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The Philosophy of Intellect of Robert Grosseteste

Robert Grosseteste first studied at the Cathedral School of Lincoln, serving Bishop Hugh of Lincoln as clerk. In the 1190s Grosseteste was a clerk of the Bishop at Hereford. The Cathedral School of Hereford was a center for Arabic learning in the late twelfth century. Grosseteste became familiar with Aristotle, Arabic scientific treatises, and the Neoplatonism filtered through works such as the *Theology of Aristotle*, *Fons Vitae* or *Liber de Causis*. His most important writings can be seen as a mixture of these three sources in combination with Christian theology, in particular Augustine, Gregory, and Boethius, as he owned copies of *De Civitate Dei*, *Moralia in Job*, and *De Consolatione Philosophiae*. In his late career, Grosseteste translated the *Celestial Hierarchy*, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, *Divine Names*, and *Mystical Theology* of Pseudo-Dionysius. In early treatises such as his *Hexaemeron* and *Commentary on the Posterior Analytics*, written between 1228 and 1235, Grosseteste developed a philosophy of intellect, influenced by Greek and Arabic commentaries on Aristotle's *De anima*, which contain Neoplatonic influences. In the *De anima* of Aristotle, Book III, a productive intellect is distinguished from a potential intellect. In the *De Anima* of Alexander of Aphrodisias, the productive intellect is the active intellect, or *nous poietikos*, and the potential intellect is the material intellect, or *nous hylikos*. The material intellect is perfected as intellection as *intellectus in habitu* in discursive reason or *dianoia*, which Grosseteste follows. The *nous poietikos* is taken as a purely spiritual substance acting on human intellect, as in the *intelligentia* of Grosseteste. The capacity for receiving the influence of the *nous poietikos* is the material intellect, the *nous hylikos*, through which knowledge is acquired.

Avicenna in the *Liber Naturalis* and Averroes in the *Long Commentary on the De anima*, along with Alfarabi, in the *Risala* or *De intellectu*, influenced the thinking of Latin scholastics in the concept of the active intellect

as the incorporeal agent leading the potential, material intellect to actuality, a concept which can also be found in the *De intellectu* of Alexander of Aphrodisias, and the *Fons Vitae* of Avicbron. Avicbron described the active intellect as a transcendent and incorporeal, cosmic intellect, similar to the way it was described in the *Paraphrase of the De anima* of Themistius, illuminating the *anima rationalis*, or rational soul. According to Roger Bacon, Adam Marsh accepted the incorporeal active intellect as a divine intellect, as influenced by the Greek and Arabic commentators on Aristotle, as did Robert Grosseteste, who distinguished a divine or cosmic intellect, *intelligentia*, from an active intellect, *virtus intellectiva*, which actualizes a material intellect, *virtus scitiva* or *virtus cogitativa*.

This distinction can be found in the writings of Roger Bacon, Albertus Magnus, and John Peckham. These three writers, along with Grosseteste, Adam Marsh, and William of Auvergne, also see the divine intellect, the *intelligentia*, as illuminating the *anima rationalis*, in the *irradiato spiritualis* of the *lumen spiritualis*, reflected spiritual light, in the synthesis of Aristotelian, Neoplatonic, and Christian influences. In Grosseteste's thought, the passive intellect is defined as the *virtus scitiva* or *virtus cogitativa*, as a form of *dianoia*, the agent intellect is defined as the *virtus intellectiva*, and the Intelligence is defined as the *intelligentia*, as in the First Cause of the *Liber de Causis*. As in the *Liber de Causis*, for Grosseteste the material intellect in the lower part of the soul acts according to the impressions received of intelligibles from the *intelligentia*, as illuminated by the *irradiato spiritualis*, the inner light, and reflected as in a mirror.

In the *Commentary on the Posterior Analytics* of Grosseteste, which contains his most extended commentary on Aristotle's conception of intellect, as light emanates from the sun, intelligibles are illuminated in the mind, or *oculus interior*. The *intellectus* in mind, *virtus intellectiva* or *nous*, abstracts universal ideas from the particulars of sense to form principles, but *intelligentia* functions without a corporeal agent, and is assisted by Divine illumination. The universal is the form or *species*, and is seen as a cause or principle of being. The universal exists *in re* in a particular thing, and causes the thing to be what it is. The universal or *species* also exists *post rem* in *intellectus*, as an abstraction from a particular thing, or intelligible. The *principia essendi* in the thing become the *principia conoscendi* in the mind. In the *Commentary on the Physics* of Grosseteste, written around 1230, the *principia essendi* of a thing, its form or *species*, are the subject of human knowledge at three different levels. At the first level, it is the subject of ontology and natural philoso-

phy. At the second level it is the subject of mathematics and geometry, as the universal is abstracted from the particular in the *principia conoscendi*. At the third level, it is the subject of metaphysics, as the *principia conoscendi* participate in the *virtus intellectiva* and Divine illumination.

The three levels of human knowledge of the *principia essendi* correspond to the three levels of intellect outlined by Grosseteste in his sermon *Ecclesia Sancta Celebrat*. *Ratio*, reason, is capable of grasping the objects of the natural sciences. The *virtutes intellectiva et intellectualis* are capable of apprehending the first principles of science and intelligibles. *Intelligentia* is the participation of Divine illumination in intellect. In the *Ecclesia Sancta*, the noblest capacity of human nature is the desire to know the *lux spiritualis*, the spiritual light, in the *intelligentia*. In the *Commentary on the Posterior Analytics* of Grosseteste, *intelligentia* is the supreme faculty of the soul. It is a form of knowing which does not depend on sense perception or abstraction in reason, or any material form, but rather on direct irradiation of the *lux spiritualis*. In the *Hexaameron*, *intelligentia* is described as a faculty of contemplation, with no connection to *phantasia*, imagination, or *ratio*. Following Augustine in *De Trinitate*, *intelligentia* is divided into *memoria*, *intelligentia*, and *amor*, in the contemplation of the Trinity without material phantasm, *species sensibilis*, or corporeal instruments, *phantasia* and *ratio*. *Ratio* and *imaginatio*, and bodily operations themselves, operate in imitation and the reflection of the *similitudo* of *intelligentia*.

In the *Commentary on the Posterior Analytics*, *intelligentia* is described as the highest part of the *anima rationalis*, which is seen as separate from corporeal motions and operations. In the treatise *De statu causarum*, the *anima rationalis* is described as an incorporeal intelligence mediating corporeal *virtus*, the motion of which in the senses are the *phantasmata*, mnemonic residues of sense impressions, of the *imaginatio*. The body is seen as an instrument in relation to *anima rationalis*, and only influences the soul indirectly. In the treatise *De intelligentis* of Grosseteste, as the higher form of substance, the incorporeal soul can be active in the body, but the body cannot be active in the incorporeal substance. This is also expressed in the *Hexaameron* and the *Commentary on the Posterior Analytics*. The soul is seen as distinct from the body. In the *Hexaameron* the action of the body is compared to that of a mirror that acts by means of reflections, created by the *irradiatio spiritualis*, the illumination provided by the *intelligentia* of the higher soul, which is also reflected in the *virtus intellectiva* and the *virtus cogitativa*, the lower levels of the rational soul and the mechanisms of cognition in which the *intelligen-*

tia participates.

In the *Hexaemeron*, sense perception is defined as the power of receiving and grasping sensible likenesses without matter, that is, the senses receive the *species* or *eidos* of the corporeal object and not the object itself. Sense perception, as a lower part of the *anima rationalis*, is passive or potential in relation to the ability of the *anima rationalis* to know or comprehend concepts, in the *virtus cogitativa*, or intelligibles, in the *virtus intellectiva*. The *anima rationalis* is activated or becomes more attentive when the body is acted upon, when the senses are stimulated. Sense perception itself is stimulated when the *anima rationalis* is able to free itself to some degree from the corporality of the body which it inhabits, and to overcome its own passivity. The *anima rationalis*, as the source of the movement of the body, pushes against the passivity of the corporeal body. As it encounters more difficulties in its task, it becomes more attentive. The *anima rationalis* is aware of the difficulties caused by its pushing against the body's passivity, and as a result sense perception is painful or troublesome, and causes turbulence in the *anima rationalis*.

The passivity of the body is overcome when the passion of the body, the *amore* or *affectus mentis*, caused by the multiple particulars of sense perception and the passivity of the body, fits with the working of the soul, when the *species* of sense perception is corresponded to the intelligible, the *species sensibilis* is corresponded to the *species apprehensibilis*, resulting from interior illumination, *irradiato spiritualis*, and the turbulence of the cooperation between *anima rationalis* and body can be overcome, and the illumination of the *oculus mentis* can function adequately so that the *anima rationalis* is at peace in its activation in intellection. The *anima rationalis* is aware of the peace that it can achieve in its overcoming of the passivity of the body, and thus aspires to the higher forms of intellection, *virtus intellectiva*, which necessitates a freedom from corporeal desires in the higher parts of the *anima rationalis*.

In the *De motu supercaelestium* of Grosseteste, the faculty of sense perception is controlled by the *vis apprehensiva* of the *anima rationalis*, and its primary goal is only that of self-preservation. Sense perception is assisted by *sensus communis*; *imaginatio*, the formation of the *phantasmata* in the *oculus mentis*; and *memoria*; as such it allows knowledge to be possible, the *scientia*, knowledge gained by abstraction in reason, and the *intellectus*, the knowledge of first principles or intelligibles; but sense perception is not the cause of knowledge. Sense perception alone cannot apprehend universals,

which are the materials of knowledge. In the *Commentary on the Posterior Analytics*, sense perception alone can perceive things only in a particular signified place and time; it can only perceive a particular, without the context given by *intellectus* and *intelligentia*. As space and time, intelligibles in the *virtus intellectiva*, are the conditions of sense experience, sense experience cannot be the cause of *scientia*, or *virtus scitiva*, or *virtus intellectiva*, although it acts as a mediator or instigator in the intellectual process. It is up to the *intellectus* to combine and differentiate the particular qualities of objects as given by sense perception.

Because the *species sensibilis*, the form of the object, in sense perception is connected to material objects, sense perception restricts the incorporeal *virtus* of *intellectus* to a certain extent. In the *Commentary on the Posterior Analytics*, the *intelligentia*, as the highest part of the *anima rationalis*, has complete knowledge of both singulars and universals, because it is illuminated by a radiated light, the *irradiato spiritualis*, or *lumen spiritualis*, and it is separated from the heavy, clouded body in sense perception, in the same way that the *anima rationalis* is separated from the body. As such, *intelligentia* is separated from the *phantasmata* of corporeal objects in the *imaginatio*, the lower function of *intellectus*, and from the desire or *amore* created in the relation between the *virtus intellectiva* and the *phantasmata*, the *affectus mentis*, the desire created by the multiple and fragmented images of perception as constructed in the *virtus cogitativa* or *virtus scitiva*. Sense perception supports the *anima rationalis*, but it is lower and separated from it, and is caused by it rather than being the cause of it.

The body corrupts the purity of the eye of the soul, the *oculus mentis*, making it cloudy and heavy. The *virtus* of the *anima rationalis* tends to be focused on bodily and material things, on the body the motion of which it is the source, and such a focus tends to lull the *virtus* of the higher intelligences, the *virtus intellectiva*, to sleep, restricting the incorporeal *virtus*, and restricting the ability of *intellectus* to engage the *virtus intellectiva* and aspire to or be open to the *intelligentia*. The *virtus scitiva* and *virtus cogitativa* are more weighed down by the corporeal *species sensibilis* in the *phantasmata* of the *imaginatio*, and are limited in their abilities of intellection. Scientific, discursive and dialectical reasoning are limited in their functioning, limited in their capacity of apprehension, *vis apprehensiva*, and limited in their understanding of the functioning of intellect and knowledge in philosophical terms. They are limited in their ability to grasp the creative and generative functions of intellect.

In Grosseteste's *Commentary on the Mystical Theology* of Pseudo-Dionysius, *intelligentia* functions independently of *ratio*, *intellectus*, and *phantasia*, or imagination. Grosseteste compares *intelligentia* to the *intellectus agens*, agent intellect, and *actio intellectus*, active intellect, the intellects which are differentiated from the passive, material intellect, discursive reason, in the *De anima* of Aristotle. In the *Commentary on the Posterior Analytics*, the origin of the *principia essendi* or universals is inaccessible to cognition or knowledge, as they are the product of the *intelligentia*, so they exist in an inchoate state as potentials, and are drawn out from potential to action, in a possible or material state which is in the beginning passive and not active. This reflects the structure of intellect as described by Aristotle, in the relation between the potential, passive or material, agent and active intellects. The *principia essendi* are brought from potential to active in sense perception, which again is the foundation for knowledge, the knowledge of universals, *principia conoscendi*, but not the cause. This is also described in Grosseteste's *De Libero Arbitrio*. As knowledge of the thing itself is impossible, scientific knowledge is based on the universals, the *principia essendi ante rem*, which are elicited through sense perception, as illuminated by the *irradiato spiritualis* in the *oculus mentis*. The *principia essendi* become the material for scientific demonstration, as science cannot be based on the corruptible and variable knowledge of singulars and particulars given by sense perception alone.

As human intellect does not have complete access to either the particulars of the sense world or the *principia essendi* that correspond to those particulars in intellect, absolute knowledge and comprehension is impossible, mostly because of the corporeal instrument to which intellection is attached. The *anima rationalis* does not have perfect vision in the *oculus mentis* of the *principia essendi* which are illuminated by the *irradiato spiritualis* of *intelligentia*, as it is clouded by its connection to the body. The goal of intellection, of intellectual activity, is to uncloud the lens of the *oculus mentis* as much as possible, to purify the *anima rationalis* of its corporeal connections, and to aspire to see the *principia essendi* as clearly as possible, though ultimately completely clear vision is not possible. The goal of intellection is to uncloud the lens of the *oculus mentis* in the *anima rationalis* so that it can receive as much as possible the *irradiato spiritualis* which illuminates the intelligibles and allows the mind to have clear understanding.