

Peter Auriol on the Intuitive Cognition of Nonexistents Revisiting the Charge of Skepticism in Walter Chatton and Adam Wodeham

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Recent years have seen a welcome revival of interest in the role of skeptical arguments in later medieval philosophy.¹ As studies have shown, scholastic treatments of knowledge and cognition show a keen interest in the skeptical problems, and by the turn of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, skepticism had become a “main focus” of philosophical inquiry.²

One key figure in this context was the fourteenth-century Franciscan philosopher and theologian Peter Auriol (1280-1322).³ Although Auriol never thought of himself as a skeptic, two of the signature claims of his philosophy soon came to be seen as major risks to certain knowledge of the world. The first is a claim about the objects of cognition. According to Auriol, the objects of cognition have a special kind of subject-dependent being. They have what he calls apparent being. The second is a claim about sensory cognition, or what he calls intuitive cognition. According to Auriol, although intuitive cognition normally comes with a real and existent object, it need not do so. God can bring about intuitions without existent objects, and even without his intervention natural factors can cause intuitive cognitions to lack existent objects.

¹ In particular, see Dominik Perler, *Zweifel und Gewissheit. Skeptische Debatten im Mittelalter*, second edition (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 2012). Also Christophe Grellard, “Comment peut-on se fier à l’expérience? Esquisse d’une typologie des réponses médiévales au scepticisme,” *Quaestio* 4 (2004), 113-35.

² Henrik Lagerlund, “A History of Skepticism in the Middle Ages,” in Lagerlund (ed.), *Rethinking the History of Skepticism. The Missing Medieval Background* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 1.

³ On Auriol’s role in the history of skepticism, see Charles Bolyard, “Medieval Skepticism,” in E. Zalta (ed.), *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (spring 2013 edition)*, §4 and Russell Friedman, “Peter Auriol,” in E. Zalta (ed.), *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (fall 2015 edition)*, §3.

In the eyes of early readers like fellow Franciscans Walter Chatton (1290-1343) and Adam Wodeham (1295-1358), these two claims were closely linked. In particular, both believed that the ontology of apparent being was a major part of why Auriol believed that there could be natural intuitions of nonexistents. But the claim that there could be natural intuitions of nonexistents directly led to skepticism, they found. On this reading of Auriol, the ontology of apparent being put him on the road to the natural intuition of nonexistents, and thus to skepticism.

Modern commentators have offered similar readings. According to Rega Wood for example, the theory of apparent being was what “forced” Auriol and his readers to consider the natural intuition of nonexistents.⁴ And according to Richard Cross, the natural intuition of nonexistents has “understandably been seen to usher in some kind of skepticism.”⁵ The apparent being opens up the possibility of natural intuitions of nonexistents, and that possibility at its turn opens the door to doubt.

But this paper argues that the kind of reading of Auriol we get in Chatton and Wodeham is problematic. In particular, the paper will make two claims. The first is that the theory of apparent being does not give any special reason to think that there could be natural intuitions of nonexistents. So even if Chatton and Wodeham are right to think that his theory of intuition leads to skepticism, it was not his account of the objects of cognition that first led Auriol down this road.

The second claim is that the charge in Chatton and Wodeham that Auriol’s theory of intuition leads to skepticism, is problematic. To be sure, his account of intuition and its object is different from the one they offer. Yet his account does not at all put at risk the kind of certain knowledge about external objects that, according to Chatton and Wodeham themselves, intuition affords. When it comes to the challenge of skepticism, Auriol is not at all worse off than his critics.

⁴ Rega Wood, “Adam of Wodeham,” in J. Gracia and T. Noone (eds.), *A Companion to Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 77-85, 78.

⁵ Richard Cross, *The Medieval Christian Philosophers. An Introduction* (London and New York: Tauris, 2014), 219.

The paper proceeds as follows. First, section 1 will take a closer look at Auriol's notion of apparent being. Section 2 introduces the concept of intuitive cognition, and section 3 argues that the apparent being is not the source of the natural intuition of nonexistents. To address the charge of skepticism in Chatton and Wodeham sections 4 and 5 first looks at the kind of empirical certainty they themselves believe intuition affords. Section 6 then argues that there is no good reason to think that Auriol's account of intuition puts in jeopardy this kind of certainty.

1. THE APPARENT BEING

Suppose you are traveling by boat, and that, standing still on the deck, you look at a row of trees on the riverside. Because of the motion of the boat, every single tree that you look at will gradually pass out of sight. But because you are standing still on the deck, it will appear to you that it is the trees, rather than the boat, that are in motion. This is a common illusion, Auriol believed, and he wanted to know what happens when we fall prey to it.

The starting point of his analysis is that, for every cognitive event, there is an act and an object of cognition. Here, the act is an act of vision, and the object of that act is motion. But that leads to a problem: After all there is no actual motion where you are looking. And for Auriol, that raises the question of what the ontological status of the motion that you see can be. In the following passage, he sorts through some options:

When someone is transported over water, the trees that exist on the shore appear to move. This motion, which is in the eye as an object, cannot be said to be the vision itself; otherwise a vision would be the object of sight, and a vision would be seen, and vision would be a reflexive power. But it cannot be said to really exist in the tree or in the shore either, because then they would really move. Neither can it be said to be in the air, because motion is not attributed to the air, but to the tree.

Therefore it only exists intentionally, not really, in seen being and in adjudged being.⁶

Here, in the second line, we are told that the motion you see is “in the eye as an object.” By this Auriol means that it appears to the eye, or that it appears as an object of vision. But although it is in the eye in this sense, the motion you see is not some inner state of your visual system. This I take to be the general point of his remark that “this motion ... cannot be said to be the vision itself.”

The motion you see cannot be the act of vision you engage in when looking at the shore, because then the object of vision would be an inner act of cognition rather than outward motion. And by the same token, the object you see cannot be some kind of species, or image, in the eye or in the power of vision. For if it were, the object of cognition would not be outer motion, but an inner species or image.⁷ But if the motion you see is not some inner state of the visual system, it needs to be something external. Auriol briefly goes over a few options.

The first is that the motion you see somehow is in the air. But this cannot be true, for then the air rather than the trees would appear to move. Indeed, the motion you see can be nowhere but in the trees. If it were anywhere else, then something other than the trees would appear to be in motion. But surely, it cannot have a real being in the trees. If it did, the trees would really move. Hence, the remaining option is that it has a kind of less than real being in the trees. And this is what Auriol in the above passage calls ‘intentional being.’

According to Auriol, this being is causally dependent upon your act of vision, which “puts the thing in intentional being.”⁸ It is the production by your act of vision of motion in intentional being that makes the immobile trees on the shore appear to be in

⁶ *Scriptum* 3.14 (Buytaert, 696).

⁷ A bit later on, Auriol rejects species as objects of the imagination for a similar reason. When I imagine my father, he reasons, the object of cognition is my father – not a species. *Scriptum* 3.14 (Buytaert, 697-8).

⁸ *Scriptum* 3.14 (Buytaert, 696).

motion. And similar analyses are offered for other perceptual illusions. When a burning stick is quickly whirled in a dark night, the object of cognition is a fiery circle in the air. But that fiery circle is neither some inner cognitive state nor a real external object. Hence it needs to be an intentional object that is produced by your act of vision.

Instead of speaking of intentional being, Auriol also speaks of apparent being. And although he introduces this being to provide a relevant object for sensory illusions like the ones above, he also holds that the apparent being is the being of objects that appear to us in general. When I see the coffee mug on my desk, for example, the mug appears to me. And according to Auriol, this means that my act of vision puts the mug in apparent being. Thus seeing the mug involves at least three beings:

- a. An act of vision
- b. The mug in apparent being
- c. The mug in real being⁹

But this account provoked strong reactions from Auriol's contemporaries. Thus according to Chatton and Wodeham, if our access to the outer world is mediated by apparent beings in this way, we will never see the things themselves. According to Chatton, the apparent being was like a "sign" that must lead us to some other thing than itself.¹⁰ And Wodeham claimed that if all access to things is mediated by apparent beings, "there will as it were be an intermediary veil" between us and the world.¹¹

⁹ According to Perler, the mug in apparent being and the mug in real being are not two beings. To say that the mug has apparent being just is to say that it appears to me, but it is not to introduce a new category of being. See Dominik Perler, "What am I Thinking About? John Duns Scotus and Peter Aureol on Intentional Objects," *Vivarium* 86 (1994), 72-89. But this is hard to square with the claims in Auriol that objects as they appear "non haberent esse verum et principale, sed intentionale et deminutum," where a strained reading seems required not to take him as marking out a special kind of being of what appears in cognition. See for example *Scriptum* 36.2 (Electronic Scriptum, ll. 287-8).

¹⁰ *Reportatio et lectura*, prol. 2.2 (Wey, 87).

¹¹ *Lectura secunda*, prol. 4 (Wood, 92).

It is not clear that these readings are entirely fair to Auriol. For on his account, the apparent mug is the same thing as the real mug, albeit in a different kind of being. The relation between apparent and real beings is thus different from the kind of sign relation that obtains between smoke and fire. And according to Auriol himself, the fact that it is one and the same mug that has both apparent and real being means that the former in fact unveils rather than veils the latter.¹²

Even so, Chatton and Wodeham are correct insofar as Auriol has moved away from a simple kind of direct realism where we have unmediated access to objects in real being. And by taking this step, they argued, he invited a host of skeptical problems. In particular, they found a close connection between the apparent being on the one hand, and the idea in Auriol that there can be natural intuitive cognitions of nonexistent objects on the other. And with this last idea, they claimed, Auriol directly put us on the road to skepticism.

2. THE INTUITION OF NONEXISTENTS

The term ‘intuitive cognition’ appears to have been introduced into the vocabulary of scholastic psychology by Duns Scotus. According to Scotus, the simple or nonpropositional apprehensions that we have of things come in two basic kinds. On the one hand, there are those simple cognitions that represent existent objects as existent, or which represent present objects as present.¹³ These Scotus terms intuitive cognitions, and paradigmatic examples include acts of vision and of the other external senses.¹⁴ On the other hand, there are simple cognitions that as it were ‘abstract’ from the existence or presence of their objects, and these Scotus calls abstractive cognitions. These are

¹² See *Scriptum* 27.2 (Electronic Scriptum, ll. 598-9).

¹³ *Quodlibet* 6.1 (Wadding XXV 243-4).

¹⁴ Scotus also appears to have allowed for an intellectual kind of intuition. But throughout this paper the focus will just be on the standard, sensory variety.

cognitions that either pertain to absent or nonexistent objects or which, alternatively, pertain to objects that, though present or existent, are not represented as such.

Paradigmatic examples of such abstractive cognitions include acts of the imagination:

Some cognition is in itself of an existent object, like that which attains an object in its proper actual existence. For instance, the vision of a color, and, generally, acts of the external senses. The other cognition is also of an object, but not as it exists in itself. Rather, either the object does not exist, or at least that cognition is not of that object insofar as it actually exists. For instance, the imagination of a color.¹⁵

Scotus's distinction between intuitive and abstractive cognition had a profound influence on medieval cognitive psychology, and after Scotus, many philosophers and theologians would adopt some version of his distinction. Indeed, as Katherine Tachau has pointed out, the history of medieval epistemology and psychology from Scotus on can in important respects "be traced as a development of this distinction."¹⁶

Auriol was one of the thinkers who, in the wake of Scotus, categorized our simple apprehensions of objects into intuitive and abstractive cognitions. And again like Scotus, he took vision and imagination to provide the paradigmatic examples of intuition and abstraction. "Vision," he wrote, is "maximally intuitive," and abstractive cognition is perhaps best described as "imaginative cognition."¹⁷ But although Auriol thus agreed with Scotus on the usefulness of a general distinction between two branches of simple apprehension, he was critical of the way in which Scotus had drawn the boundaries between intuition and abstraction.

In particular, Auriol was critical of the claim in Scotus that all intuitions have existent objects. To be sure, Scotus was right to think that my intuitive cognition of a tree will normally be caused by an actual tree in my visual field, but what he had failed

¹⁵ *Quodlibet* 13.2 (Wadding XXV 521).

¹⁶ Katherine Tachau, *Vision and Certitude in the Age of Ockham. Optics, Epistemology, and the Foundations of Semantics* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 81.

¹⁷ See *Scriptum*, prol. 2 (Buytaert, 204-5).

sufficiently to appreciate, Auriol thought, is that whatever a creature can do, God can do too. Thus, even when there is no actual tree around to be seen, it is possible for God to bring about in me the very act of intuition that would normally have been caused by a tree in front of me. Intuitive cognition of a nonexistent object is a supernatural possibility, and so, Auriol concludes, Scotus's claim that intuition is "in itself of an existent object" cannot go through.

Auriol was not alone in allowing for supernaturally induced intuitions of nonexistents. Thus as we will see later on, Chatton and Wodeham will do the same. But where Auriol differs from them, is that for him the intuitive cognition of nonexistents is not just a supernatural, but also a natural possibility. Independently of any sort of divine intervention, that is, Auriol thinks that our external senses can by nature engage in acts of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching absent and nonexistent objects.¹⁸

Why did he think this? According to some of his early readers, this idea in Auriol was linked with his ontology of apparent being. And indeed as we have seen above, Auriol believed that the apparent being made possible the cognition of nonexistent things in a way that other theories could not. The theory of apparent being provided relevant objects for such cognitions, and thus succeeded where competitors like the species theory failed. As a result the theory of apparent being and the natural intuition of the nonexistent are linked at least in the sense that

if there are going to be natural intuitions of nonexistents, they will have apparent beings as their objects.¹⁹

But in early readers like Chatton and Wodeham, we also get the suggestion that they are linked in the further sense that

¹⁸ *Scriptum*, prol. 2 (Buytaert, 200).

¹⁹ Insofar as apparent being is perhaps itself some kind of existence, strictly speaking we may have to say that the objects of these intuitions are unreal rather than nonexistent. But I will throughout this paper stick to Auriol's and his critics' own parlance, and speak of intuitive cognitions of nonexistents.

if the objects of cognition are going to be apparent beings, there will be natural intuitions of nonexistent.

Thus when Chatton inquires “whether there naturally is intuitive cognition without the presence of the object seen,” the first argument that he presents in favor of an affirmative answer is that

there is one opinion according to which ... an intuitive cognition constitutes the thing in some kind of apparent, objective being.²⁰

As Tachau has commented, Chatton here took the apparent being to be “the crucial premise” for the natural possibility of intuitions with nonexistent objects.²¹

Again, when Wodeham asks “whether sensory or intellectual intuition can naturally be caused or sustained without the existence of the thing that is seen,” the first argument that gets cited for an affirmative answer is that the objects of vision have apparent being:

It seems to suffice for an act of vision that its object have seen being. But seen being is not the same as the existent object, because it is separable from it.²²

Like Chatton before him, Wodeham is here suggesting that if the objects of cognition are apparent beings, this gives us some kind of reason to think that there will as a matter of natural fact be intuitive cognitions of nonexistent objects.²³

²⁰ *Reportatio et lectura*, prol. 2.2 (Wey, 86).

²¹ For this qualification, see Tachau, *Vision and Certitude*, 186.

²² *Lectura secunda*, prol. 3 (Wood, 65).

²³ Tachau (*Vision and Certitude*, 287) points to Chatton as a possible influence on Wodeham here.

But the idea that there could be natural intuitions of nonexistent objects, according to Chatton and Wodeham, will lead to skepticism. Ever since Scotus, intuition was seen as a major source of certainty about the world.²⁴ Abstractive cognition of concepts sufficed to grasp such principles as that the whole is greater than its parts, but to come to know with certainty that some whole or part exists, intuition was needed. As Scotus had put it: without intuitive cognition, “the intellect would not be certain of the existence of any object.”²⁵ So if intuitive cognition should turn out to be unreliable, this would be a serious blow to our certainty about the world we live in.

Such, at any rate, appears to have been the reasoning of Chatton. Perhaps taking his cues from Scotus, Chatton declared that intuitive cognition was our main source of certainty about the world, writing that “our greatest certainty about sensible things we have because we are aware of our perceptions.”²⁶ But if as a matter of natural fact, intuitive cognition could fail to trace existent objects in the world all of our certainty about the sensible things in the world “would perish,” Chatton feared.²⁷

In the same vein, Wodeham claimed that intuition is “necessarily required” for all knowledge of matters of fact.²⁸ Without it, we could perhaps grasp all kinds of conceptual truths, but not know that the sun has risen, or that it is being eclipsed. But if natural intuition could fail to trace existent objects, it would dry up as a source of certainty, and we would still have no way of knowing anything about the current behavior of the sun. If natural intuitions could lack existent objects, “then there would be no certainty in such cognitions, and then all knowledge that is acquired through experience would perish.”²⁹

²⁴ See Stephen Dumont, “John Duns Scotus,” in Gracia and Noone (eds.), *A Companion to Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 353-69, especially page 364. Also Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus’s Theory of Cognition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 47.

²⁵ *Ordinatio* 4.45.2 (Vaticana XIV 157-8).

²⁶ *Reportatio et lectura*, prol. 2.2 (Wey, 89).

²⁷ *Reportatio et lectura*, prol. 2.2 (Wey, 89).

²⁸ *Lectura secunda*, prol. 2 (Wood, 44).

²⁹ *Lectura secunda*, prol. 3 (Wood, 66).

In the critical treatment of Auriol that we get in Chatton and Wodeham, we thus find two basic ideas that will need to be looked at in more detail. The first is that the apparent being gives us a reason to believe that there could be natural intuitions of nonexistent objects. The second is that if there can be natural intuitions of nonexistent objects, skepticism looms large. On the picture that we get in these Franciscans then, it was via the natural intuition of nonexistents that the apparent being had put Auriol on a dark path to skepticism.

Similar ideas have been put forth by modern commentators. Thus Tachau has described the natural intuition of nonexistent objects as a “consequence” of the view that the objects of cognition are apparent beings.³⁰ And according to Rega Wood, it was with his claim that “the objects of cognition are apparent beings, not things themselves” that Auriol “forced his contemporaries to consider the possibility of naturally produced cognition of nonexistents.”³¹

As for the idea that the possibility of such cognition puts us on the road to skepticism, Richard Cross in a recent book has argued that, if natural intuitions can come without existent objects, the question will arise how we will tell true from false intuitions. But Auriol does not give us any way to pick out intuitions that lack a real object. As a result, Cross claims, it is understandable that Auriol’s theory of intuition has been perceived as a source of skeptical questions ever since the early reception of his thought.³²

But if Auriol’s readers ever since the fourteenth century have found it plausible that the apparent being gives us reason to think that there could be natural intuitions of nonexistent objects, and that this possibility at its turn puts us on the road to skepticism, the next three sections will argue that both of these ideas need correction, or at least qualification. Thus section 3 will argue that, as such, the theory of apparent being does not give us a special reason to think that there could be intuitive cognitions of nonexistent

³⁰ Katherine Tachau, “The Response to Ockham’s and Aureol’s Epistemology (1320-1340),” in A. Maierù (ed.), *English Logic in Italy in the 14th and 15th Centuries* (Naples: Bibliopolis, 1982), 185-217, 200.

³¹ Wood, “Adam of Wodeham,” 78.

³² Cross, *Christian Philosophers*, 219.

objects. And as sections 4 to 6 will go on to point out, the natural intuition of the nonexistent in Auriol does not leave him any more vulnerable to skepticism than critics like Chatton and Wodeham are themselves.

3. AURIOL ON THE INTUITION OF NONEXISTENTS

In this section, I will argue that the theory of apparent being is neither necessary nor sufficient to arrive at the conclusion that there could be natural intuitions of nonexistent objects. And the best starting point to do that, is to look at Auriol's own defense of the natural intuition of such objects.

As we found before, Auriol treats visual cognition as the paradigm case of intuitive cognition. But, he claims, there is a number of experiences teaching us that vision can in natural circumstances come without existent objects:

Afterimages. According to Auriol, the case of afterimages shows that the vision of a luminous object can remain for some time after its disappearance.

Dreams. Following Averroes, Auriol holds that dreams are cases where the dreamer sees objects that are not really there.

Apparent horrors. When we are in the grips of intense fear, we hear the screams of dead spirits and see ghosts that are not there.

Illusions. When we are tricked by illusions, Auriol thinks we see things that are not really there, like broken sticks.

Distorted color vision. Due to an indisposition of the eye, we may see a shade of red when no red body is around.³³

On the basis of these cases, Auriol concludes that intuition cannot be defined as the simple apprehension of an existent object as existent. Rather, the hallmark of intuition is that, independently of whether or not its object exist, its object is made to appear in an unmediated way as actual, present, and existent.³⁴

Auriol's case for the natural intuition of nonexistents thus crucially hinges on the idea that visions come in two kinds: those that do, and those that do not have real objects. Though the former may be the default, the latter kind of vision tends to occur in dreams and fevers, or when we are in the grips of intense emotions. Other than philosophers for whom 'see' is a success verb in that just as one cannot know what is false one cannot see what is not there, then, for Auriol seeings can lack existent objects without ceasing to count as seeings.

Auriol was aware, however, that an opponent might object that illusions and the like are not cases in which the eye sees, but merely cases where it *seems* to the subject that the eye sees:

People who are deceived in this way do not see, but it appears to them that they see, because the common sense so judges.³⁵

But in response to this objection, Auriol points out that the common sense will need some kind of trigger to judge that an object x is seen. And the only thing that will trigger the common sense to judge that x is seen, he reasons, is the fact that x appears as an object of vision. But whenever x appears as an object of vision, it is in fact seen:

³³ Auriol cites these cases in *Scriptum*, prol. 2 (Buytaert, 199).

³⁴ See *Scriptum*, prol. 2 (Buytaert, 205).

³⁵ *Scriptum*, prol. 2.2 (Buytaert, 200).

If the common sense judges that the eye sees, it is necessary that there be something in the eye that it judges, namely the appearance of a thing. But the appearance of a thing in sight is the vision itself.³⁶

Auriol repeats the point that whenever x appears as an object of vision, x is seen later on:

Vision is nothing but some kind of appearance.³⁷

But if x is seen whenever it appears to me as an object of vision, this has repercussions for the distinction between real and seeming cases of seeing. Indeed it seems the distinction between real and seeming seeings will collapse. After all, we only ever seem to see an object when it appears to us in the way of an object of vision. So if x is seen whenever it appears as an object of vision, we will see an object whenever we seem to.

At this point, we begin see more clearly why Auriol believes intuitive cognitions of nonexistents are a natural possibility. An object x is seen when it visually appears. Hence when in dreams and fevers we get the visual appearance of nonexistent objects, we do not merely seem to see them, but are seeing them indeed. And since all acts of vision are intuitive cognitions, this means that some intuitive cognitions come without actually existent objects as a matter of natural fact:

1. All acts of vision are cases of intuitive cognition.
2. When x appears as an object of vision, x is seen.
3. It is naturally possible for x not to exist and to visually appear to me.
4. Therefore, it is naturally possible to see nonexistent things.

³⁶ *Scriptum*, prolog. 2 (Buytaert, 201).

³⁷ *Scriptum* 3.14 (Buytaert, 713). When Auriol says that vision is “nothing but” an appearance, his point is that objects are seen whenever they appear as objects of vision. He does not mean to deny that vision also involves an act of the sensory power to produce an object in apparent being. It is important to distinguish between the act and the appearance it produces. For although in normal cases of vision the latter is an object of cognition, the former is not.

5. Hence, it is naturally possible to intuit nonexistents.³⁸

And what this reconstruction tells us, is that the apparent being is neither necessary nor sufficient for the conclusion in Auriol that there can be natural intuitions of nonexistents.

To see that the ontology of the apparent being is not necessary to arrive at the natural intuition of nonexistents, consider a philosopher who accepts (3), with the caveat that the natural cases where a nonexistent object appears to us can with equal right be described as cases where an existent object appears to be otherwise than it is. More precisely, they can be described either as cases where an existent external object appears to be otherwise than it is, or as cases where an existent inner object seems to be something that it is not.

The illusion of the broken stick provides an example of the first kind. Under one description, this is an appearance of a broken stick that is not really there. But under an alternative description, it is a real stick appearing to be shaped otherwise than it is. Likewise the haunting shadow that appears to me in a dark night under one description is an unreal spirit, but under another is just a pale mist or vapor looking like a ghost. Dreams are typical examples where it is an inner object that appears to be otherwise than it is. Thus my dream of a chimera under one description is the appearance of a nonexistent animal. But under another, it is just a case of an inner image looking like an original.

Without going into details, it seems plausible that all natural appearances of unreal objects can be redescribed in this way as cases where an actual inner or outer object appears to be otherwise than it is.³⁹ Indeed, it seems that the only appearances of nonexistents that cannot also be described as cases where a real object appears to be otherwise than it is, are cases where God intervenes by bringing about a cognition independently of any existent object internal or external to its subject. Yet even if God

³⁸ The same argument could be made for other modes of sensory cognition. But vision being the paradigm case of intuition, the focus will here be on visual cognition.

³⁹ Chatton and Wodeham take this line, and we will look at some of the details of their accounts below.

can bring about such events, those would not be the natural cases that the above argument is about.

But if we can think of all natural appearances of nonexistent objects as cases where an existent object seems to be otherwise than it is, it becomes plausible to think that we could account for (3) without invoking the apparent being. The appearance of a bent stick that is not there just is a case of a real stick looking bent, and the real stick looks bent because of the refraction of light that results in the retinal image of a bent stick. The appearance of a chimera is but a case of an image that looks like an original. And it does so because the brain processes the image the way it also does visual input. Again details apart, it seems likely that we can give analyses of these cases in a way that makes no special demands on our ontology.

And if we can accept the natural appearance of nonexistent objects without invoking the apparent being, it becomes easier to see how one could arrive at the natural intuition of unreal objects independently of the apparent being. It suffices to accept that all visions are intuitions and that an object is seen whenever it visually appears to us. This will get us to the conclusion that we can naturally see and thus intuit the nonexistent, without in any way relying on the kind of ontology of apparent being that we get in Auriol.

If the apparent being is not necessary to arrive at the conclusion that there can be natural intuitions of nonexistents, it is not sufficient either. To see this, suppose that you accept that the objects of cognition are apparent beings, and that you also accept that things can appear to us as objects of vision even if they do not exist. Now if you follow Scotus in saying that vision always comes with a real object, you will deny that (2) all cases where an object visually appears are cases where the object is seen.⁴⁰ But if you do deny that, the fact that it is possible as a matter of natural fact for nonexistent things to

⁴⁰ In the early fourteenth century, John Rodington would make the point that the presence of a real object is implied in what it means to see an object in the first place: "The word 'vision' necessarily connotes an existent object that is seen. And when it is asked how the object relates to vision, the answer would be that the object is intrinsically included in all that is meant by the word 'vision'." I *Sententiarum*, prol. 2 (Tweeddale, 329).

appear as objects of vision will not entail that it is possible as a matter of natural fact for nonexistent things to be seen, and hence to be intuited. Accepting Auriol's ontology of cognition is thus not sufficient to also accept naturally caused intuitions of nonexistents.

What about the further claim in Chatton and Wodeham, that Auriol's allowance of natural intuitions of nonexistents puts in jeopardy certain knowledge about the world? As we have seen in this section, it seems plausible that the examples of such cognitions that we get in Auriol can be redescribed as ordinary cases where an existent object appears to be otherwise than it is. But surely such cases need to be acknowledged by everyone. Hence to the extent that they limit the certainty intuition can give us, this is a point that all of us will need to grant, the critics of Auriol included. The following sections will further develop this. Sections 4 and 5 explore what kind of certainty intuition affords according to Chatton and Wodeham themselves, given that natural conditions can cause real objects to appear to be otherwise than they are. Section 6 then argues that there is no good reason to think that Auriol's account of intuition puts in jeopardy this kind of certainty.

4. CHATTON ON INTUITION AND CERTAINTY

According to Chatton, intuitive cognition comprises the acts of the five external senses. Generally speaking, indeed, intuitive cognition is nothing but ordinary seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting or touching. Part of what this means, is that every act of intuition makes its object appear as present to us. Accordingly, intuitions always go hand in hand with an affirmative judgment about the existence of their objects.⁴¹ But how certain can we be of the judgments that intuitive cognitions cause us to form?

⁴¹ See *Reportatio et Lectura*, prol. 2.3 (Wey, 102). On the affirmative judgments that accompany acts of intuition, see Rega Wood, "Adam Wodeham on Sensory Illusions with an Edition of *Lectura Secunda*, Prologus, Quaestio 3," *Traditio* 38 (1982), 231-52, 220 and Dominik Perler, "Skepticism," in R. Pasnau (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, second edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 384-96, 389.

A first obstacle to absolute certainty comes from God's absolute power. For even though in the natural course of events intuitions are always caused by real objects, Chatton admits God "could bring about an act of seeing without the presence of the thing" and make me err as a result.⁴² For example, God could make me intuit a nonexistent sunflower, and make me judge that it exists. And this possibility raises the question of whether Chatton offers us any means to recognize these divinely caused intuitions of nonexistents.

Although Chatton has been criticized for failing to offer such a means,⁴³ Dominik Perler has recently argued that, in Chatton's philosophy we do in fact get a mechanism allowing us to detect divinely caused intuitions of nonexistents. For after citing the possibility of divine intervention, Chatton goes on to say that "we understand a thing not to be present via argumentation."⁴⁴ And according to Perler the point here is as follows. Imagine that you are walking in a field and intuit a blooming sunflower. Because intuitions bring about affirmative judgments about the existence of their objects, you will judge that the sunflower exist. But at this point, you need to ask yourself how that judgment fits with the facts that it is winter, that the field is covered with snow, and that sunflowers do not bloom under these conditions. This will reveal that there could be no sunflower where you are looking. Your intuition of it must hence be caused by God.⁴⁵

But this line of argument overlooks at least one option, namely that rather than intervening in nature by making you intuit a sunflower that does not exist, God could just as easily have intervened in nature by making a real sunflower for you to intuit in spite of the cold season and the snow. Once we are allowing divine intervention, that option is one the table no less than God causing a intuition with no actual object. And it is hard to see how information about sunflowers or climate conditions could help you rule this option out.

⁴² *Reportatio et lectura*, prol. 2.2 (Wey, 92).

⁴³ See Luciano Cova, "Francesco di Meyronnes e Walter Catton nella controversia scolastica sulla 'notitia intuitive de re non existente'," *Medioevo* 2 (1976), 227-52.

⁴⁴ *Reportatio et lectura*, prol. 2.3 (Wey, 103).

⁴⁵ Perler, *Zweifel und Gewissheit*, 279.

A further problem for this reading is that, right after his claim that “we understand a thing not to be present via argumentation,” Chatton proceeds as follows:

The absence of a thing the presence of which is cognized intuitively when it is present is cognized via argumentation when it is absent. For someone can perceive that he has no intuitive cognition of such a thing, and argue from this that this thing is not present, because since there is no obstacle that would prevent it from being seen in case it were present, and since the thing is not seen, therefore it is not present. Consequently, he cognizes via argumentation that the thing is not present.⁴⁶

In this passage, Chatton introduces the principle that whenever I do not experience x but there are no obstacles that would prevent me from experiencing x if x were present, I can conclude that x is not present. Applying this principle is what he refers to as ‘cognizing that x is absent via argumentation’. But if this principle tells us what to conclude when we do *not* experience x , it tells us nothing about what to do when we *do* experience x . That is, it does not offer us a means to decide whether a given cognition of x is a divinely caused intuitive cognition of an absent object, or rather a naturally caused perception of an object that is actually present. Despite appearances, then, Chatton does not give us an argumentative means of classifying determinate acts of cognition as divinely caused, and so, the judgments that we come to form on the basis of our intuitions all come with the proviso that we might have been supernaturally led astray. Absolute certainty on the basis of intuition is impossible, therefore, and in fact this is something Chatton is happy to admit:

⁴⁶ *Reportatio et lectura*, prol. 2.3 (Wey, 103).

I say that we can have no certainty through external sensations such that God, an angel, and perhaps some inferior causes too could not deceive us.⁴⁷

In this passage, Chatton does not specify which “inferior causes” he has in mind, but from his discussion of intuitive cognition, it becomes clear that the certainty intuitive cognition affords is further limited by a number of rather ordinary factors.

Indeed, even without divine intervention, it is not entirely impossible, Chatton believes, for intuitive cognitions to occur without existent objects. For even though they cannot naturally be caused without the existence and presence of their objects, they can nevertheless for a short while outlast their objects. For example, when we intensely look at a flame or at a strong lamp, our perception of light may last for some moments even after the candle has been blown out, or after the lamp has been switched off. To be sure, because intuitive cognitions can ‘linger on’ in this way for a very short time only, we can be certain that things we perceive for a longer period of time do indeed exist for most of that time. Nevertheless, in the short timespan in which we might be dealing with a perception that outlasts its object, we cannot be certain of the actual existence of what we intuit. As Chatton himself puts it: “I concede that during that time in which a vision can remain after the visible object has disappeared, no certainty is had.”⁴⁸

A final factor qualifying the certainty that intuitive cognition can give us, is the fact that, according to Chatton, intuitive cognitions of real objects can under special circumstances elicit false judgments. When looking at a trompe l’oeil, for example, the intuition of the picture of a rose may lead me to judge that I am having an actual flower in front of my eyes.⁴⁹ And in a poorly lit room, say in a Madame Tussauds museum, the intuition of a wax sculpture of may make me judge that I am in the presence of another human being.

⁴⁷ *Reportatio* 2.11 (Wey and Etzkorn, 280). This claim is repeated in *Reportatio* 3.2.2 and 4.4 (Wey and Etzkorn, 47 and 284).

⁴⁸ *Reportatio et lectura*, prol. 2.2 (Wey, 92).

⁴⁹ See *Reportatio et lectura*, prol. 2.2 (Wey, 97).

Now, Chatton is confident that such natural illusions occur but infrequently, and that, moreover, they never “subject us to invincible error.”⁵⁰ Chatton appears to believe that, at least on reflection, we are able to discern good and bad conditions for intuitive cognition. So even if we may not be able to avoid all error, we will often be able to correct mistakes, as when in retrospect we come to the conclusion that some given act of intuition took place under poor conditions, and that we need to revise the beliefs we came to hold as a result of it.

Even so, the limits on the certainty that intuition affords are clear. After all, God could deceive us no matter what the natural conditions, so reflecting on the conditions under which we saw an object will not help us to detect these cases. And some natural limits remain too. For not only may we err before we have had the time to assess natural conditions, but even given time, the fact that we have the means to correct natural error does not mean that we always succeed in using these means. The fact that no natural error is invincible in principle does not mean that none will ever slip through as a matter of infelicitous fact.

As a result, intuition will give us but a kind of conditional certainty.⁵¹ It gives us certainty about its objects as long as God does not deceive us, it does not outlast its object, and conditions are not such as to make it come with an error of judgment. And this notion that perception can give us conditional rather than absolute certainty was more explicitly spelled out by Wodeham. In the following section, we will look at Wodeham’s concepts of certainty and knowledge. This will eventually help us to see how we should appreciate the claims in Chatton and Wodeham to the effect that all certainty and knowledge about external reality perish if Auriol is right that intuitive cognitions can naturally occur without existent objects.

⁵⁰ *Reportatio et lectura*, prol. 2.2 (Wey, 92).

⁵¹ See also Dominik Perler, “Can We Trust Our Senses? Fourteenth-Century Debates on Sensory Illusions,” in Dallas Denery, Kantik Ghosh, and Nicolette Zeeman (eds.), *Uncertain Knowledge. Scepticism, Relativism, and Doubt in the Middle Ages* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 63-90, especially page 70.

5. WODEHAM ON INTUITION AND CERTAIN KNOWLEDGE

For Wodeham, intuitive cognitions are those simple apprehension that can in principle give us knowledge about the contingent present.⁵² Hence all acts of seeing, hearing, smelling, touching and tasting count as intuitions. This is not because they never make us err: they do. But an act of vision that makes us err still is the kind of act that in principle could have given us knowledge about the contingent present, if only conditions had been different. In this it differs from an act of fantasizing, which no matter what the conditions, by nature just is not the kind of act that is conducive to knowledge about matters of fact that hold here and now.

Like Auriol and Chatton, Wodeham allows that God can supernaturally bring it about that we have intuitive cognitions of nonexistents. Yet unlike both, he is adamant that under no circumstance do we naturally have an intuition of something nonexistent. Even in the case of afterimages, Wodeham argues, what we see is something that actually exists. For when we look at a strong light, a species will get impressed upon the eye, which for a while remains present there even after the light has died out. And afterimages result when these species then become objects of vision in themselves, while the cognitive power judges that what we see is still the outer light.⁵³

All intuitive cognitions are firmly tied to some actually existent object then. But this does not make intuition an infallible source of information about the world. For what the case of afterimages illustrates, is that the intuition of a real object may under special conditions lead to an error of judgment. This typically happens when our intuition is impeded by poor external conditions, or by defects in the organs of perception. But even though intuition is not infallible, Wodeham remains optimistic that it can yield certainty, as well as knowledge about the external world. To see how Wodeham envisions this, and

⁵² *Lectura secunda*, prol. 2 (Wood, 35 and 37).

⁵³ *Lectura secunda*, prol. 3 (Wood, 77).

in what way intuitive cognition is conducive to certainty and knowledge, it will be useful to briefly look at his concepts of certainty and knowledge one by one.

a. Certainty

For an intuition to give us certainty about the contingent present, is for that intuition to yield a judgment about the contingent present that is certain. And for a judgment to be certain, according to Wodeham, first of all is for that judgment to be true: the concept of a certain judgment that is false “includes a repugnancy.”⁵⁴ But if truth is necessary for certainty, it is not sufficient. For if I correctly judge that John exists without seeing him, Wodeham would say that my judgment, though true, fails to be certain. As he also puts it, my judgment that John exists in this case will amount to “estimation” rather than certainty. But just what does Wodeham think is needed for certainty in addition to truth? This is a question that he himself does not explicitly address in any detail. What he does tell us, however, is that his distinction between certainty and estimation has its roots in “the Commentator and the Philosopher.”⁵⁵

More precisely, Wodeham’s distinction between estimation and certainty traces back to Averroes’s commentary on book VII of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. According to Aristotle, opinion deals with “what is capable of being otherwise,” but knowledge is about what cannot be otherwise.⁵⁶ Knowledge, in other words, is about what is necessary, and what falls short of necessity is in the domain of opinion. Or, as Averroes put it: “it is impossible for knowing and not knowing to be of that which is not necessary. Of such things, there is only estimation.”⁵⁷ When Wodeham traces back his distinction between opinion and certainty to Aristotle and his Commentator, then, the suggestion is that certain judgments, for him, are judgments that necessarily hold true.

⁵⁴ *Lectura secunda*, prol. 2 (Wood, 37).

⁵⁵ *Lectura secunda*, prol. 1 (Wood, 14).

⁵⁶ *Metaphysics* 1040a1. For David Bostock’s helpful exposition of Aristotle’s position, see Aristotle, *Metaphysics Book Z and H*, ed. D. Bostock (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 217.

⁵⁷ *In Metaphysicam* VII.17 (Venice, 95).

At first this makes it hard to see how intuition could possibly yield certainty. The very point of intuition after all is that it gives us access to contingent matters of fact about the here and now, so if certainty is defined in terms of necessity, there seems to be no way in which intuition could ever yield more than estimation. But at the same time, Wodeham makes it very clear that intuition yields at least some kind of certainty, writing that intuition is that mode of cognition

in virtue of which the soul with certainty naturally assents that such a thing exists unless a miracle or some other impediment should stand in the way.⁵⁸

Intuitive cognition makes it certain that a thing exists, provided that we are not subject to divine deception and that conditions are good – your senses function well, you are not ill, and the light is clear.

I propose we read Wodeham as follows here. Suppose that you have an intuitive cognition of John, and judge that John exists. God has not interfered with your intuition, and natural circumstances are good. Hence, your judgment that John exists is certain. But by this, Wodeham does not mean that it deals with “what cannot be otherwise.” What he does mean, however, is that, as long as these conditions obtain, your judgment is infallible. Given these conditions, it could not be false.

b. Knowledge

Knowledge, according to Wodeham, is evident judgment. All evident judgments are certain.⁵⁹ But apart from that, they are also beyond doubt.⁶⁰

To see what that means for Wodeham, consider a case where as a matter of fact,

⁵⁸ *Lectura secunda* prol. 3 (Wood, 65).

⁵⁹ *Lectura secunda*, prol. 6 (Wood, 173).

⁶⁰ *Lectura secunda*, prol. 6 (Wood, 163-4).

- i. you intuit John and judge that he exists,
- ii. God does not deceive you, and
- iii. natural conditions are good.

This is a case where, as we have seen above, the judgment that John exists is certain. Now suppose that we add to the above that

- iv. you feel fully confident that God does not deceive you and that natural conditions are good.

In this case where you feel no cause for disbelief, we could say that it is subjectively past doubt that John exists. But now contrast this with a situation where

- v. you have a way to rule out that God deceives you and that natural conditions are poor.

In this case, your judgment would be past doubt in what we could call an objective sense, which is stronger than the subjective sense above.

This objective sense is stronger, in that your judgment that John exists could not be objectively past doubt without also being certain. After all once it is ruled out that God or natural conditions deceive you, on the account that we have seen Wodeham develop, it could not be false that John exists. But even if it were uncertain that John exists, it could still be subjectively past doubt to you that he does. Thus if light conditions were in fact poor in a way that you had failed to notice, it could well turn out false that John exists. But because you had not evaluated the relevant conditions correctly, you could still be as confident about them as ever. A factual lack of certainty can go hand in hand with a subjective absence of doubt.

Now what Wodeham demands of an evident judgment is at least that it be beyond doubt in the first, subjective sense. He writes that an evident judgment will “fully assure

the mind,” and I take this to mean that it will only be evident to you that John exists if you feel no cause for disbelief.⁶¹ But that John exists also needs to be beyond doubt in the second, objective sense. For no matter how confident you feel, if you cannot rule out that God or natural conditions deceive you, it would not be fully evident. This at any rate seems to be Wodeham’s point when he writes that

I concede what is inferred about a judgment that regards a contingent truth about an external thing. For no such judgment is simply evident with an evidentness that excludes all possible doubt. Because if all possible cognitions and judgments would be caused by either God or nature, it would be possible that in virtue of God's absolute power, things are not such as they would be signified to be by such an apprehended cognition.⁶²

In light of this, Wodeham concludes that it is never absolutely evident to you that John exists, or that he has certain properties. The kind of evident judgment that intuition affords is that John exists,

unless God miraculously intervenes here, or there is an impediment due to the imperfection of that cognition or due to some indisposition on behalf of the object, the medium, the power, or the organ.⁶³

Now in some cases, Wodeham leaves out the natural impediments and simply says that intuition affords evident knowledge that John exists unless God intervenes:

Although a categorical evident judgment is not had ... yet a conditional evident judgment is had, namely that it is so unless God deceives.⁶⁴

⁶¹ *Lectura secunda*, prol. 6 (Wood, 164).

⁶² *Lectura secunda*, prol. 6 (Wood, 169).

⁶³ *Lectura secunda*, prol. 2 (Wood, 35).

Perhaps the reason the natural impediments are left out here is that Wodeham thinks that, at least in some cases, we can rule out that poor conditions blur our view. But even in those cases where we can rule out natural grounds for doubt, the divine cause for doubt will always remain on the table:

There is no intuition that affords an evident judgment that a thing exists and that God could not uphold the intuition without its object.⁶⁵

And with this claim, Wodeham has put a limit on what intuition can afford that seemed far away in Scotus. In an early question of his *Ordinatio*, Scotus aims to show against Henry of Ghent that knowledge can be had solely by natural means. And part of this task here is to show how we can know the objects of vision. In his discussion, Scotus takes for granted that we know our own inner acts. Thus when we are awake we know that we are awake and when we see we know that we see.⁶⁶ But when we see, there must also be a real object for our act. For as we have seen him claim above, an act of vision “attains an object in its proper actual existence.”

So far there is no ground for doubt then. But what remains to be ruled out is that the object is not in fact the way we judge it to be. Scotus in his discussion with Henry takes it for granted that God will not tamper with the way we judge, and the only serious ground for doubt he sees is that natural conditions could make us judge an object of vision to be otherwise than it is. And of course he knows that this happens often enough, as for example when we forget to consult the sense of touch when a stick looks bent to the eye. But at least in some cases Scotus thinks this kind of error can be ruled out. For if vision is

⁶⁴ *Lectura secunda* 1.2 (Wood, 222).

⁶⁵ *Lectura secunda*, prol. 2 (Wood, 41).

⁶⁶ See *Ordinatio* 1.3.1.4 (Vaticana III 145).

not contradicted by any of the other senses, then, Scotus claims, “there is certainty about the truth of what is so cognized by the senses.”⁶⁷

Here we seem to come close to full evident sensory cognition. To be sure, we may have questions about the way Scotus makes his case. (Do we really know our own acts of cognition in the way Scotus claims we do?) But what matters for now is that it seems Wodeham could agree with Scotus that, at least in some cases, we can rule out that natural conditions make us err. Yet where he and Scotus part ways is that for Wodeham, even if we know for sure that natural conditions are as good as they could ever be, there always remains at least one ground for doubt, namely that our vision could lack a real object and was made by God alone. With this, he builds in a barrier to full evident cognition that, for Scotus, just does not exist.

At this point it may seem as if Wodeham is painting a rather bleak picture of our knowledge of the world. But even if his appeal to divine deception may be a traditional skeptical argument,⁶⁸ Wodeham did not use this argument to get at a traditional skeptical conclusion. For even without absolutely evident knowledge, Wodeham believed, science remained possible. Thus even if the reality of a solar eclipse cannot be made absolutely evident to us, the “hypothetical” knowledge that it is real unless God deceives us, Wodeham at one point claimed, was enough to support the scientific conclusion that the sun is a celestial body that can be eclipsed.⁶⁹ Less than absolute *evidentia*, for Wodeham, may thus be *evidentia* enough.

6. REVISITING THE CHARGE OF SKEPTICISM

⁶⁷ *Ordinatio* 1.3.1.4 (Vaticana III 146).

⁶⁸ For this qualification, see Elizabeth Karger, “Ockham and Wodeham on Divine Deception as a Skeptical Hypothesis,” *Vivarium* 42 (2004), 225-36, 229.

⁶⁹ See *Lectura secunda* 1.2 (Wood, 220).

As we have seen above, Chatton and Wodeham feared that, with Auriol's admission of naturally caused intuitions of nonexistents, all certainty and knowledge about the external world would perish. In this section, however, I will argue that in fact there is no good reason to believe that the kind of certainty and knowledge they think intuition affords is in jeopardy on Auriol's theory of intuition.

As the previous sections have made clear, for both Chatton and Wodeham intuition yields a conditional rather than absolute kind of certainty. Specifically, as we have seen, Chatton thinks that the certainty an intuition affords is conditional upon the possibility that

- A1 it is a divinely caused intuition of a nonexistent,
- A2 it is a naturally caused intuition outlasting its object, or
- A3 it is an intuition of a real object that is judged to be otherwise than it is.

And similarly, we have seen that for Wodeham, the certain and evident cognition that an intuition yields is conditional upon the possibility that

- B1 it is a divinely caused intuition of a nonexistent, or
- B2 it is an intuition of real object that is judged to be otherwise than it is,

where the last class encompasses the case of afterimages that Chatton took to be natural intuitive cognitions of nonexistent light.

What about Auriol? Although he does not offer us the kind of discussion of conditional certainty and evidence that we get in Wodeham, it seems clear that for him, the certainty of a given intuition will be conditional upon the possibility that

- C1 it is a divinely caused intuition of a nonexistent, or
- C2 it is a naturally caused intuition of a nonexistent.

The first thing to note here is that all three Franciscans allow that God could bring about the intuitive cognition of a nonexistent object. So here Chatton and Wodeham side with Auriol against Scotus, for whom this particular barrier to certain knowledge does not exist.

But on the point of natural errors, Chatton and Wodeham see an important difference between them and Auriol. For according to Chatton, intuitions do but rarely outlast their objects, and it is only under special circumstances that the intuition of a real object comes with an error of judgment. Likewise, Wodeham thinks that the cases where intuition leads to error present exceptions to the rule, and occur only under special conditions. But at the same time, both Chatton and Wodeham suggest that, in Auriol, the category of naturally caused intuitions of nonexistents covers a rather more substantial number of cases.

Thus Chatton claims that in Auriol, intuition will become pretty much like abstraction, in that like abstraction it is “by nature equally disposed to being, whether its object exist or not.”⁷⁰ And according to Wodeham, in Auriol

there is no greater reason why a given intuitive perception be caused by the object that is perceived through such an act rather than by other causes.⁷¹

The suggestion in both authors thus is that, whereas their own cases of natural errors are exceptions to the rule, Auriol’s natural intuitions of nonexistents are not, but occur with frequency. But if that is correct, it seems that the certainty intuition affords will be more heavily qualified on Auriol’s account than it is on their own.

However, to suggest that natural intuitions of nonexistents are more than exceptions to the rule misconstrues what Auriol had in fact said. For in his *Scriptum*, he had explicitly said that, under normal conditions, our intuitive cognitions will trace existent objects, providing us with reliable information about our environments:

⁷⁰ *Reportatio et lectura*, prol. 2.2 (Wey, 90).

⁷¹ *Lectura secunda*, prol. 3 (Wood, 66).

In the natural order of things, an intuitive cognition will be impressed on the intellect from the object, and be conserved by it as light is by the sun. And so it does not make the intellect err because when the object is absent, the intuition immediately stops to be.⁷²

For Auriol, then, intuitive cognitions of nonexistents present exceptions to the rule. And that means that, on his account, intuition yields a certainty conditional on divine deception plus a small number of special cases.

At this point, it begins to look as if on Auriol's account, we are in pretty much the same epistemic condition as we are with Chatton and Wodeham. And the way in which Auriol marshals support for the natural intuition of nonexistents confirms this impression. As we have seen, according to Auriol the following five experiences illustrate the natural possibility of intuitions without objects:

Afterimages

Dreams

Apparent horrors

Illusions

Distorted color vision

But all of these experiences are covered by the last two conditions on certainty that we get in Chatton. As we have already seen, the phenomenon of afterimages is covered by his category A2 of intuitions outlasting their objects. And although Chatton does not discuss the case of distorted color vision, the remaining three cases he thinks are best understood as intuitive cognitions of real objects that in an error of judgment get mistaken for others.

⁷² *Scriptum*, prol. 2 (Buytaert, 209). Auriol's discussion here concentrates on intellectual intuitive cognition, but the point applies to standard perceptual intuition as well.

As for dreams, Chatton makes it clear that they must not be understood as visions of nonexistent objects. Rather, what happens in dreams appears to be that we see inner species or representations, but judge that what we see are outer objects. And even if Averroes is right, and if dreams are indeed the result of visual activity in the eye, still this vision not pertain to anything unreal. More precisely, it will be the vision of a state of our visual organ, which we mistake for something else:

If it is the case that some vision is caused in the sleeper's sight, this is not the vision of anything nonexistent, but it is the vision of some quality that has just been effected in that organ. Yet it is such an act of vision that a superior power does not judge that it differs from the vision of something white. And thus it mistakenly judges that it sees whiteness.⁷³

The case of dreams thus goes into category A3 of intuitive cognitions of real objects going hand in hand with an erroneous judgment.

The same holds for apparent horrors. Those who are in the grips of intense fear do not hear or see anything that is not really there, but rather mistake the real objects that they do perceive for others. Aroused by fear, for example, someone may hear his own heartbeats, but mistake them for the approaching steps of a murderer:

With regard to the third case of the frightened person, I say that someone who is deeply afraid judges that he hears things that he does not really hear.⁷⁴

Likewise, subjects who are tricked by illusions do not actually see unreal objects. Rather, they see real things, but through an act of judgment mistake them for others:

⁷³ *Reportatio et lectura*, prol. 2.2 (Wey, 96-7).

⁷⁴ *Reportatio et lectura*, prol. 2.2 (Wey, 97).

I say that someone tricked by an illusion does not see nonbeings, but that he sees present things. A superior power, however, not being able to tell clearly which things it sees, errs in judging that it sees thing that in fact it does not see.⁷⁵

The illusions that Auriol had cited in support of the apparent being provide clear examples of this. Thus, when the trees on the shore appear to move, what we see are immobile trees. But from our position on the moving boat we are led to judge that what we see are trees in motion.

All of the cases Chatton discusses are covered by his own categories of intuitions outlasting their objects and errors of judgment that follow upon the intuition of real objects. And the case of Wodeham is much the same in this respect. According to Wodeham, in afterimages and dreams, what we do in fact see, are species in the eye or in the imagination. What we are led to judge that we see, however, is an external light or some other object. The frightened see real things, but an error of judgment makes them believe that what they see are things that in fact are not there, and when the world seems covered by a shade of red, what the perceiver in fact sees is just a state of his own eyes, like the blood of a broken retinal vein, although

through an error of the power of judgment he believes that what he sees is external redness.⁷⁶

Finally, in illusions, we see real and present things, but the power of judgment mistakes them for fictions or absent objects. This, indeed, is how Wodeham analyses all of the illusions Auriol had cited in support of the apparent being. When the trees on the shore appear to move, for example, we do not see real motion in the trees. What we do see, is just the trees on the shore. But because our visual input is distorted by the continuous change in our and the trees' relative position, we judge that the trees are in motion:

⁷⁵ *Reportatio et lectura*, prol. 2.2 (Wey, 97).

⁷⁶ *Lectura secunda*, prol. 3 (Wood, 82).

But this appearance is not a vision, but it is a wrong judgment that is caused by vision.⁷⁷

All of Auriol's purported examples of natural intuitions of nonexistents, then, are covered by Wodeham's category B2.

This leaves us with the following situation. According to Chatton and Wodeham, the certainty that intuition can give us is conditional upon divine deception, plus a small set of natural yet special cases of perception. In Auriol, it is conditional upon divine deception, plus the set of natural intuitions of nonexistents. But contrary to what Chatton and Wodeham suggest, that set is small, and consists of exceptions to the rule. More to the point, the cases it includes appear to be precisely the kind of natural yet special cases of perception upon which the certainty of intuition is conditional according to Chatton and Wodeham themselves.

And this casts new light on their worry that with the natural intuition of nonexistents Auriol had made trouble for our main source of certainty about the world. For as we now see, the class of natural intuitions without real objects covers just a set of ordinary errors that Auriol and his critics alike need to take into account. To the extent that these errors create trouble for our main source of certainty then, it is a kind of trouble that both Auriol and his critics need to deal with. In fact if we put to one side the divine case for the moment, it becomes hard to see how intuition would be any more fallible on Auriol's account than it was on Scotus's. After all, Scotus knew as well as anyone that under poor conditions, intuition will come with error. But the natural intuition of nonexistents in Auriol just is a way to account for these errors – not a source of new ones.

To be sure, Auriol does not give us any way to pick out these natural errors. And indeed it may seem difficult for him to do so. For on a basic level, true vision and illusion are similar in that both are pairs of an act of vision and an apparent being. The only

⁷⁷ *Lectura secunda*, prol. 4 (Wood, 97).

difference is that in one case the apparent object does, and in the other does not, match a real object. But hard as it may be to pick out errors, Auriol does not seem to be that much worse off than his critics. For on their account too, the illusion of a bent stick is similar in a basic way to the true vision of a stick that is bent indeed. Both are visions of a real stick that come with a judgment about its shape. The only difference is that the judgment is true in one case but false in the other. So far then, picking out errors seems just as hard for Auriol as it is for his critics. Or in a more positive key, to the extent that his critics are optimistic that natural errors will get detected most of the time and that none is “invincible” in principle, it is not clear that Auriol could not share that kind of optimism.⁷⁸

What might appear to complicate matters here, is the fact that for Auriol we only ever see the world via the apparent being. But if that is the case, we can never compare the way an object appears to us with the way it is in itself. And if we can never compare the way an object appears to us with the way it is in itself, it is hard to see how we could tell apart the good and bad cases. It is as if we were given a collection of paintings and had to pick out the ones that are most realistic without ever seeing their originals. This is the kind of ‘veil of perception’ problem that is perhaps best known from the early modern reception of indirect realism.

But again I do not see that Auriol is any worse off than his critics. For they too will need to admit that when we see an object, it will always appear to us in one way or another. And just as Auriol cannot ‘look behind’ his apparent being, they too lack the kind of neutral point of view it would take to see things as they are in themselves, independently of the way they appear to us. So even though for them things appear the

⁷⁸ It is true that according to his critics, some illusions happen because we see a species in a way that we do not in veridical vision. But that does not make them easier to detect. Species can be mistaken for outer objects, and that is why we find some dreams to be indistinguishable from true visions. On a more general note, the species theory was the result of philosophical analysis, and to the best of my knowledge, no one ever claimed that the role of species in cognitive processes was evident from introspection. It seems unlikely, then, that we could identify some act of cognition as an illusion just on the ground that it is mediated by a species. At least, the role played by species in these illusions does not seem to give us an advantage in recognizing them for what they are.

way they do because of how we judge them to be and not because of the special being they get as objects of vision, the basic task for them is the same as it is for Auriol and the rest of us: to find a way to tell good and bad cases apart despite the fact that we cannot compare the way things appear to us with the neutral way they are in themselves that perhaps only a God's eye view would reveal.⁷⁹

7. CONCLUSION

Auriol's account of appearances provoked strong reactions among contemporaries, who felt that the apparent being would foreclose proper access to the outer world. In particular, his fellow Franciscans Walter Chatton and Adam Wodeham felt that Auriol's ontology of appearances was what had led him to claim that intuitive cognitions can naturally come without existent objects. And this claim, at its turn, they believed opened the gates to skepticism. But although Auriol's readers from the fourteenth century to our own days have linked his ontology of apparent being to the intuition of nonexistents, this paper has argued that the former is neither necessary nor sufficient for the latter. Moreover, we have seen that the charge of skepticism in Chatton and Wodeham is problematic. For Chatton and Wodeham, the certainty that intuition affords is conditional rather than absolute. But for Auriol, as we have seen, the certainty of intuition is conditional upon the exact same cases as it is in his critics. So his theory of intuition may have been unusual, and it may have left us without a means to tell truth from error in all cases. But that being said, it did in no way put at risk the kind of certainty that was enough for two of his hardest critics. The charge of skepticism that we get in Chatton and Wodeham, then, lacks a fair ground.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ For a detailed argument that indirect realism is not conducive to skepticism in any special way, see John Greco, *Putting Skeptics in their Place. The Nature of Skeptical Arguments and their Role in Philosophical Enquiry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 77-106.

⁸⁰ I would like to thank the participants of the 2016 Peter Auriol Workshop at the University of Leuven, where an earlier version of this paper was presented. Also, I am grateful to an anonymous referee for a detailed set of helpful comments.

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