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INTUITION, EXTERNALISM, AND DIRECT REFERENCE IN OCKHAM

Susan Brower-Toland

In recent years, a number of Ockham's commentators have been converging around a broadly externalist reading of his theory of mental content. Noting the emphasis he places on the role of (efficient) causation in his account of concept formation and mental representation, these commentators argue that, on Ockham's view, the content of a given mental state is determined, at least in part, by its causal connections to objects in the environment.[1] The aim of this paper is to challenge this increasingly prominent interpretation by focusing on Ockham's account of singular thought—or what he himself refers to as 'intuitive cognition'. This focus makes sense because those who defend the externalist reading of Ockham's theory of content typically build their case on his account of intuitive cognition. Nor is it hard to see why. Ockham not only places particular stress on role of causality in his account of intuitive states, but also assigns a foundational role to intuition in his broader account of mental content. Any grounds for rejecting an externalist interpretation of Ockham's theory of intuitive cognition will, therefore, count likewise against the externalist reading as whole.

On the standard externalist reading, intuitive cognitions are mental states that are individuated by their causal connection to some singular object. In fact, on this reading, intuitive cognitions turn out to be directly referential mental states since their content is taken to be wholly coincident with the individual object to which they are causally linked. Although this interpretation is suggested by a number of things Ockham himself says, and is defended by a host of his best commentators, there are, as we shall see, at least two serious problems for accepting it: first, causal externalism does not square with Ockham's account of supernaturally produced intuitive cognition; second,

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[1] See, for example, Peter King, "Rethinking Representation in the Middle Ages," in *Representation and Objects of Thought in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. H. Lagerlund (Hampshire: Ashgate Press, 2007); Peter King, "Thinking about Things: Singular Thought in the Middle Ages," in *Intentionality, Cognition, and Representation in the Middle Ages*, ed. G. Klima (Fordham: Fordham University Press, forthcoming); Calvin Normore, "Burge, Descartes, and Us," in *Reflections and Replies*: *Essays on the Philosophy of Tyler Burge*, eds. M. Hahn and B. Ramberg (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2003); Calvin Normore, "Ockham on Mental Language," in *Historical Foundations of Cognitive Science*, ed. J.-C. Smith (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990); Claude Panaccio, "Ockham's Externalism," in *Intentionality, Cognition, and Representation in the Middle Ages*, ed. G. Klima (Fordham: Fordham University Press, forthcoming).

taking intuitive cognitions to be directly referential sits uneasily both with Ockham's own characterization of the intentional structure of intuitive states and with his account of their role in the formation of perceptual judgments.

1. Intuitive Cognition: The Externalist, direct referentialist Interpretation

Ockham divides mental (i.e., intellective) states into two broad categories: those that are propositional in content (*complexa*) and those that are not (*simplex*).[2] He then further subdivides the latter into the following categories: those that are intuitive and those that are abstractive. Intuitive states, as Ockham characterizes them, are acts of perceptual acquaintance in which one is directly or immediately aware of some object.[3] Such states are, moreover, always singular in content; in intuition one is presented with one individual thing (*this* human, or *that* color). As Ockham explains:

> A non-propositional cognition (*cognitio simplex*) that is proper to a singular thing…is an intuitive cognition. … That an [intuitive act] is proper to one singular thing is clear since it is immediately caused (or is naturally suited to be caused) by the singular thing, and it is not naturally suited be caused by any other singular thing—even one of the same species.[4]

As this passage makes clear, Ockham understands the intentional or referential properties of intuitive cognitions in terms of their causal link to individual objects. As he sees it, an act of intuition refers to precisely that object which, in the natural course of things, causes or occasions its occurrence.

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[2] On Ockham's view this division, which maps Aristotle's distinction in the *Categories* between expressions that are "said in combination" (*dicuntur cum complexione*), and those "said without combination" (*dicuntur sine complexione*), reflects the language-like structure of mental representation.

[3] Intuitive cognition is not, however, restricted to perception of extramental objects. According to Ockham, one can also have intuitive cognition—that is, perception—of one's own mental states. For more on the distinction between intuition and abstraction, see John Boler, "Intuitive and Abstractive Cognition," in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, eds. N. Kretzmann, A. Kenny and J. Pinbourg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). Sebastian Day, *Intuitive Cognition: A Key to the Significance of the Later Scholastics* (St. Bonaventure, New York: The Franciscan Institute, 1947).

[4] *Quodl*. I.13 (*OTh* IX, 73). All references to Ockham's Latin texts are to his *Opera Philosophica et Theologica* (St. Bonaventure, New York: St. Bonaventure University Press, 1967-88). I use the following abbreviations in referring to particular volumes: *Ord.* (= *Ordinatio. Scriptum in Librum Primum Sententiarum*); *Rep.* (Reportatio. *Scriptum in Librum Primum Sententiarum*); *Quodl.* (= *Quodlibeta Septem*); *SL* (= *Summa Logicae*). Translations are my own.

As it turns out, intuitive states are characterized not only in terms of their object, but also in terms of the relations they bear to other mental states. Indeed, what most distinguishes intuitive from abstractive states, on Ockham's view, is the fact that intuitive cognitions are such that, by their very nature, they lead to the formation of a variety of perceptual judgments. Ockham holds that whenever there is an intuitive cognition of some object, that intuition will always and immediately give rise to a number of "evident" judgments regarding both that object's existence and its perceptible attributes. He puts it this way:

> An intuitive cognition of a thing is a cognition such that by virtue of it we can know whether the thing exists or not (so that if the thing does exist, the intellect at once judges that it exists and evidently knows that it exists). … Likewise, an intuitive cognition is such that when certain things are cognized and one inheres in the other…by virtue of this non-propositional cognition of such things one immediately knows whether a thing inheres or does not inhere… Thus, if Socrates is in fact white, then a cognition of Socrates and whiteness is said to be an intuitive cognition when, in virtue of such a cognition, one can evidently know that Socrates is white.[5]

Because intuitive states are defined by their role in perception and judgment, Ockham appeals to these same roles to distinguish them from abstractive cognitions. Thus, abstractive cognitions are such that they neither give rise to nor serve as grounds for perceptual judgments.[6] This is because, unlike intuitive states, abstractive cognitions are perfectly general in content and are also such that they yield no information regarding either the present existence or the contingent features of individual things. According to Ockham, abstractive states not only "regard something as abstracted from many singulars," but also "abstract from existence and non-existence, and from all the other conditions which contingently belong to or are predicated of a thing".[7]

As the foregoing makes clear, Ockham's theory of intuition is central both to his epistemology and to his theory of mind and mental representation. Until quite recently, however, the literature on Ockham's account of intuitive cognition has tended to focus only on the epistemological significance of intuition and, in particular, on questions about the justificatory role of such states vis-à-vis the beliefs or judgments formed on the basis of them. But in the past few years interest has increasingly turned to issues surrounding the

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[5] Ord. Prol. q.1, a.1 (*OTh* I, 31).
[6] As Ockham says: "abstractive cognition is that by virtue of which one cannot evidently know of a thing whether it exists or does not exist." Ibid. (*OTh* I, 32).
[7] Ibid. (*OTh* I, 30-31).

implications of Ockham's theory of intuitive cognition for his broader views about the nature of mental representation and, in particular, to questions about its bearing on his theory of concepts and mental language.

As scholars have long been aware, Ockham devotes considerable attention to the project of developing a systematic account of the nature and structure of mental language. On his view, all thought (that is, all intellective cognition) occurs as a kind of inner language—one structured in much the way natural language is. Given this, it is natural to expect that Ockham's distinction between intuitive and abstractive cognition answers to something in his account of mental language. Since Ockham himself never explicitly marks such connections, however, mapping his theory of intuition and abstraction onto his theory of mental language requires a bit of reconstruction.

In his recent book, *Ockham on Concepts*, Claude Panaccio offers just such a reconstruction. In fact, he dedicates the first chapter of his book to teasing out the relationship between the epistemological vocabulary of intuitive and abstractive cognition and the logical and semantical categories in terms of which Ockham characterizes the language of thought.[8] Starting with acts of *abstractive* cognition, Panaccio argues, quite persuasively, that such states function in mental language as general expressions—"mental common nouns", as it were.[9] That abstractive cognitions are semantically *general* is clear not only from the fact that Ockham explicitly characterizes them as states that "abstract from singulars", but also from his claim that the intentionality of an act of abstractive cognition is determined by a relation of "likeness" or "similarity" to what it represents. After all, Panaccio reasons, if relations of similitude or likeness determine the content of abstractive acts, such acts are, at least in principle, capable of representing any number of (relevantly similar) entities and, so, are general in representational function.[10] As mental common nouns, therefore, acts of abstractive cognition turn out to be among the basic, categorematic units of mental language.

Like abstractive acts, intuitive cognitions also function as semantic and syntactic units of mental language. Unlike abstractive acts, however, they clearly function as *singular* terms since they are causally and referentially tied to a single object. But what kind of singular term are they? Over the course of

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[8] Claude Panaccio, *Ockham on Concepts* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2005), 5-20.

[9] Ibid., 9.

[10] Ockham himself calls attention to this result: "No simple abstractive cognition is more a likeness of one singular thing than of another maximally similar to it. …Therefore, no such act is proper to a singular, rather every [abstractive act] whatsoever is general (*universalis*)." *Quodl*. I.13 (*OTh* IX, 74)

his discussion, Panaccio surveys a number of ways they might be classified. Ultimately, however, he argues for the introduction of a "special semantical and syntactical category, [one] which presents strong similarities with what Bertrand Russell used to call 'proper names in the logical sense'." As he explains:

> A logically proper name, in Russell's view, is never given but to a single referent, with which the speaker must at some point have been directly acquainted, this episode of direct acquaintance having fixed once and for all the referent for this particular designator. Ockham's intuitive cognitions are direct designators too: they do not have descriptive contents, any more than Russell's logically proper names do. And they presuppose a direct acquaintance of the agent with the object. The requirement of acquaintance, however, is even stronger in the case of Ockham's intuitive cognitions since such cognitions simply cannot occur (in the natural order) in the absence of their objects.[11]

According to Panaccio, intuitive cognitions are best understood as directly referential (mental) expressions. On his reading, intuitive states are utterly devoid of descriptive content and, so, are such that they "refer to their objects without the help of any form of description, of any general concept, or of any intermediary whatsoever."[12] Accordingly, he insists that "in the case of intuitive cognition it is causality…which determines signification."[13] Ultimately, therefore, Panaccio contends that intuitive acts should be classified as 'rigid dietics'—that is, as states that "literally show their object (this is the diexis aspect) and never change them (this is the rigidity)."[14]

Although Panaccio does not, at least in this context, explicitly use the term 'externalism' to describe Ockham's account of intuitive cognition, it should be clear that the account does turn out to be externalist.[15] For purposes of discussion in what follows, it will be useful to think of the version of externalism Panaccio attributes to Ockham in terms of two distinct theses:

(1) The content of an intuitive state is individuated broadly in terms of its causal connection to some object.
(2) The content of an intuitive state just is the object to which it is causally linked.

The first thesis (call it the 'causal thesis') follows from Panaccio's claim that intuitions are determined by their causal relation to their objects; the second thesis (call it the 'direct reference thesis') captures his view that intuitions are

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[11] Panaccio, *Ockham on Concepts*, 13.
[12] Ibid., 14.
[13] Ibid., 12.
[14] Ibid., 14.
[15] But see his "Ockham's Externalism" in which he does explicitly characterize Ockham's views about both intuitive and abstractive acts as 'externalist'.

"direct designators" lacking any internal, descriptive content. Now, while the causal thesis alone is sufficient to secure an externalist interpretation of Ockham's theory of intuition, its conjunction with the direct reference thesis yields a radically externalist interpretation since it rules out any "two-factor" account of intuitive content. On this reading, there is no possibility that intuitive cognitions have, in addition to their broad (or object-dependent) content, any kind of narrow (or object-independent) content.

Panaccio is not alone in reading Ockham's account of intuition as a form of externalism. Marilyn Adams has advanced a similar reading. Like Panaccio, Adams seems to be committed to the causal thesis since she too sees Ockham as giving pride of place to causality in the determination of intuitive states. In fact, she explains Ockham's (mature) account of intuitive cognition by comparing it to contemporary, causal theories of proper names.[16] What is more, she also sees a resemblance between Ockham's intuitive cognitions and Russell's logically proper names—though, in the end, she appears to shy away from the direct reference thesis.[17] Other commentators, however, have been perfectly willing to embrace both aspects of the radical externalist interpretation. Peter King, for example, not only explicitly commits himself to the causal thesis, asserting that Ockham "endors[es] a causal theory of proper names in Mental Language", but also advances something like the direct reference thesis.[18] According to King, Ockham has "no need to postulate independent contents or indeed any discernible intrinsic structure to the [intuitive] mental act."[19] In much the same vein, Calvin Normore attributes both theses to Ockham, saying that he holds a "causal externalism of the 'bare concepts' sort."[20]

While similar interpretations have been advanced by still other scholars, the foregoing is sufficient to establish both the nature of the currently prevailing interpretation of intuitive cognition and the weight of the authority

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[16] Marilyn Adams, *William Ockham* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press Adams, 1987), ch. 4. Adams sees a development in Ockham's account of intuitive cognition. On her view, the nature of this development "invite[s] a comparison with the contemporary movement away from a Russellian analysis of proper names." (137)

[17] Ibid., 136-138.

[18] See King, "Rethinking Representation".

[19] Ibid. In "Thinking About Things", King makes roughly the same point: "the content of these mental acts [namely, of intuitive cognitions] is not an internal feature of the mind. Instead it is determined by the external world, in particular, by the very item that caused the intuitive cognition."

[20] Normore, "Burge, Descartes, and Us," 5. See also his "Ockham on Mental Language," 56-57. While Normore holds that both abstractive and intuitive states are purely externalist, Panaccio resists this claim when it comes to abstractive cognition. See Panaccio, "Ockham's Externalism".

behind it.[21] As suggested earlier, moreover, the externalist interpretation of Ockham's account of intuitive cognition forms the basis of the externalist reading of his theory of mental content in general. On Ockham's view, as King aptly puts it, intuitive cognitions are, "the building blocking of mental life."[22] Concept formation, for example, begins with intuition; all abstractive acts (i.e. general concepts) are causally connected to prior acts of intuition. Likewise, acts of intuition partly constitute the perceptual and existential judgments based on them. If, therefore, the content of intuitive states is externally individuated the concepts and judgments formed from them would have to be as well. This is, in any case, what commentators have tended to suppose.

It must be acknowledged that there is much in Ockham's texts that appears to support the foregoing picture. Not only is it clear that all cognition begins with intuitive cognition, but there can be no denying that Ockham places considerable emphasis on causality in his account of intuitive cognition. Consider, for example, his remarks in the following two passages (on which all the aforementioned commentators rely)

> Intuitive cognition is the proper cognition of a singular not because of its greater likeness to one thing more than another but because it is naturally caused by one thing and not by another; nor can it be caused by another. [23]

> For this reason, likeness is not a sufficient explanation (*causa praecisa*) for why one thinks about one thing and not another. …[an intuition], from its nature, determines for itself that it leads the intellect into cognition of that object by which it is partially caused (and it so determines for itself that it is caused by that object that it cannot be caused by any other).[24]

As these passages show, Ockham does appeal—and quite explicitly—to causality in his explanation of the connection between intuitive cognitions and the objects to which they refer. And Ockham certainly does say things that could be taken to imply that he thinks this causal connection is what determines the content of intuitive states. Perhaps one of the most suggestive

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[21] Gyula Klima argues for something like the causal thesis in a recent paper entitled "Singularity by Similarity v. Causality in Aquinas, Ockham, and Buridan" delivered at the *Montreal Workshop on Nominalism*, May 12-13 2006, at University of Quebec at Montreal. See also Henrik Lagerlund, "Mental Representation in Medieval Philosophy," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2004 Edition), ed., E. N. Zalta, URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2004/entries/representation-medieval/>

[22] Peter King, "Thinking About Things".

[23] *Quodl*. I.13 (OTh IX, 76).

[24] Rep. II.qq.12-13 (*OTh* V, 287-289).

passages in this regard is one where Ockham is considering two angels—call them 'Gabriel' and 'Michael'—one of whom is looking into the mind of the other. In the example, Michael is intuiting some object, and Gabriel is attempting to read Michael's mind—to see what he's cognizing. According to Ockham, Gabriel will be unable to determine what object Michael is thinking about:

> One [angel] who intuitively see an act of cognition of some singular [in another's mind] does not, nevertheless, intuitively see the singular thing itself…. For, even if an angel were to intuitively see the act of cognition of some singular (and, we may suppose, also intuitively sees the singular thing itself), nevertheless, he would not see that that cognition [in the mind of the other] is of *this* singular. …Indeed, even if there were only one singular thing near to the intellect [of the other] still the angel could not evidently know that this cognition is of that singular…[25]

One natural explanation for why Gabriel can't determine the content of Michael's intuition is that, on Ockham's view, the content of an intuitive act isn't "in the head". In any case, Ockham's remarks in this context, especially when taken together his with repeated emphasis on the role of causality in intuition, make the causal externalist reading look tempting.

Yet, despite the suggestive nature of these texts and the cumulative weight of the authorities who draw an externalist moral from them, there is reason to reject the externalist interpretation of Ockham's account. To see why, it will be useful to begin by considering Ockham's account of supernaturally produced intuitive cognition. Supernatural cases of intuition appear to tell strongly against the causal thesis and, so, against any *causal* externalist interpretation of intuition (radical or not). To be sure, all of the commentators mentioned above are perfectly aware of the supernatural cases of intuitive cognition and of the theological considerations that motivate them.[26] My own conviction, however, is that they have not sufficiently attended to the implications of such cases.

2. Against Causal Externalism: Supernaturally Produced Intuitive Cognition

[25] Rep. II.q.16 (*OTh* V, 378-9). I'm grateful to Panaccio for calling my attention to this passage.

[26] Panaccio, for example, explicitly mentions Ockham's willingness to allow for "miraculous interventions of this sort" and acknowledges that any "general characterization of intuitive…cognitions must take [this] into account". See *Ockham on Concepts*, 7.

In nearly *every* context in which Ockham discusses intuitive cognition he acknowledges, at least implicitly, the possibility of supernaturally caused intuitive cognitions. For this reason, his willingness to allow for miraculous intuitions cannot be seen as a mere slip on his part, or some peripheral feature of the account; rather, it's at the very center. In fact, Ockham's standard way of characterizing intuitive cognition is calculated to allow for the possibility of divine intervention. The following passage is representative in this regard:

> Intuitive cognition of a thing is a cognition such that by virtue of it we are able to know whether a thing exists or does not exist so that, if the thing does exist, the intellect immediately judges that it exists and evidently knows that it exists (unless, by chance, it is impeded on account of some imperfection in this cognition). In the same way, if, by divine power, God were to preserve a perfect intuitive cognition of a thing that no longer exists, by virtue of this non-propositional cognition the intellect would cognize that that thing does not exist.[27]

As Ockham points out in this passage (and many others like it), intuitive cognitions provide grounds not only for judgments regarding the existence of the objects intuited, but also for judgments regarding the *non-existence* of some object.[28] Cases in which the intuitive act yields a judgment regarding the non-existence of some object are precisely those in which the intuitive cognition is supernaturally produced, since in them there is no existing object to serve as cause for the intuitive act in question. Yet, while the intuitive act is, in such cases, the result of God's causal activity, it does not necessarily produce any error on the part of the cognizer—for Ockham claims that the ensuing judgment is that the relevant object *does not exist*.

The specific case Ockham is envisioning above is one in which God intervenes to *conserve* an intuitive act after the object of such an act is removed or destroyed. But this represents only one of a variety of ways in which Ockham thinks God could intervene. For my purposes, the following two cases are more instructive:

> [CASE 1] Through intuitive cognition we judge a thing to exist when it exists—and this is the case generally whether the intuitive cognition is naturally caused or supernaturally caused by God alone. If it is naturally caused, then it cannot exist unless the object exists and is present in the required proximity. …
> If, however, it is supernaturally caused—say, if God were to cause in me an intuitive cognition of some object existing in Rome—immediately, upon the possession of the intuitive cognition of it, I could judge that what I intuit and see exists, just as much as if I had the cognition naturally. Now, you may say that the

[27] *Ord*. I Prol. q. 1 (*OTh* I, 30-31).
[28] Cf. *Rep*. II.qq., 12-13 (*OTh* V, 284); *Quodl*. V.5 (*OTh* IX, 496)

> object is not present here and is not in the required proximity to me. I reply that although intuitive cognition cannot be naturally caused except when the object is present in the required proximity, still, it can be supernaturally caused. … [CASE 2] Similarly, I can judge, by means of an intuitive cognition, that a thing does not exist when it does not. … For instance, if God were to cause in me the intuitive cognition of some non-existent object and were to conserve that cognition in me, then, by means of that cognition, I could judge that the thing does not exist. For, seeing that thing intuitively and forming this mental sentence, "this object does not exist", the intellect, in virtue of the intuitive cognition, immediately assents to this sentence—and dissents from its opposite—in such a way that the intuitive cognition is the partial cause of the assent (as was said before about natural intuition). And so, consequently, the intellect assents that what I intuit is pure nothing.[29]

In Case 1, Ockham allows that God could produce (and conserve) in me an intuitive cognition of an object that in fact *does exist*, but which does not exist anywhere in my proximate environment (but rather in Rome). What this shows, is that on Ockham's view it is possible for me to have an intuitive cognition of (along with any number of evident judgments about) an object that is at a significant distance from me, and perhaps is such that I've never encountered it at all. In Case 2, Ockham allows that God could cause (and conserve) an intuitive cognition of an object that does not exist at all—not near me, not in Rome, not anywhere. What this case shows is that Ockham is willing to countenance even the possibility of intuition of non-existent objects.

On the face of it, these cases look to be straightforward counter-examples to the causal thesis. After all, to allow that there could be intuitive cognition of objects with which a cognizer has no causal contact (or which do not exist) would certainly seem to vitiate the claim that Ockham places causal requirements on the individuation or determination of intuitive states. As it turns out, however, matters are not so simple. This is because Ockham is willing to speak of supernaturally produced intuitions in ways that suggest that such acts still bear *some* kind of causal relation to their objects.

In order to get clear about the precise implications of supernaturally caused intuitions for the standard interpretation, it will be useful to begin by distinguishing between two types of view that go by the name 'externalism' in the contemporary literature: strong and weak externalism, respectively.[30] *Strong* externalism is the view that a given mental state depends (for its existence and identity) on the existence of some entity *in the subject's environment*. Weak externalism, by contrast, is the view that a mental state

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[29] *Rep*. II.qq.12-13 (*OTh* V, 258-260).

[30] I take this distinction, which is well-known in the contemporary literature, from Colin McGinn, *Mental Content* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 7-9.

depends (for its existence and identity) merely on the existence of some external entity somewhere or other. Thus, whereas strong externalism ties a mental state to the part of the world the subject inhabits, weak externalism does not; weak externalism does not, in other words, require the relevant entity to exist in any proximity to the subject whatsoever. Now, insofar as commentators see Ockham as appealing to *causal* connections for the determination of intuitive states it would appear that they mean to be attributing to him some version of strong externalism since, intuitively, we can stand in causal relations only to things which exist in some spatio-temporal proximity to us—or, in any case, it would certainly seem that acts of *perception* can be caused only by objects existing in our immediate environment.

But if we return to our two cases, it would seem that Case 1 is sufficient to rule out any version of strong externalism. For while Ockham thinks that, *in the natural course of things*, intuitive cognitions are caused only by objects existing in our immediate proximity, nevertheless, in Case 1 he allows for the possibility of our having, *via* supernatural means, an intuition of objects that exist at a great distance from us—of objects which play no role in bringing about the intuition of them. But, then, for the same reason, it would appear that intuitive cognitions are not strongly externalist since they do not require any causal connection to objects existing in the subject's environment.[31]

Of course, even if this is right, Case 1 is not sufficient to show that intuitive cognitions are not still in some important way object-dependent—that is, it does not show that such states are not in *any* respect individuated by a relation to external entities. But we shouldn't forget about Case 2. Here, Ockham allows that there could, in principle, be an intuitive cognition of what does not exist *at all*. Again as he himself says (at the end of the foregoing passage), in such cases "what I intuit is pure nothing" (*purum nihil*). But, clearly, this would seem to imply that intuitive cognitions are not object-dependent in any respect and, hence, to rule out *any* version of externalism, strong or weak.[32]

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[31] Although Ockham is notorious for his willingness to allow for (causal) action at a distance, the distance at issue in Case 1 is (as Ockham himself makes clear) too great for this sort of action. As he says, "God alone" will be the cause of the intuition of the object since there is "such a distance between the object and the [intellective] power that the power cannot (naturally) have an intuitive cognition of the object".

[32] In fact, whereas Case 1 may be sufficient to rule out the causal thesis (since it allows for intuition of objects with which the cognizer has had no causal contact), Case 2 appears to rule out both the causal and direct reference thesis (since it allows for intuition of what does not exist). More on direct reference in §. 3 below.

This is where matters get complicated. The complication lies in the fact that Ockham says a number of things (both in connection with Case 1 and 2 above as well as in other contexts) which might be taken to suggest that some version of the causal thesis and, hence, some form of causal externalism may, nevertheless, be viable after all—even in cases of intuition of non-existents. Consider, for example, his remarks in the following passage:

> You may say that God can directly and totally cause an intention, and in that case…causality does not produce an intention [which is] of one thing but not of another. After all, it is directly caused by nothing other than God. To this, I reply that any intention of a creature that is caused by God [is such that it] could be (partially) caused by a creature, even if, in fact, it is not so caused. Therefore, the intention cognizes that singular thing by which it would be determinately caused if it were caused by a creature.[33]

And, again:

> You may claim that [an intuitive cognition] can be caused *by God alone*, and I admit that this is true. But such a vision is always naturally *suited* to be caused by one object and not by another; and if it is naturally caused, it can be caused only by one object and not by another. Hence, the reason why an intuitive cognition…is proper to one singular thing [and not another] is not similarity but only causality; no other cause can be assigned.[34]

In these texts, Ockham claims that even when intuitive cognitions are not actually caused by the singular objects to which they are directed, these states are such that *if they had been caused* naturally (rather than supernaturally), they *would have been caused* by those object to which they refer. Indeed, it would seem that even in the case where the intuition is of a non-existent, Ockham still wants to say that it is "causality" which explains why the intuition "is proper to" (i.e. is *of* or *about*) one thing and not any other. These sorts of remarks make it look as if Ockham thinks that in cases of supernaturally produced intuition there is still a kind of object-dependence—even a kind of *causal* dependence of intuitions on their objects. If this is right, perhaps there's something to the causal externalist reading after all. For, one can then take these passages as claiming that even supernaturally induced intuitions are broadly individuated—namely, by (counter-factual) casual relations to their (possibly non-actual) singular objects.

Let us grant, for the moment, that it is possible to read such passages in this way. Even so, several observations are in order. First, it is important to see

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[33] *Rep*. II.qq.12-13 (*OTh* V, 289).
[34] *Quodl*. I.13 (*OTh* IX, 76).

that the version of externalism under consideration is, at best, only a form of weak externalism. This is because the object on which a supernatural intuition depends needn't be present anywhere in the subject's immediate environment. (Indeed, it need not even actually exist!).[35] Certainly, such a view may still qualify as externalist, but it is a far cry from the sort of view that goes by the name in current the discussions (to which Ockham's views are, as we've seen, often favorably compared). In fact, the variety of externalism on offer here is so week that it looks to be perfectly compatible with the strongest varieties of internalism defended by contemporary philosophers.[36]

Second, even granting that Ockham's account of intuition may constitute a variety of (weak) externalism, it should be clear that it cannot be taken to constitute any kind of *causal* externalism. Although the relation in terms of which intuitive states are individuated on this view *makes reference to* causality, the relation is not, in fact, one of causing. On the contrary, it is a relation of counterfactual (causal) dependence. Of course, one could stipulate that mere reference to causation is all that's required for a view to qualify as causal externalism. But here again it's clear that, at least from a contemporary perspective, the type of "causal externalism" in question is so attenuated as to barely merit the name. Indeed, to the extent that Ockham's commentators have been tempted to see his account as an early analogue of contemporary versions of causal externalism, they appear to have paid too little attention to the implications of supernaturally produced intuitions.

Third, it's important to see that, however weak or attenuated the proposed version of externalism is, it may *still* be too strong for Ockham. This is because the view on offer entails a commitment to non-existent objects (or mere possibilia) and there is a good deal of textual evidence which suggests that Ockham wants to restrict his ontology to what is actual.[37] Hence, to the

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[35] Actually, strictly speaking, in order to qualify as a version of weak externalism by the McGinn definition we'd have to broaden that definition just a bit (so that relevant dependence relation includes dependence on objects that have a mode of reality less than actual existence).

[36] Thus, Gabriel Segal—a well-known proponent of internalism—argues that weak externalism is perfectly compatible with internalist views of mental content. See Gabriel Segal, *A Slim Book about Narrow Content*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2000).

[37] Not only are there are a number of texts in which Ockham appears to explicitly reject the notion what is non-actual has any kind of being or reality, but he also has straightforward theological reasons for doing so. According to Ockham, God is the only being that exists necessarily—everything else is both created and contingent. But *possibilia* appear to be a type of necessary being (they are, after all, *necessarily* possible) and, as such, would possess being or reality independently of God's intellect or will. This is perhaps why Ockham claims that all uncreated creatures (his vocabulary for *possibilia*) exist only "in their cause" (namely, in God); and that they are nothing distinct from the divine essence itself. See Ord I d. 36, q.1 (*OTh* IV, 550). For discussion of Ockham's committment to non-existent entities see Adams, *William*

extent that this interpretation saddles him with a commitment to possiblia, it must, for that reason if no other, be seen as highly contentious.

A fourth and final observation is this. Even if it's *possible* to read the foregoing passages as committing Ockham to some version of externalism (whether causal or not), it must be said that without some independent motivation for taking them this way, there's no obvious reason for doing so. For, in fact, all the passages we've looked at are perfectly compatible with a purely internalist interpretation. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that intuitive cognitions are not dependent on anything external to the mind, and, thus, that Ockham holds a purely internalist account of intuitive content. We can still make good sense of the claims he makes about the counterfactual causal relations between supernatural intuitions and their objects. We could say, for example, that what makes it true that a supernaturally induced intuition could have been caused (naturally) by just one object is the nature of the intuitive act itself—namely, its content being such that that act could only (naturally) be the product of one particular object. Not only is this interpretation *compatible* with Ockham's claims, but some of his remarks even seem to tell in favor of it. For example, Ockham sometimes speaks of intuitive states—whether naturally or supernaturally produced—as being in themselves "suited" (or "apt") to be caused in certain ways.[38] Again, he sometimes characterizes intuitive acts as "determining for themselves" that they are caused by certain objects.[39] One natural way of taking these remarks is to read them as making claims about the nature of intuitive cognitions and the way in which they determine or ground a relation to a single object. Thus, while the relation between an intuitive cognition and its object would be an internal one (that is, one that obtains in any world in which both the relata exist), the obtaining of the relation itself would be determined by intrinsic features of the intuition—features that make it "suited to be caused by one object and not by any other."

If something like this is right, then causality plays at most a *genetic* role in Ockham's account of intuitive cognition. It would function merely as part of

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Ockham, 400-416; Alfred Freddoso, "Ockham's Theory of Truth Conditions," in *Ockham's Theory of Propositions*, trans. A. F. Freddoso and H. Shuurman (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), sec.5; Elizabeth Karger, "Would Ockham have Shaved Wyman's Beard?" *Franciscan Studies* 40 (1980): 244-64; Calvin Normore, "Some Aspects of Ockham's Logic," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ockham*, ed. P. V. Spade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), sec. 3; Paul Spade, "Ockham's Nominalist Metaphysics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ockham*, ed. P. V. Spade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[38] *Quodl*. I.13 (*OTh* IX, 76)

[39] *Rep*. II.qq.12-13 (*OTh* V, 289)

an explanation of how, in the natural course of things, we come to occupy intuitive states with a given intentional content, and *not* as part of an explanation of the constitution or determination of such states. And, this is the way Ockham himself tends to speak about causality. Consider, for example, the following passage:

> Intuitive cognition cannot be caused or conserved naturally when the object does not exist. The reason for this is that a real effect cannot be caused or produced into being from non-being from what does not exist. As a result, naturally speaking, an intuitive cognition requires for its existence both a productive and a preservative cause.[40]

Here, Ockham claims that intuitive cognitions depend (in the ordinary course of things) on the causal activity of their objects merely to "produce them into being from non-being", and there is no indication that the causal connection does more than that. Intuitions would, therefore, seem to depend on their object merely as a "productive and preservative cause" rather than as something constitutive of their identity. Indeed, this is precisely why God can always serve in place of the object to produce an intuitive cognition with *the very same content*.

3. Against Direct Reference: Some Final Considerations

As noted earlier, the received view of Ockham's theory of intuition involves two theses: a causal thesis and a direct reference thesis. Although, to this point, our focus has been on just the latter it should be clear that, if the argument of the previous section is correct and the internalist reading captures Ockham's theory of intuition, the direct reference thesis will also be ruled out. If intuitive cognitions are not object-dependent in any way, their semantic or intentional function cannot be characterized in terms of direct designation or pure denotation. Before closing, however, it is worth noting that there is further, independent evidence against the direct reference thesis—evidence which can be found in some of Ockham's explicit remarks about both the semantic character of intuitive states and their role in judgment formation.

Consider the fact that Ockham tends to describe intuitive cognition not only as an act of cognizing some singular object, but also as cognizing it *in a certain way*. For instance, he says that, unlike abstractive acts, which abstract from existence and non-existence, intuitive cognitions present their object *as existing* or *as not existing*: "intuitive cognition is that by means of which a

[40] *Quodl*. VI.6 (*OTh* IX, 606)

thing is known to exist when it does exist, and not to exist when it does not exist."[41] And, as Ockham elsewhere suggests, intuitive cognitions present objects in other ways as well: "the intellect intuitively cognizes singulars *as here and now* and according to every other condition with respect to which the senses cognize (and even more as well)."[42] Evidently, therefore, on Ockham's view an intuitive cognition of some individual (say, Socrates) will present him not only *as existing*, but also *as here and now*, and perhaps also *as pale*, *as next to Plato*, and so on.

If this understanding of his view is correct—and intuitive cognitions not only refer to their objects but also connote something about their existence and circumstances—it would explain why Ockham assigns intuition the role he does in the formation of existential and perceptual judgments. As we've seen, Ockham holds that when the intellect intuitively cognizes some object, it *immediately* forms a number of judgments about them. Consider again the following passage:

> Intuitive cognition is such that when certain things are cognized, one of which inheres in the other, or is distant from the other, or stands in some relation to the other, it is at once known by virtue of this non-propositional cognition of those things whether a thing inheres or does not inhere, whether the thing is distant or not distant, and so on for other contingent truths. Thus, for instance, if Socrates is pale in reality, then cognition of Socrates and paleness is called intuitive cognition when, in virtue of such a cognition, one can evidently known that Socrates is pale.[43]

Passages such as this one make clear that Ockham thinks that the mere possession of an intuitive cognition of an object immediately leads the intellect to assent to a number of "contingent truths" regarding its attributes, spatial location, relations, etc. But why would he think this? The most natural and straightforward explanation is that he thinks intuition itself somehow *presents* or *represents* the object *as having* those attributes, locations, relations, etc. After all, if an intuition is purely referential, and thus denotes Socrates and paleness but does not present Socrates *as pale* (or paleness *as inhering in Socrates*), it is difficult to see why Ockham would claim that just "by virtue of" having such an intuition one could immediately and evidently judge *that Socrates is pale*.

What is more, there is a passage in which Ockham explicitly allows that one can have "more than one simple and proper concept of one and the same thing"—that is to say, one can have qualitatively distinct intuitions of one and

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[41] *Rep*. II.qq.12-13 (*OTh* V, 286). Cf. *Quodl*. V.5 (*OTh* IX, 496)
[42] *Rep*. II.qq.12-13 (*OTh* V, 284).
[43] *Ord*. Prol. q.1, a.1 (*OTh* I, 31)

the same object.[44] This can occur, for example, in cases where the cognizing subject moves closer and closer to the object so that, as he draws near, "his vision of it is intensified and becomes clearer."[45] Evidently, Ockham is supposing that, in such a case, a cognizer will have several distinct intuitions or "visions" of the same object as he moves—"visions which," he says, "are the same in species [that is, they are intuitions of the same object], but differ only as more or and less perfect."[46] But that is just to suppose that the intuitions of the object differ not only in number, but also in representational content—that is to say, that each intuitive act presents the object in a different way depending on the vantage point of the cognizer. That such intuitions differ in content is clear since, as Ockham proceeds to explain, each gives rise to a different perceptual judgment:

> …as he [the cognizer] approaches the visible object (say, that it is a white thing)…diverse judgments can be caused—for example, that the thing seen is a being, or is a body, or is a color, or [has] whiteness.[47]

All this, of course, strongly suggests that intuitive cognitions cannot, as many commentators have supposed, be directly or purely referential states—in the sense that their reference to an object exhausts their intentional or semantic function. After all, if intuitive cognitions lack any sort of internal or representational structure, we seem to be left with no way to account for Ockham's claim that numerically distinct intuitions of one and the same object may lead to different perceptual judgments.

Although intuitive cognitions *can* be understood to function as singular terms in the language of thought, we shouldn't be too quick to classify them as directly referential (or "logically proper") expressions. For, as the foregoing considerations suggest, these states seem to involve some connotative content—indeed, they would seem to bear a remarkable resemblance to a type of singular expression that comes to be referred to by later logicians as a "vague individual" (*individuum vagum*).[48] A vague individual is a type

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[44] *Quodl*. I.13 (*OTh* IX, 75).
[45] Ibid. (*OTh* IX, 76).
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] For more on later medieval discussions of this category of singular term see E. J. Ashworth, "Singular Terms and Singular Concepts: from Buridan to the Early Sixteenth Century," in *John Buridan and Beyond*: *Topics in Language and Sciences 1300-1700*, eds. R. L. Freidmann and S. Ebbesen (Copenhagen: The Royal Danish Academy of Science and Letters, 2004); E. J. Ashworth, "Singular Terms and Predication in Some Late Fifteenth and Sixteenth Century Thomistic Logicians," in *Medieval Theories on Assertive and Non-Assertive Language*, eds. A. Maierù and L. Valente (Florence: Olschki, 2004); Henrik Lagerlund, "Vague Concepts and

expression (or concept)—such as 'this human' or 'this white thing'—that is semantically singular, but complex in representational content; it refers to exactly one individual, but conveys or connotes something about its nature or "individual circumstances". Now, obviously, it would take us too far a field to explore the resemblance between Ockham's intuitive cognitions and the notion of vague singulars.[49] Suffice it to say, however, that to the extent that intuitions function as something akin to vague singular concepts—that is, to the extent that they are connotative in nature or present their object under certain (general) aspects—to that same extent they are ill-suited to serve as 'logically proper' or directly referential mental expressions.[50]

Singular Terms in a Buridanian Language of Thought Tradition," in *Intentionality, Cognition, and Representation in the Middle Ages*, ed. G. Klima (Fordham: Fordham University Press, forthcoming).

[49] The *prima facia* similarity between Ockham's characterizations of intuitive cognition and vague individual concepts is quite remarkable. Not only do Ockham's intuitive cognitions appear to be connotative in nature, but they also clearly do involve a kind of semantic or representational generality. Indeed, despite the emphasis Ockham places on causality in accounting for the intentionality of intuitive cognition, he is also happy to speak of intuitive cognitions as relating to their objects as "likenesses" of them—where likeness is, as we've already seen, a way of indicating semantic generality. At Rep. II.qq.12-13, for example, Ockham says that a given act of intuitive cognition "is not more a similitude of one [object] than of another" and that it could be "equally assimilated to many individuals" (*OTh* V, 287-289). It is precisely for this reason that he thinks one must appeal to the genetic features of intuitive acts in accounting for the singularity.

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