantasia in producing sensory images. Among medieval thinkers, this idea comes to be expressed as a kind of slogan: "there is nothing in the intellect that was not first in the senses."

17 *De an*. 3.4, 429a24.

18 Thus, Aristotle says of the intellect: "its nature must be nothing other than this: that it be potential. Hence, that part of the soul called reason (and by reason I mean that by which the soul reasons and conceives) is in actuality none of the things which are before it reasons. […] Whenever it [the mind] becomes each thing in the manner in which one who knows in actuality is said to do so […] even then it is somehow in potentiality, not, however, in the same way as before learning or discovering. And then it is able to think itself." (*De an*. 3.4, 429a21–b9; trans. Shields, with slight modification.)

part motivated by his opposition to sort of account one finds in Aquinas, I wrap up this background section by calling attention (very briefly) to the relevant elements of Aquinas's account.

2.2 *Aquinas's (Attempt at an) Irenic Account*

Given Aquinas's commitment to a broadly Aristotelian cognitive psychology, it is perhaps not surprising that he ultimately embraces both Aristotelian theses about self-knowledge, namely, that the soul's knowledge of itself is both dependent and intermittent. Consider, for example, his remarks in the following text:

> While, of itself, [our intellect] has the power to intellectively cognize, it is not itself intellectively cognized except insofar as it becomes activated (*actu*). […] However, since, as was explained above, it is connatural to our intellect, in its state in the present life, to be directed toward material and sensible things, it follows that our intellect cognizes itself insofar as it is rendered actual (*fit actu*) by species abstracted from sensible things through the light of the active intellect. […] Therefore, it is through its own act, and not through its own essence, that our intellect has cognition of itself.19

As this passage makes clear, Aquinas accepts the Aristotelian conception of the (possible) intellect's nature as a *power* or *potency* for intellective cognition along with the Aristotelian *dictum* that something can be cognized only to the extent that it is actual. But from these two assumptions, it immediately follows that the intellect cannot cognize itself unless it is already "actualized"—that is, already occurrently engaged in an act of cognition. As Aquinas goes on to explain, however, our cognitive faculties, at least in our current embodied state, are fundamentally oriented toward and responsive to stimulus from the external, physical environment. Thus, on his view, we do not apprehend our mind unless and until we are already engaged in acts of sensing or thinking of external things. Thus, as he puts it elsewhere: "one perceives that he has a soul […only] because he perceives himself sensing and understanding."20

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19 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* (hereafter *st*), 1.87.1c. English translations of *st* are from Thomas Aquinas, *Treatise on Human Nature: The Complete Text (Summa Theologiae i, questions 75–102)*, trans. F. Freddoso (South Bend, Ind.: Saint Augustine's Press, 2010). I make slight modifications to Freddoso's translations.

20 Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate* (hereafter *dv*) (Rome: Sancta Sabina, 1972–1975), 10.8c.

This position represents a marked departure from the Augustinian commitment to the sufficiency of the mind's self-presence for reflexive awareness and, likewise, a rejection of any kind of permanent mode of actual self-knowing.21 Indeed, many of Aquinas's contemporaries—Olivi included—found his position objectionable on just such grounds.22 It is worth noting, however, that Aquinas does attempt to preserve something of the Augustinian line by emphasizing the immediacy of mind's access to itself once it is actualized in cognizing. Thus, while, in the foregoing passage, Aquinas denies that the intellect knows itself through its own essence, he hastens to add that it does immediately know itself in its own act. Indeed, as Aquinas goes on to explain, in all of its acts of sensing and thinking the soul is immediately aware of itself as the subject of such acts. Here's how he puts it:

> [O]ne perceives oneself to have a soul, to live, and to exist because one perceives oneself sensing, thinking (*intellegere*), or exercising other vital activities of this sort. […] For, of course, no one perceives oneself to be thinking unless one is thinking of something. After all, thinking of something is prior to thinking of oneself thinking. Therefore, the soul comes to actively perceive its existence through what it is thinking and sensing.23

In this way, Aquinas holds that once the mind is actualized in cognition, it is immediately, *subjectively* acquainted with itself as the first-person subject of its episodic cognitive acts.24 As he says: "Someone perceives himself to have a soul from the fact that he perceives himself sensing, understanding and exer-

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21 See Therese Scarpelli Cory, *Aquinas on Human Self-Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 38.

22 For a presentation of the development of debates about self-knowledge after Aquinas see François-Xavier Putallaz, *La connaissance de soi au xiiie siècle: De Matthieu d'Aquasparta à Thierry de Freiberg* (Paris: Vrin, 1991); see also Susan Brower-Toland "Mind's Reflexivity: Self-Knowledge & Consciousness in Later Medieval Philosophy," (forthcoming), sections 2.2 and 3.2.

23 *st* 1.87.1c.

24 I discuss Aquinas's views a bit more fully in Susan Brower-Toland, "Mind's Reflexivity," sections 2.1 and 3.1. Aquinas's views on consciousness and self-knowledge in general are treated at length in Cory, *Aquinas on Human Self-Knowledge*, especially ch. 3, 5, and 6. Although there are some differences between Cory's reading of Aquinas and my own, we agree on Aquinas's views about subjective self-awareness. For Aquinas's views about reflexivity and subjectivity see Therese Scarpelli Cory, "The Reflexivity of Incorporeal Acts as Source of Freedom and Subjectivity in Aquinas," in *Subjectivity and Selfhood in Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. J. Kaukua and T. Ekenberg (Cham: Springer,

cising other vital operations of this sort."25 What is more, insofar as the mind or soul has direct access to itself as the subject of its episodic states, it can—in an important sense—be said to know itself through itself. This is, in any case, how Aquinas attempts to capture something of Augustinian Sufficiency.26 Moreover, Aquinas goes so far as to insist that because the mind is essentially such that it has *the power* to reflexively apprehend itself as the subject of its episodic states, it possesses a kind permanent (albeit merely dispositional) access to itself. In this way, Aquinas also attempts to preserve something of the Augustinian claim about the permanence of self-knowing and thereby to have developed an account that accommodates central elements of both the Aristotelian and Augustinian approaches.27

3 Olivi on Activity, Reflexivity and Permanence: Claim One

From Olivi's perspective, Aquinas's account would fail not only as a project in reconciliation, but just on its own terms. It fails as a project in reconciliation since, from Olivi's perspective, the central Aristotelian theses about self-knowledge, viz., dependence and intermittence, are incompatible not only with core Augustinian tenets but also with the very claim that the soul experiences itself as the first-person subject of its conscious states. For, on Olivi's view, the phenomenal character of subjective experience presupposes a com-

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2016), 125–141; and ead., "Aquinas and 'I': A Medieval Concept of the Self," in *The Self: A History*, ed. P. Kitcher (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 73–98. In these papers, Cory argues that Aquinas's account of the metaphysics of the soul is sufficient to ground the subjective character of our conscious states—a claim with which, as we shall see, Olivi disagrees.

25 *dv* 10.8.

26 For example, Aquinas claims: "We must understand the words of Augustine in this way, namely, that the mind cognizes itself through itself because from the mind itself there is that in it from which it can proceed further into an act by which it actually cognizes itself by perceiving itself existing" (*dv* 10.8 ad 1). Or again: "Just as it is not the case that one must always actually be thinking about (*intelligatur*) that of which he has habitual knowledge through species existing in the intellect, so, too, it is not the case that one must always actually be thinking about the mind, knowledge of which is habitually in us because its essence is present to our intellect" (*dv* 10.8 ad 11).

27 That Aquinas attempts to be steering a middle course through these seemingly opposed authorities is clear, for example, from remarks such as the following: "Thus it is clear that our mind cognizes itself in some way through its essence, as Augustine says, but in a certain way also through an intention or species, as the Philosopher and the Commentator say" (*dv* 10.8c).

mitment to Augustinian Sufficiency and Permanence—both of which claims depend, in turn, on a view of the soul as essentially active. Olivi's own account of self-knowledge is, therefore, predicated on a just such a conception of the soul.

3.1 *Sufficiency: The Soul as (Self -)Cognitive Agent*

Olivi's views about the active nature of the soul and its role in cognition are quintessentially "Augustinian" in that they are founded on axioms that Olivi expressly holds on Augustine's authority and expressly in opposition to those he takes to be characteristically Aristotelian.28 Olivi's application of these Augustinian axioms in defense of the soul's activity and agency in cognition is not altogether original and is well-surveyed in the secondary literature.29 My aim here is simply to briefly touch on the considerations that motivate his view of the soul as active before turning to the connection between his views about cognitive activity and his commitment to the sufficiency thesis about self-knowledge.

Whereas the general Aristotelian view is that cognition is an actualization of a passive potency or power in the soul of the cognizer, Olivi holds that cognition is a process in which the cognizing subject—that is, the soul—is active. On his view, cognition is not a matter of the soul passively receiving information from the external world, but rather involves the soul's activity in both attending to and processing such information. In support of this view, Olivi appeals to both theoretical and phenomenological considerations. On the theoretical side there are, for example, Augustinian maxims having to do with the nobility and ontological superiority of what is immaterial and simple over what is corporeal and extended.30 According to the nobility thesis, moreover, what is ontologic-

28 For broader context surrounding later medieval debates about the activity versus passivity of perception and cognition, see José Filipe Silva, "Medieval Theories of Active Perception: An Overview," in *Active Perception in the History of Philosophy: From Plato to Modern Philosophy*, ed. J. Silva and M. Yrjönsuuri (Cham: Springer, 2014), 117–146.

29 See, for example, José Filipe Silva, "Medieval Theories of Active Perception," 132 ff.; Juhana Toivanen, *Perception and the Internal Senses: Peter of John Olivi on the Cognitive Functions of the Sensitive Soul* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 141–161; José Filipe Silva and Juhana Toivanen, "The Active Nature of the Soul in Sense Perception: Robert Kilwardby and Peter Olivi," *Vivarium* 48 (2010): 245–278; and Andre Martin, *The Gaze of the Mind: Cognitive Activity, Attention, and Causal Explanation in 13th–14th Century Latin Medieval Psychology*, PhD diss. (University of Toronto, 2018), ch. 2.

30 Although Augustine is not the only source for the nobility thesis, Olivi expressly cites him in support of it: "Blessed Augustine, who says that nothing can be produced in a spirit by a body through a direct impression […]. [I]n *Super Genesim ad litteram* Book 12, ch. 16, he

ally more perfect cannot be acted on by what is ontologically inferior.31 Thus, insofar as soul is immaterial and, hence, superior to anything corporeal, its act of cognizing cannot be the product of the causal activity of any external object, any corporeal faculty, or even any stored sense impression. Indeed, on his view, it is the soul's agency in producing its own act that secures its status as the *imago Dei*. For, he explains,

> if the powers of the soul were not the agents of their acts, then the soul (with its powers) would be, as it were, a bare stump and like a lump of matter, since the mind carries out no act if not its knowing and willing. […] In that case, the Scriptures would say without reason that the mind is the most noble image of God.32

It must be, therefore, that the soul is the sole efficient cause of its own acts—both cognitive and volitional. And this, of course, requires that the soul is by its very nature active.

A second, broadly theoretical consideration, that Olivi invokes in the support of the soul's cognitive agency has to do with the role he gives to attention in his account of cognition. Here too following Augustine, Olivi characterizes the soul's activity or agency in terms of its ability to actively direct its attention.33 Indeed, on Olivi's view, it is precisely this sort of cognitive agency that is required if cognition is to occur at all. The mere presence of the object or its species to a cognitive power is not sufficient to produce an act of cognizing—not even in a power disposed for cognition. Here's Olivi:

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says: 'Because every spirit is, without a doubt, superior to every body, it follows that a spiritual nature is superior to the corporeal. […] Thus it is that the image of a body in a spirit is superior to the body itself in its substance. Nor should it be reasonably believed that a body brings about something in a spirit, as if a spirit were subjected to a producing body in place of matter.'" (*Quaestiones in secundum librum Sententiarum* [hereafter *Summa ii*], q. 72, 16.) I have relied on (with occasional, silent modifications) Robert Pasnau's translations of *Summa ii*, q. 72 and q. 74, available online at https://spot.colorado.edu/~pasnau/research/ . For Olivi's reliance on Augustine, see also *Summa ii*, q. 72, 15–18. Olivi is also aware that nobility maxims have broader neo-platonic credentials. See, for example, *Summa ii*, q. 72, 18, where he cites (pseudo-)Dionysius to support the claim that the rational soul cannot be acted on by any lower powers.

31 For, according to Olivi, "everything that is active, insofar as it is active, is superior to what is passive, insofar as it is so." (*Summa ii*, q. 72, 1).

32 *Summa ii*, q. 74, 126.

33 See, for example, Augustine, *Trin.* 9.18, 10.4, and 15.23. For discussion of Augustine on this, see Scott MacDonald, "Augustine's Cognitive Voluntarism in *De Trinitate* 11," in *Le De Trinitate de saint Augustin*, ed. E. Bermon and G. O'Daly (Paris: Vrin, 2012), 322–339.

> [H]owever much the cognitive power is informed through a habit and a species differing from the cognitive action, it cannot advance to a cognitive act unless, prior to this, it actually tends (*intendat*) toward the object, so that the gaze (*aspectus*) of its intention (*intentionis*) is actually turned and directed toward the object. And so, granting that a species preceding the cognitive action is impressed by the object, still in addition to this [impression] the soul's power must actually tend toward and intellectually attend to the object; for it is impossible that it produce in itself a cognitive act without this.34

Interestingly, for Olivi, the role attention plays in cognition has important phenomenological implications. Indeed, it is precisely because attention is the immediate causal source of our acts of cognition that such acts have the subjective phenomenal character they do. For example, our experience of our acts of thinking and perceiving as something *we do*, rather than as something we undergo is, Olivi thinks, explained by the fact that cognition is the result of our agency in directing cognitive attention. As he says, it is only "insofar as an act goes out from an *internal* cognitive principle that we sense it to be our action and a kind of acting of ours—that is, a going out from us and, as it were, an extending to the object and a tending (*intendens*) toward it."35 In this way, Olivi likewise relies on phenomenological considerations in defending the soul's cognitive agency. Indeed, he thinks we are directly acquainted with this feature of our cognitive psychology.

Of course, if the soul is active in such a way that it alone serves as the efficient cause of its acts of cognizing external objects, much the same is true when it comes to its sufficiency in cognizing itself. It should be clear, therefore, that Olivi's commitment to the soul's nature as cognitive agent fairly straightforwardly entails a commitment to the Sufficiency thesis about self-knowledge. After all, if the soul is the principle and source of its act of cognizing in general, it is likewise the principle and source of its knowing of itself.

That said, it is worth noting that this same commitment to soul's activity in cognition does not by itself secure a commitment to the Permanence thesis. Indeed, there are some—including thinkers as staunchly Augustinian as Bonaventure—who are willing to embrace the Augustinian view of the soul

34 *Summa ii*, q. 72, 10.

35 *Summa ii*, q. 72, 38, my emphasis. Cf. ibid., q. 58, 463–464, where Olivi claims that "we experience inwardly in ourselves that those acts [i.e., acts of the cognitive powers] proceed from us and that we truly perform them."

as essentially active in cognition and, hence, who likewise embrace the Sufficiency thesis about self-knowledge, but nevertheless deny that self-knowing is an ongoing, permanent feature of the mind. Bonaventure, for example, accepts Augustinian Sufficiency, but denies Permanence. When it comes to questions about the permanence of self-knowledge, Bonaventure appears to defend a position closer to that of Aquinas, namely, one according to which the mind is merely innately disposed for reflexive knowing.36 On Bonaventure's view, the soul's permanent *disposition* for self-knowing grounds its sufficiency for subsequent episodic acts of such knowing. For him, it is precisely the soul's "innate disposition for self-knowledge" that explains its capacity to autonomously initiate intermittent acts of self-thinking.

What the case of Bonaventure makes clear, then, is that a commitment to the soul's nature as active may be adequate to secure a further commitment to Sufficiency, but both of these are, nonetheless, compatible with a rejection of Permanence. Clearly then, further evidence is needed to show that Olivi himself is committed to Permanence.

3.2 *Permanence: Soul as Vital Reflexivity*

An important consideration motivating Olivi's commitment to the Permanence thesis comes directly from his views (canvassed just above) regarding the soul's causal sufficiency for actual self-knowing. As we have already noted, Olivi holds that mere proximity of an object to cognitive power is not sufficient to produce an act of cognizing with respect to that object. Some form of mental attention is required. The soul must direct its cognitive gaze—and thereby turn (and apply) the relevant cognitive power or faculty—to the object in question. This done, cognition occurs. The same conditions apply in the case of self-knowledge. That is, the same three things are required: namely, the object, gaze, and (activated) power. In the case of self-knowledge, however, just one entity—the mind or soul itself—plays all three roles. Here's Olivi:

> The first way [i.e. non-discursive] of knowing requires three things. The first is the presence of the object, which is the mind itself. The second is the gaze of the intellect, reflected or inwardly turned on itself. The third is the very act of knowing—which, according to Augustine, is the image of the mind.37

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36 For a defense of this reading of Bonaventure see Cory, *Aquinas on Human-Self Knowledge*, 34–35. Unlike Aquinas, Bonaventure seems to think that this innate reflexive capacity renders us capable of initiating acts by which we directly intuit the soul.

37 *Summa ii*, q. 76, 148.

In self-knowledge the soul itself is both cognitive power and cognitive object. Hence, provided the soul's gaze is actively turned reflexively on itself, the soul alone suffices for actual (or activated) self-knowing.38 However, on Olivi's view, the soul in fact is always actively reflexively turned upon itself. Thus, on his view, the soul's very mode of existence is, as it were, a kind of vital reflexivity.39 Two sorts of evidence can be marshalled in support of this reading. The first comes from Olivi's view of our very nature as human persons.40 Indeed, on Olivi's conception of it, our personhood is constituted as a kind of reflexive self-presence. In his words: "personhood (*personalitas*) or a person is a *per se* existence fully turning back to and remaining in itself or being perfectly reflexive on itself."41 For Olivi, the core of human personhood lies not only in our nature as intellectual beings, but also—indeed perhaps chiefly—in our nature as free beings. And it is our nature as free beings that entails reflexivity. For, on Olivi's analysis, freedom requires complete (causal) autonomy with regard to our human actions and operations. Hence, to be free, the causal principle for our acts of thinking and willing must be wholly internal to us. Given this, freedom is ultimately a capacity for self-motion on the part of the soul42—a

38 As Olivi says just a bit later in the same discussion: "And the soul has this knowledge of itself through a direct inward turning of its intellective gaze upon itself and upon its acts. Indeed, so long as the soul is wakeful, with use of free choice of the will, the gaze remains always and continually turned inward upon it." (*Summa ii*, q. 76, 146–147.)

39 Here I read Olivi's account of the soul's permanent self-knowing in much the same way Charles Brittain reads Augustine's account. On Brittain's interpretation "[…] we shouldn't succumb to the temptation to reduce *slrk* [i.e., the mind's permanent loving, remembering, and knowing itself] to a thesis about mere potentiality—the intellect's self-knowledge seems rather to constitute its permanent activity, i.e. what Augustine calls *a kind of life*." See Brittain, "Intellectual Self-Knowledge," 316.

40 For fuller treatments of Olivi's account of personhood see: Juhana Toivanen, "Voluntarist Anthropology in Peter of John Olivi's *De Contractibus*," *Franciscan Studies* 74 (2016): 41–65; Calvin Normore, "Causa sui: Awareness and Choice in the Constitution of the Self," in *Subjectivity and Selfhood in Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. J. Kaukua and T. Ekenberg (Cham: Springer 2016), 91–107; Sylvain Piron, "L'expérience subjective chez Pierre de Jean Olivi," in *Généalogies du sujet: De saint Anselme à Malebranche*, ed. O. Boulnois (Paris: J. Vrin, 2007), 33–62; and Stève Bobillier, *L'ethique de la personne* (Paris: Vrin, 2020), ch. 2.

41 *Summa ii*, q. 59, 526.

42 In discussing free will, for example, Olive argues explicitly for self-motion on the part of the soul, arguing that it "holds in itself the force of two beings, as it were, and it has this according to the fact that it is powerful (*potens*) in turning the gaze of its power (*virtutis*) on itself. For inasmuch as it is something capable of being moved and a terminus of this gaze it is distinct from itself in its way (*suo modo*) just as a movable thing is distinct from its mover." (*Summa ii*, q. 57, 364.)

capacity Olivi identifies with its reflexivity.43 In fact, Olivi takes the soul's "perfectly reflexive existence" itself as an ongoing manifestation of its capacity for freedom and self-motion. For, he explains,

> no power can turn itself back upon itself unless it has freedom. For nothing can immediately turn itself back on itself (*se reflectere immediate ad se*) unless it is already directed toward itself (*conversum ad se*) as a mover to what is movable. For to turn itself back (*reflectere se*) in this way is for it to move itself. But no power can move itself toward itself or toward something else unless it has dominion over itself.

In this way, Olivi treats reflexivity as the soul's very mode existing—namely, an autonomous activity definitive of our nature as persons.44

This view about the nature of the soul is reinforced, Olivi thinks, by considerations having to do with its nobility. This brings us to the second sort of evidence in favor of Olivi's commitment to Permanence. For Olivi invokes nobility not only in support of the soul's cognitive agency, but also in making a case for its permanent reflexivity. Consider, for example, his remarks in the following passage:

> The most noble and powerful acts proceed from the most noble and powerful source. But knowing and volitional acts are, in terms of their genus, the most noble and dominating of all. Therefore, their active source is the most noble, powerful, and commanding. Therefore, since fundamental, permanent and *per se* existence in a creature is not a contradiction (quite the contrary, the very character of personal existence is taken from it) it follows that the source of these sorts of acts is a thing that is most substantial in the being to which it belongs.45

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43 "Indeed, so long as the soul exists in wakefulness with the use of free choice of the will (*in pervigili usu*), the gaze remains always and continually inwardly turned upon it" (*Summa ii*, q. 76, 147).

44 Cf. *Summa ii*, q. 52, 200, where Olivi claims that the soul's "personhood […] is the same as a *per se* existence that is free, governing, reflexively turned back on itself and able turn back in a self-possessing way, that is, possessing itself with a certain free reflexivity." For a discussion of reflexivity in connection with the faculty of will, see Mikko Yrjönsuuri. "Free Will and Self-Control in Peter Olivi," in *Emotions and Choice from Boethius to Descartes*, ed. H. Lagerlund and M. Yrjönsuuri (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2002), 99–128. For a discussion of reflexivity at the level of senses see Toivanen, *Perception and the Internal Senses*, 141–161.

45 *Summa ii*, q. 74, 125.

Here Olivi tells us that insofar as the soul is the active principle and source of "the most noble and powerful acts," namely its acts of knowing and willing, it itself must be "most noble, most powerful, and most commanding"—a status which he associates with a certain exalted mode of existing. Whatever else this mode of existence amounts to (he describes it variously as "fundamental, permanent, and *per se*", "most substantial" and as the source of our "personal existence"), it is plausible to suppose that Olivi means (at very least) to accord the rational soul a kind of fundamental or independent *actuality*.

Olivi also expressly connects this superior and more worthy mode of existing, on the one hand, to the soul's cognitive reflexivity on the other. His argument runs as follows:

> Just as cognizing is better and more worthy of love than merely existing without any cognition, so also existing in one cognizing as what is cognized is a higher mode of existing for something than is any existence in itself other than that. […] Therefore, a cognitive comprehension of oneself is a kind of higher and more intimate mode of being oneself in oneself and of uniting and deeply rooting oneself in oneself than simple being would be by itself.46

Olivi begins by observing that cognizing is better than "existing without any cognition." Likewise, he claims, existing as an object of cognition is better than existing without being cognized. From here, it is a short step to the conclusion that existing as *both* cognizing *and* being cognized is superior to each taken separately. And this appears to be precisely the conclusion Olivi comes to at the end of the foregoing quotation: "a cognitive comprehension of oneself is a kind of higher and more intimate mode of being oneself in oneself and of uniting and deeply rooting oneself in oneself than simple being would be by itself."

Taken together, the foregoing considerations suggest that Olivi's conception of the active nature of the soul is not merely, as is often supposed, a thesis about the soul not being actualized in cognition by anything inferior to itself; it is also a thesis about the soul's distinctive mode of existing. As we have seen, the soul is such that its very existence constitutes a kind of autonomous, vital (and, hence, actual) reflexivity—a mode of being that consists in its "cognitive comprehension" of itself. If all this is right, it should be clear that Olivi is committed to the Permanence thesis about self-knowledge.

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46 *Summa ii*, q. 74, 124.

That said, it must be acknowledged that Olivi does sometimes speak of the soul's essential self-knowledge as involving a "habitual awareness of itself" or the "*disposition* of an efficient cause" with respect to the production of its self-knowing. Consider, for example, his remarks about self-knowing in the following passage:

> When, therefore, it is asked whether the soul knows itself through its essence, [I answer: …] if one means by "through its essence" that the soul is, *through itself*, an object of its knowledge in such a way that it is not made an object for itself through an intervening memorative species, then, yes, in the first [i.e., non-discursive] way of knowing, the soul knows itself through its essence—that is, through a gaze and an act fixed immediately on its essence. And, if "through" here signifies the disposition of an efficient cause, then it is true that it knows itself *through the essence* of its intellect as through an efficient cause of its act of knowing. And even if a power cannot exist in this case without some accidental light or acumen (as, in any case, it cannot do so without an accidental gaze added to the power), still indeed it knows itself *through the essence of its power*. Yet not through the [power] alone but rather with the added [reflexive] gaze and habit. But although habitual knowledge of itself (*habitualis notitia sui*) is its inseparable accident (as I have proven elsewhere), I do not, nevertheless, deem it necessary in order to produce the act of knowing itself. Rather it must be known that the aforementioned habit is caused by the overflowing actuality of the intellect's [orientation] toward itself and what is its own (*habitus praedictus causetur ex redundanti actualitate intellectus ad se et sua sciendum*)47

Admittedly, on the face of it, some of Olivi's remarks might suggest that he associates permanent self-knowing with a mere reflexive habit or disposition. In light of what we have seen of Olivi's views regarding the soul's nobility and personhood, however, we have good reason to resist thinking that Olivi is here articulating anything like the view defended by Aquinas or Bonaventure—that is, a view which reduces permanent self-knowledge to a kind of permanent *disposition or* mere *potentiality* for occurrent self-knowing. In fact, a close reading of this passage itself serves to confirm Olivi's commitment to a non-reductive understanding of permanence.

47 *Summa* ii, q. 76, 149, my emphasis.

To see this, note that Olivi begins by affirming that the soul knows itself "through a gaze and act fixed immediately on its essence." And, as he goes on to point out, it is precisely because the soul (*qua* power) cannot exist without this gaze that its disposition to bring about reflexive knowing is always activated. Not only that, but Olivi even goes so far as to insist that the soul's so-called *habitual* self-knowledge is posterior to—and, thus, not a source of—its *actual* self-knowing. "Rather," he claims, "the aforementioned habit is caused by the overflowing actuality of the intellect's [orientation] toward itself and its knowing." Far from endorsing any kind of dispositionalist reading of the Permanence thesis about self-knowledge, Olivi is keen to emphasizes the "overflowing actuality" of its permanent self-knowing.

4 Olivi on Activity and Subjectivity

To this point, I have been arguing for the first of the two main claims I announced at the outset: namely, that Olivi's conception of the soul as essentially active and essentially reflexive entails a commitment on his part to a kind of innate, perpetual self-knowing. I want to turn now, in this final section of the paper, to the second of my two claims, namely, that, for Olivi, this permanent, psychological reflexivity plays an essential role in explaining the subjective character of our conscious states. Indeed, as we will see, Olivi thinks that it is precisely because of their commitment to Dependence and Intermittence that neo-Aristotelians like Aquinas lack the resources to explain subjectivity.

By way of setting the stage for my argument here, I want to begin by emphasizing that in ascribing to Olivi a view according to which self-knowing is kind of a primitive, permanent activity, I do not mean to ascribe to him a view according to which such activity is itself conscious. It is rather what Olivi describes, in other contexts, as a kind of general or "indeterminate," "unnoticed" attending. For Olivi, there is a distinction to be drawn between the soul's activity of attending on the one hand, and its act of occurrent cognizing on the other. While the latter act (i.e., conscious cognition of some object) cannot occur without the former (i.e., object-directed attention), Olivi does allow that the former can occur without the latter.48 In fact, he thinks that such a distinction

48 As he says: "The powers [of the soul] have a two-fold gaze (*aspectus*). The first is from itself indeterminate with respect to this or that object—as, for example, when the eye is awake and closed (or we are in darkness) but we are directing the power of seeing outward in such a way that it is applied to seeing by the will or by nature. In this case, on account

is necessary to explain cases of divided attention. Consider, for example, a case in which my attention, while focally engaged in consideration of one thing—say, in thinking about a paper I am writing—is simultaneously, peripherally directed elsewhere—say, at the playground where my kids are playing. Even if I am preoccupied in thinking about my paper, Olivi maintains that my ongoing, peripheral attention to the playground makes it possible for me to *immediately* hear my child when he calls out to me. Olivi describes the case this way:

> Even if the intellect or the power of hearing were forcefully turned toward something else, nevertheless, there would remain in the power of hearing a certain unnoticed directedness (*occulta conversio*) toward the whole surrounding environment—in such a way that if a loud sound arose there, the power of hearing would perceive it right away. And [this perception would occur] without being preceded by a new directing of the power toward the sound. For the preceding unnoticed directedness is sufficient for perception. […] For it [viz. the power] is not so turned to the one thing that there does not remain in it some kind of general attention (*generalis aspectus*) to other things that are present or accessible to it.49

Here Olivi clearly draws a distinction between a kind of unnoticed attending, on the one hand, and occurrent cognizing on the other.50 What I want to claim is that a similar distinction applies in the case of self-knowing. Thus, on Olivi's view, a general (active but peripheral or unnoticed) reflexive orientation of the

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of some hindrance (*indispositionem*) in medium or on account of the imposition of some obstacle one does not direct [the gaze] in a determinate way. The other gaze (*aspectus*) is determinate, or is a determination of the first gaze (*aspectus*). For the first one is related to the second as a root to a branch, and a sensation is caused from the first [i.e. indeterminate looking] when an object is present [and thus the looking comes to be determinately carried to that object.]. For example, suppose that a man (whose eyes are open) were created alone before the creation of everything else; he would strive with all effort to direct his eyes toward seeing just as if there were external visible things. In this case, it is clear that his gaze (*aspectus*) would not be terminated at or determinately carried to any external object." (*Summa ii*, q. 73, 68–69.) For a discussion on this passage, see Toivanen, "The Fate of the Flying Man," 86–94.

49 Peter Olivi, *Quaestio de locutionibus angelorum*, ed. S. Piron, *Oliviana* 1 (2003), § 32. Available online: http://oliviana.revues.org/document18.html.

50 Here too Olivi is closely following Augustine. For a treatment of Augustine on consciousness and cases of divided attention, see Susan Brower-Toland, "Augustine's (Non-Trinitarian) Account of Perception in *De Trinitate* 11," *Oxford Studies in Medieval Philosophy* 8 (2020): 41–78.

soul's gaze must be distinguished from an act of focal self-thinking (*cogitatio*) or self-cognizing. For the same reason, even if the soul's mere existence is sufficient to secure an active reflexive orientation of its gaze, it does not likewise follow that such self-directed, peripheral attending is sufficient for an act of *conscious* self-directed thinking. Nor, to my knowledge, is there any evidence to suggest that Olivi thinks such is the case. Indeed, quite the contrary; Olivi (like any good Augustinian) thinks that we are, for the most part, so preoccupied with the external world that the soul's innate indeterminate reflexivity is rarely actualized in acts of conscious self-thinking.

That said, even if the soul's permanent reflexive attending is not by itself sufficient for producing acts of self-directed thinking, nevertheless, Olivi does think that this permanent if unnoticed reflexivity actively structures our conscious states such that self-awareness occurs as a constitutive feature of them.51 On his view, whatever the focal, determinate object of a given act of cognition or volition may be, that act will also include peripheral awareness of the soul itself as its subject. And this, Olivi thinks, owes precisely to the soul's permanent self-reflected orientation. As he explains:

> [T]here is no object and no act that the soul can actually know or consider without it always thereupon knowing and sensing itself to be the subject (*suppositum*) of the very act by which it knows and considers those things. Accordingly, in its thinking, it always shapes the force of this proposition "I know this" or "I think this" or "I doubt this." And the soul has this knowledge of itself through a direct inward turning of its intellective gaze upon itself and upon its acts.52

According to Olivi, therefore, even if the soul's ongoing, active reflexivity is itself non-conscious, it is, nevertheless, precisely because of "the direct inward turning of its intellective gaze upon itself" that the soul is inevitably, peripherally conscious of itself as the subject of its occurrent states.

In this regard, Olivi shares with Aquinas the view that conscious self-knowledge—that is, the soul's conscious, or experienced awareness of itself occurs primarily as constitutive feature of our acts of thinking and perceiving of things other than the soul. Thus, for both Olivi and Aquinas every act of cognition has

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51 I have discussed the way in which the soul's permanent reflexivity structures its episodic, conscious cognition at greater length in Brower-Toland, "Olivi on Consciousness and Self-Knowledge." However, in this earlier discussion I did not appreciate, as I do now, the *active* nature of the soul's permanent self-knowing.

52 *Summa ii*, q. 76, 146–147.

a kind of dual aspect insofar as it includes: (1) focal awareness of the object upon which it is intentionally directed and (2) peripheral awareness of oneself (or one's soul) as its subject. Indeed, Olivi characterizes this kind of self-knowledge in roughly the same terms Aquinas himself does. As we have seen, Aquinas holds that one "perceives oneself to have a soul, to live, and to exist because one perceives oneself sensing, thinking, or exercising other vital activities of this sort."53 Olivi expresses his own view in much the same way: "I never apprehend my acts (for example, acts of seeing, speaking, and so on) except by apprehending myself seeing, hearing, thinking, and so on."54 For convenience, I refer to this subjective, first-person character of conscious experience as "subjectivity."

Yet, even if Olivi shares Aquinas's views about the nature and phenomenal character of this subjective mode of self-knowing, nevertheless, he staunchly insists that such subjectivity is incompatible with any Aristotelian account of the nature of the soul. Thus, to the extent that Aquinas embraces an Aristotelian account of the intellective soul as a passive potency he will, on Olivi's view, be unable to explain the very phenomena that his own account of conscious self-knowing relies on. And this is because, as Olivi sees it, a commitment to both Sufficiency and Permanence is essential to any adequate account of subjectivity.

To see why Olivi thinks this is the case, let us focus first on why Sufficiency might be required for subjectivity. As we have already seen, Olivi thinks that cognizing is a process in which the cognizing subject is wholly active. In fact, as we have seen, he invokes our phenomenological experience in support of this claim. As he says: "we experience inwardly in ourselves that those acts proceed from us and that we truly perform them."55 Thus, on Olivi's view, the subjective character of our acts includes a sense of agency or sourcehood. Indeed, this is precisely what it is for a given act to be—and to be experienced as—*mine*. It is my act insofar as it is brought about *in* my soul, *by* my soul. And it is experienced as mine insofar as it is registered in (and as) *my* awareness as result of the soul's *self-initiated* reflexivity. If, therefore, an act of cognition—and the reflexive awareness attendant on it—comes about only as a result of the causal activity of something distinct from the soul, such an act would neither belong to me nor be reflexively experienced as mine. Here is Olivi:

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53 *st* 1.87.1. See footnote 19 in section 2.2 above.

54 Peter Olivi, *Impugnatio quorundam articulorum Arnaldi Galliardi* (hereafter *Impugnatio*), ed. S. Piron, *Oliviana* 2 (2006), art. 19, § 11. Available online: http://oliviana.revues.org/document56.html.

55 *Summa ii*, q. 58, 463–464. Cf. ibid., q. 72, 38; and q. 74, 124.

> When someone senses that he himself knows, and sees, and loves, he senses at that point the identity and selfness of himself (*suitatem sui*), so to speak, and he is noticing and sensing himself insofar as he is both cognized and the active subject (*activum suppositum*) [of cognizing]. But if an accident [e.g., a species received in the soul] is the effective source of those acts, then the opposite must rather be sensed.56

Olivi's remarks here are motivated in part by a general causal principle. Olivi holds that action in general belongs properly to the agent and not to the patient or the recipient of the action. Thus, if the mind or soul is not the primal source of its own acts and operations and, likewise, of the reflexivity constitutive of them, such activities would not, in fact, belong to the soul nor, for that reason, would they be experienced as such.57

It is, perhaps, a bit harder to see why Olivi thinks that an adequate account of subjectivity requires a commitment to Permanence. Here too, however, Olivi's way of characterizing subjective experience of our mental acts provides a clue. As Olivi characterizes the phenomenal character of conscious experience, it is clear that he supposes that we, at least implicitly, mark a distinction between our mental acts, on the one hand, and our mind or soul as the active subject of such acts, on the other. As he explains, when "we apprehend our acts […] we distinguish between the acts themselves and the substance on which they depend and in which they exist."58 More precisely, he thinks that

> we are perceptibly aware that these acts are derived from and dependent on a substance and not the other way around, [for we perceive] that the substance is fixed and permanent in itself, whereas the acts come about in continual succession. But this could not be the case if we could not cognize the suppositum of our acts except via intervening phantasms.59

Here Olivi makes clear that part of the distinction we mark between our acts and ourselves as their subject has to do with our sense of the former as something "derived from and dependent on" the soul and as "coming about

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56 *Summa ii*, q. 72, 126.

57 "Because," Olivi says, "in that case understanding, perceiving, and desiring taken actively should be attributed to the objects themselves rather than to the powers, just as lighting and heating are attributed to the sun or to a fire rather than to the air illuminated by them" (*Summa ii*, q. 58, 463). For further discussion of this claim See Silva and Toivanen, "The Active Nature of the Soul," 269 ff.

58 *Impugnatio* 19, § 11.

59 *Impugnatio* 19, § 11.

in a continual succession."60 By contrast, we experience our soul not only as the source of such acts but as "fixed and permanent." Taking for granted that this is a plausible characterization of subjective phenomenality, Olivi insists that no Aristotelian account of the soul can explain it. For, recall, on the Aristotelian account, the intellective power is sheer potency, and hence, something that exists in actuality only intermittently, and only via the activity of sense faculties and "intervening phantasms." Given this, Olivi thinks it is difficult to see how the Aristotelian can explain our experience of ourselves as the permanent, fixed subject of our various, intermittent states.

To better appreciate the difficulty, recall Aquinas's view. According to Aquinas, "our intellect, in its state in the present life […] cognizes itself insofar as it is rendered actual (*fit actu*) by species abstracted from sensible things."61 Accordingly, Aquinas holds that it is only "through its own act, and not through its own essence, that our intellect has cognition of itself." In this regard, therefore, the intellect exists as actualized when, and only when, intermittent (outward-directed) acts of cognition occur in it. For the same reason, its actual existence and self-awareness is dependent on and temporally co-extensive with such acts. But, if this is right, how can Aquinas explain one's subjective experience of oneself (i.e., of one's mind or intellect or soul) as both prior to and the enduring subject of its various episodic acts? For, as Olivi insists, subjectivity involves that "we are perceptively aware that these acts are derived from and dependent on a substance and not the other way around." As Olivi sees it, then, the best—indeed, the only—explanation for the soul's experience of itself as something that is fixed and enduring is for its awareness of itself to be fixed and enduring.

5 Conclusion

I have attempted to call attention to the way in which, for Olivi, the phenomenal character of conscious experience depends on a certain conception of the soul—namely, as essentially active and essentially reflexively turned upon itself. As we have now seen, moreover, on Olivi's view, the soul's very mode of existence consists in a kind of active, vital reflexivity. This conception of the soul entails that its knowledge of itself is a permanent, fixed feature of it—such

60 Cf. *Summa ii*, q. 72, 124, where Olivi claims that: "[…] constant internal experience proves this. For we sense from within our powers that our acts of cognition are made and go away, and that through them in some way we actively grasp and hold the objects themselves."

61 *st* 1.87.1c. See footnote 19, section 2.2 above.

that the soul's existence is itself sufficient for its self-knowing. Olivi is not alone in defending such a view of the soul's nature. Indeed, he takes himself simply to be articulating Augustine's view of the soul. What is both novel and striking in Olivi's account, however, is his contention that such a view of the soul *is required* in order to explain the subjective character of conscious thought and perception. Admittedly, Olivi's arguments depend very heavily on his preferred way of characterizing the phenomenal character of subjective experience. Any opponent could evade a good deal in his arguments by rejecting his framing of the phenomena to be explained. Even so, Olivi's argument for the connection between psychological agency, on the one hand, and subjectivity, on the other, amounts to a substantive and provocative contribution to later medieval philosophical psychology.62

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