
ARTICLES

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Radulphus Brito on the Knowledge of Substances Through Their Accidents

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Abstract

In this article, I explore two questions by Radulphus Brito—one from his commentary on Porphyry’s *Isagoge* and the other from his questions on Aristotle’s *De anima*—to present Brito’s stance on the possibility of knowing the substance (or essence) through its accidents. In my argument, I focus on the role that Brito ascribes to the internal senses in his explanation of this knowledge. My second aim is to show the links between this discussion and the questions on the accident and the distinctive property (*accidens et proprium*) as predicables in Brito’s commentary on Porphyry. In conclusion, I offer insights into the semiotic relevance of the discussion.

1. From the *Questions on Porphyry* to the *Questions on De anima I*

Radulphus Brito (d. 1320/1321) investigates the possibility of knowing substances (or substantial essences: *quod quid est*) from their accidents in two works. Specifically, he deals with this issue in one question in version B

of his *Questions on Porphyry* (before 1296),¹ and he also tackles it in a question on Book I of Aristotle's *De anima* (I.8) (ca. 1295).² In this paper, I do not provide a detailed account of the links between Brito's discussions and the preceding authors' ideas, though I reference the earlier *De anima* commentaries whenever relevant.

Brito's commentary on the *De anima*, as well as some of his other writings,³ exists in different versions. On comparing the lists of questions in the two manuscripts that Sander W. de Boer used for his working edition with at least three other manuscripts preserving Brito's work,⁴ one can easily see that the number of questions on Books I and II differs in them. Namely, while *F* and *V_I* contain 10 questions on Book I and 46 questions on Book II,⁵ *P_I*, *P₂* and *V₃* each have 14 questions on Book I and 47 questions on Book II, with one question added between 44 and 45. The question is devoted to the number of the internal senses, and I will rely on it in discussing the role that the internal senses play in the knowledge of substances (Section 3). Chronologically, there is no doubt that the question on Porphyry (version B) predates the one on *De anima* I. Importantly, the latter refers to the former as offering a solution that Brito once held but has

¹ Contrary to what Heinrich Roos and Jan Pinborg proposed many years ago, version B precedes version A; for more details, see the extensive discussion in Marmo, 2025. The question under discussion here is preserved in only one ms. (*N* = Nürnberg, Stadtbibliothek, Cent. V.21, ff. 73va–b) and was edited as q. 44 of version B in Roos, 1978, pp. 61–64.

² Radulphus Brito, *Quaestiones super librum De anima*, I.8 (ed. de Boer, 2012, pp. 299–306). De Boer edited all the questions on Book I and selected questions on Book II, using only two witnesses (*F* = Firenze, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Conv. Soppr., E.I.252, and *V_I* = Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Pal. lat. 1059), sometimes consulting a third one (*P_I* = Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, lat. 14705), thereby realizing that there are probably different redactions of this commentary (de Boer, 2012, p. 266).

³ There are also different versions of Brito's questions on the so-called *Ars Vetus*, the *Liber sex principiorum*, Aristotle's *Prior Analytics*, *Physics*, *Nicomachean Ethics*, and Boethius's *De divisione*. On the different redactions of Brito's questions on the *De anima* III, see Fauser, 1974.

⁴ They are *P_I*, *P₂* (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, lat. 12971) and *V₃* (Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. lat. 3061), which also contain other works by Brito.

⁵ See de Boer, 2012, p. 12.

apparently abandoned.⁶ Brito's change of position on this matter probably explains the omission of the question from the subsequent version (i.e., version A) of his *Questions on Porphyry*.⁷

2. The Two Questions Compared

When comparing these two questions by Brito, one notes, firstly, that the issue is worded differently. In the commentary on Porphyry (version B), the title of the question reads “whether from one apparent feature in reality the intellect can rise to the essential understanding of a genus,”⁸ while question 8 on Book I of the *De anima* is titled “whether accidents lead us to the knowledge of the substance.”⁹ Noticeably, the focus of the discussion shifts from the genus and its understanding, a regular preoccupation in commentaries on Porphyry's *Isagoge*, to the substance (or its essence) and its knowledge through accidents, a usual thematic concern in commentaries on Aristotle's *De anima*.¹⁰

At the beginning, the question on Porphyry lists four counterarguments, only two of which are taken up in the question on Book I of the *De anima*, both of them being fairly traditional arguments also to be found, for instance, in the commentaries of Simon of Faversham (d. 1304) and Magister Simon

⁶ On this reference, see Marmo, 2018, pp. 200–201.

⁷ As suggested in Marmo, 2025, p. 39.

⁸ Radulphus Brito, *Quaestiones super Porphyrium*, q. 44 (ed. Roos, 1978, p. 61): *utrum ex uno apparenti in re intellectus possit consurgere in intellectum essentialem generis*.

⁹ Radulphus Brito, *Quaestiones super librum De anima*, I.8 (ed. de Boer, 2012, p. 299): *utrum accidentia ducant in cognitionem substantie*.

¹⁰ The question was inspired by the following passage in *De anima* (I.1): “Set e converso accidentia conferunt magnam partem ad cognoscendum quod quid est” (402b21–22; quoted from the edition in Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia libri De anima*, ed. Gauthier, 1984, p. 3b). The same question was discussed in at least two previous Parisian commentaries: *Quaestiones super librum De anima*, I, q. 13, by Simon of Faversham and *Dicta super librum De anima* by Magister Simon. The latter is a literal exposition with questions and *dubitationes*. The two authors were probably not the same person (see Christensen, 2018; Bernardini, 2023). Interestingly, neither Albert the Great (ca. 1260) nor Aquinas (1267–1268) proposed any question or *dubitatio* on this issue in their commentaries; see Albert the Great, *De anima*, I.1.5 (ed. Stroick, 1968, p. 10b; Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia libri De anima*, cap. I (ed. Gauthier, 1984, p. 7b).

(end of 13th century–beginning of 14th century). The first argument says that the substance cannot be possibly known from its accidents because nothing acts outside its own species (*nichil agit ultra suam speciem*). Since accidents and substances in fact belong to different genera, accidents cannot make any substance known. Furthermore, the argument in the commentary on Porphyry traces the major premise back to Averroes¹¹ and the minor back to Plato, as well as to Aristotle's *De generatione et corruptione* (I.7 324a1–14, 323b31–33) and Book II of *De anima* (5 418a4–6).¹² The second argument relies on the correspondence between cognitive and ontological principles (*eadem sunt principia cognoscendi et essendi*) to state that accidents are not ontological principles of substances (i.e., they are not their causes), so they are not principles of their knowledge either.¹³ The difference between the two replies to the latter argument in the two commentaries is quite interesting. In the question on Porphyry, the response emphasizes that the minor premise (accidents are not the causes of a substance) only holds *a priori* (because a substance is the cause of accidents), but not *a posteriori*, that is, in the cognitive

¹¹ Radulphus Brito, *Quaestiones super Porphyrium*, q. 44 (ed. Roos, 1978, p. 62; this is the first argument *contra*). See Simon of Faversham, *Quaestiones super librum De anima*, I.13 (*V*₂ = Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. lat. 2170, f. 70rb): “Nichil agit ultra suam speciem etc.; maior scribitur in libro *De generatione*; minor patet, quia (quod V) accidentia sunt alterius predica<men>ti quam substantia.” Magister Simon, *Dicta super librum De anima* (L = Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek, 1359, f. 46rb): “Quia nichil agit ultra speciem, secundum Philosophum et Platonem, septimo *Metaphysice*; sed <si> hoc contingeret quod ex accidentium cognitione possimus cognoscere substantias essentialiter, sequeretur accidens aliquid agere extra suam speciem; quare etc. Accidens enim et substantia non solum specie differunt, <sed> numero <et> etiam genere.”

¹² Radulphus Brito, *Quaestiones super librum De anima*, I.8 (ed. de Boer, 2012, pp. 299–300; this is the first argument *contra*). Brito combines here the references to Plato and to Aristotle's *De generatione*, which were used, respectively, by Magister Simon and Simon of Faversham.

¹³ Radulphus Brito, *Quaestiones super Porphyrium*, q. 44 (ed. Roos, 1978, p. 62; this is the fourth argument *contra*). Radulphus Brito, *Quaestiones super librum De anima*, I.8 (ed. de Boer, 2012, p. 300; this is the third argument *contra*). See Simon of Faversham, *Quaestiones super librum De anima*, I.13 (*V*₂, f. 70rb); *add. in mg.*: “Item, illud quod non est causa essendi alicui<us> non est causa cognoscendi illud, quia eadem sunt principia essendi et cognoscendi, ut scribitur secundo *Metaphysice*; sed accidentia non sunt causa essendi <substantie> etc.” Magister Simon, *Dicta super librum De anima* (L, f. 46vb), quotes the same principle in a *dubitatio* (about the kind of cognition of the accidents that is required to obtain the knowledge of the substance) which follows the question in the same *lectio*.

process of searching for the cause (*inventio*).¹⁴ In the question on Book I of *De anima*, the reply points out that the major premise (*eadem sunt principia ecc.*) is true (if something is the ontological principle of something else, then it is also its cognitive principle), but its converse does not hold (*if something is the cognitive principle of something else, then it is its ontological principle), so by saying that accidents do not lead to the knowledge of the substance, one commits a fallacy of the consequent (by denying the antecedent).¹⁵

Another fairly common counterargument, which is only present in Brito's questions on *De anima* I, relies on the circularity between knowing accidents from the substance (a commonly accepted notion) and knowing the substance from accidents; this circularity is regarded as problematic because it results in a *petitio principii*.¹⁶ Brito's response is not particularly original, in fact rehearsing the reply that Simon of Faversham and Magister Simon gave to the same argument.¹⁷ Namely knowing accidents from the substance differs from knowing the substance from accidents, with the former knowledge being complete and perfect, whereas the latter is defective.¹⁸

¹⁴ Radulphus Brito, *Quaestiones super Porphyrium*, q. 44 (ed. Roos, 1978, p. 64).

¹⁵ Radulphus Brito, *Quaestiones super librum De anima*, I.8 (ed. de Boer, 2012, p. 305). On *fallacia consequentis*, see Marmo, 2023.

¹⁶ Radulphus Brito, *Quaestiones super librum De anima*, I.8 (ed. de Boer, 2012, p. 300). See Simon of Faversham, *Quaestiones super librum De anima*, I.13 (V, f. 70rb): "Item, non est dubium quin ex cognitione \substantie/ deveniamus in cognitionem accidentium; si ex cognitione accidentium econverso deveniremus in cognitionem substantie, circulus esset in cognitionibus, quod reprobatur primo *Posteriorum*." Magister Simon, *Dicta super librum De anima* (L, f. 46rb): "Preterea, planum est quod substantie cognitio ducit in cognitionem accidentis, quia secundum Philosophum, septimo *Metaphysice*, substantia est prius omni accidente secundum esse <et> cognitionem; si igitur accedens econverso duceret in cognitionem substantie, iam fieret circularis <demonstratio> que reprobata est primo *Posteriorum*."

¹⁷ Simon of Faversham, *Quaestiones super librum De anima*, I.13 (V₂, f. 70va): "Et per hoc patet solutio tertie rationis, quia hoc non est circulus eo quod cum alius modus cognoscendi per quem devenitur ab accidentibus in cognitionem quod quid est, et econverso; sic ergo apparet conclusio." Magister Simon, *Dicta super librum De anima* (L, f. 46va): "Ad aliud dicendum quod differenter cognoscitur accedens ex substantia, quia intellectu completo et cognitione a priori; <sed> cognitione quasi posteriori et incompleta et ab effectu cognitio substantie communibus(?) ex accidentibus; modo si idem esset modus cognoscendi hic et ibi, tunc bene esset circulus, quare [quia L] <e>tc.; et ex isto patet sententia."

¹⁸ Radulphus Brito, *Quaestiones super librum De anima*, I.8 (ed. de Boer, 2012, p. 305).

Just like the previous commentators, albeit less explicitly, Brito suggests that accepting the main thesis—that the substance can be known from its accidents—is actually not a problem as such; the real difficulty lies in *how* such knowledge might be derived from the accidents.¹⁹ In his commentary on Book I of *De anima*, Brito examines six possible solutions, while in the previous question on Porphyry, he briefly mentions just one opinion (introduced by the vague “some say”: *dicunt quidam*) and immediately rejects it because it contradicts the principle that the substance is the primary object of the intellect’s knowledge.²⁰ In his *De anima* commentary, Brito uses the same argument to counter the second, third, and sixth positions. As the first and fourth positions are most relevant to this paper, I will examine them in detail.

The first approach (or explanation) is Brito’s favorite. His general premise in all the explanations is that there is a distinction, first, between common accidents and proper accidents and, second, between substances possessing sensible qualities and those disjoined from them. Brito then argues that what acts on the imagination (through the senses) in the case of sensible substances is the compound and not either the form or the matter alone. This compound (which exists *sub esse materiali*), combined with the illumination by the agent intellect, modifies the possible intellect’s knowledge of the substance. This does not imply that accidents are first known by the possible intellect since the intellect depends on what is perceived by the senses and then reworked by the imagination. For their part, substances separated from sensible qualities are only known through their effects, which are common or proper accidents. I will discuss the distinction between common and proper accidents below (Section 4), when dealing with Brito’s *Questions on Porphyry*.²¹

¹⁹ Radulphus Brito, *Quaestiones super librum De anima*, I.8 (ed. de Boer, 2012, p. 301). See Simon of Faversham, *Quaestiones super librum De anima*, I.13 (*V*, f. 70rb): “Intelligendum quod de conclusione questionis non est difficultas, sed de modo, scilicet quis sit modus deveniendi a cognitione accidentium ad cognitionem substantie difficultas est.” Magister Simon, *Dicta super librum De anima* (*L*, f. 46rb): “Tertio breviter notandum est secundum quem modum ex cognitione accidentium devenimus in cognitionem quiditativam rerum, que [qua *L*] quidam dicunt hoc modo fieri [...]”

²⁰ Radulphus Brito, *Quaestiones super Porphyrium*, q. 44 (ed. Roos, 1978, p. 63).

²¹ Radulphus Brito, *Quaestiones super librum De anima*, I.8 (ed. de Boer, 2012, pp. 301–302).

The fourth position corresponds to the stance Brito himself adopts in the *Questions on Porphyry* (version B), and, indeed, he admits to having held this view elsewhere (*istam viam alias tenui*).²² It assumes that when faculties (or cognitive capacities) are hierarchically connected, such as touch relative to sight or sight relative to the estimative power, whenever the lower faculty operates, the higher faculty can know not only what the lower faculty knows, but also what the lower faculty does not know. This notion is conveyed in Avicenna's famous example of a lamb, which, on seeing a wolf for the first time ever, immediately knows through its estimative power the creature's hostility (which is a *species insensata*, that is, imperceptible to the senses). The same relationship obtains between the intellect and the imagination, which means that when the imagination knows a sensible object (from its accidents), the intellect immediately knows not only these accidents (abstractly), but also the substance in which they inhere. The same example was also cited in the *Questions on Porphyry*,²³ further evincing the effectiveness of the estimative faculty proposed by Avicenna in the *Liber Sextus de Naturalibus* and consequently recognizing a form of "animal intelligence"²⁴ (to which Brito does not attribute any inferential ability).

Bruto refutes the fourth solution by raising a doubt. Specifically, he observes that if this were the case, the substance would not be understood through its own species (*species*), but rather through that of the accidents. The point is that, according to this position, the imagined species would only refer to the accidents, but not to the substance or essence, whereas Aristotle insists that the passage through the imagination is necessary for human knowledge.²⁵

²² Radulphus Brito, *Quaestiones super librum De anima*, I.8 (ed. de Boer, 2012, p. 303). See Radulphus Brito, *Quaestiones super Porphyrium*, q. 44 (ed. Roos, 1978, p. 63).

²³ Radulphus Brito, *Quaestiones super Porphyrium*, q. 44 (ed. Roos, 1978, p. 63).

²⁴ Avicenna, *Liber de anima seu sextus de naturalibus*, IV.1 (ed. van Riet, vol. 2, 1–11). See Black, 1993; 2000; Oelze, 2019; Marmo, 2020.

²⁵ Radulphus Brito, *Quaestiones super librum De anima*, I.8 (ed. de Boer, 2012, pp. 305–306).

3. The Role of the *Aestimativa/Cogitativa*

Brito's position changes between his commentary on Porphyry and his questions on *De anima*.²⁶ He seems to eschew the model of the internal senses including the estimative faculty, which extracts the *species insensatae* from the sensible species that are perceived and stored by the imaginative faculty, and then composed by the fantasy. Instead, he apparently espouses the idea of combined causality, in which the imagined accidents and the active intellect contribute to producing the knowledge of the substance.²⁷ However, Brito does not really abandon the former model and in fact lists the estimative faculty among the internal senses. He recognizes five internal senses: the common sense, the imaginative faculty, the fantasy, the estimative faculty (in brute animals and, following Averroes, the *cogitativa* in humans), and the memory. In the question on the internal senses added in *P*₁, *P*₂ (in an incomplete form), and *V*₃, Brito explains the (functional) relationships of succession between these senses in terms borrowed from Avicenna and al-Ghazālī. Accordingly, the common sense knows the differences between the various sensible objects of the different senses. Then, the imaginative faculty takes its turn and preserves the species (or images) received by the common sense. Afterwards, the fantasy pieces together various imagined objects, composing new ones, for example combining an imagined mountain and imagined gold into the image (*phantasma*) of a golden mountain. Subsequently, the estimative faculty extracts the (unperceived) species of utility or harm from the perceived ones, so as to know something in terms of friendship or hostility, like a sheep that *judges* a wolf it sees to be an enemy by its color and *judges* a lamb it hears to be a friend by its voice. Finally, the memory preserves the species known by the estimative and the other faculties.²⁸

²⁶ A similar change concerns a range of other issues, including the meaning of general terms such as “animal,” the unicity/unity of substantial forms, and the meaning of concrete accidental terms, to name a few notable cases. See Marmo, 2025, pp. 28–31, 36–37, 38.

²⁷ This corresponds to the theory of abstraction also expounded in Brito's *Questions on Porphyry*, version A, qq. 5–8 (ed. Pinborg, 1980).

²⁸ Radulphus Brito, *Quaestiones super librum De anima*, II.44bis (*P*₁, f. 113ra; *P*₂, f. 23ra–b; *V*₃, f. 21vb): “Avicenna et Algazel [...] primo ponunt sensum communem cuius actus est cognoscere differentiam diversorum sensibilibus diversorum sensuum [...] Postea est virtus ymaginativa que conservat species receptas in sensu communi [...]”.

The verb “judge” (*iudicare*) that Brito uses for animals in conjunction with the function of the estimative/cogitative faculty is an interesting detail. While Brito seems to attribute a compositional ability to animals (if not an inferential one, which Roger Bacon (1214/20–1292) explicitly did), one should interpret the value of this verb with caution. First, in discussing the fantasy and its act of composing images of sensible objects, Brito states that what the fantasy produces when it puts together the imagined objects are not propositions, but rather complex images,²⁹ which are made up of different and possibly incompatible features (such as the *fantasma montis aurei* above). Furthermore, he says that, in extracting unperceived species from the perceived ones, the estimative faculty is passive rather than active. He then restates the notions linked to his previous position on knowing the substance from its accidents: among ordered faculties, when the lower one operates, the higher one is modified by the same object as well. Since the unperceived species is contained in the perceived one, the change in the estimative faculty, Brito posits, is immediate and does not imply any activity on the part of the faculty itself. The sheep’s “judging” the wolf to be an enemy or the lamb to be a friend has thus nothing of the capacity to connect or infer (*virtus collativa*) that characterizes the cogitative faculty in humans, which Brito also calls “the syllogistic handling of particular (propositions or terms)” or “the ability to (inferentially) connect particular intentions,”³⁰

Postea est fantasia cuius actus est componere diversa fantasiata ad invicem, sicut montis et auri fantasiati, e sic de aliis, et apprehendere et conservare unum aggregatum fantasma montis aurei; [...] Postea est virtus estimativa que cognoscit species non sensatas ex sensatis, sive elicit species convenientis et disconvenientis, et cognoscit aliquid sub ratione amici et inimici, que non sunt sensata, sed eliciuntur a sensatis, sicut <ovis> ex colore lupi apprehenso iudicat eum inimicum, et ex voce agni iudicat eum amicum; [...] Postea est virtus memorativa que habet conservare species apprehensas ab estimativa et etiam ab aliis.” Also in his *Quaestiones super librum De memoria et reminiscencia*, q. 5, §3.1.3 (ed. Ebbesen, 2016, p. 36), Brito adopts Avicenna’s system of five internal senses.

²⁹ Radulphus Brito, *Quaestiones super librum De anima*, II.44bis (*P*₁, f. 113rb; *V*₃, f. 22ra; *P*₂ omits the final part of the question): “diverse sunt virtutes iste sensitive, quarum una apprehendit fantasiata secundum se et alia componit diversa fantasiata sine compositione affirmationis et negationis, sed sicut est compositio totius ex partibus.”

³⁰ Radulphus Brito, *Quaestiones super librum De anima*, II.44bis (*P*₁, f. 113ra; *V*₃, f. 21vb): “Item, notandum est quod estimativa in brutis in hominibus dicitur ‘cogitativa’ que etiam dicitur ‘syllogistica part<icular>ium’ vel ‘virtus collativa plurium part<icular>ium intentionum’, quia ista estimativa in homine est perfectior quam sit estimativa in brutis propter connexionem eius et communicationem cum intellectu.”

and which enables us to draw conclusions about particular objects.³¹ Certainly, Brito considers sensible knowledge in brute animals to be of simple nature, that is, to be associated with or only serving simple knowledge (*apprehensio simplex*).

4. Common and Proper Accidents

4.1. The Various Types of Accidents and Their Common Essential Feature

Brito devotes the final three questions of his commentary on Porphyry's *Isagoge* to the accident.³² The last of them offers a philosophical discussion of the essential feature of accidents, dismissing theologians' opinions which involve the miracle of transubstantiation.³³ Philosophically speaking, what is essential to accidents is that they inhere in a subject, which means that they cannot actually exist without a subject, at least not in the natural course of things.³⁴ Furthermore, in questions 28B and A, which examine the distinction between accidents and distinctive properties as predicables, Brito proposes the same distinction between *accidentia communia* and

³¹ On the ability of the *cogitativa* to infer the unknown from the known, see Radulphus Brito, *Quaestiones super librum De memoria et reminiscencia*, q. 5, §3.3 (ed. Ebbesen, 2016, p. 37).

³² Radulphus Brito, *Quaestiones super Porphyrium*, qq. 31–33, in both A and B versions. I will quote, for version B, from the mss. *N* (ff. 76va–77rb) and *Le* (Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek, 1427, f. 16ra–b; on its recent discovery, Ebbesen, Marmo, 2024, pp. 45–46); for version A, I will quote from a collation of three mss. (*M* = Milano, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, C.161.Inf., ff. 146rb–va; *O* = Osimo, Biblioteca dell'Istituto Campana, 18.L.38 (39), f. 10va–b; *V*₄ = Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. lat. 3044, ff. 39v–41v).

³³ On the discussions among theologians on the possibility of knowing substance through its accidents, see Robert, 2006.

³⁴ Radulphus Brito, *Quaestiones super Porphyrium*, q. 33A (*M*, f. 146rb; *O*, f. 11va; *V*₄, f. 41r): “secundum Philosophum, ista (scil. que dicta sunt: i.e., the opinion of the theologians) non sunt vera: bene verum est quod secundum fidem nostram accidens potest esse sine subiecto, sicut in corpore Christi; sed hoc non est per naturam, immo hoc est miraculose et supra naturam.” See also ed. Ebbesen, 1986, p. 85. See Radulphus Brito, *Quaestiones super Porphyrium*, q. 33B (*Le*, f. 16ra; *N*, f. 77ra): “Obmissis omnibus opinionibus, et theologorum et aliorum, dico quod inherere est de essentia accidentis non solum aptitudinaliter, sed etiam actualiter.”

propria that he uses in his question 8 on Book I of *De anima*, adding some interesting examples. The term “accident,” he says, can be understood in two ways. Either it is regarded as being opposed to the substance, and then it includes the distinctive property (*proprium*); or it is considered to be a feature that does not determine its subject or its cause in the subject, and thus it only includes the *accidentia communia* as defined by Porphyry. Only in the latter sense is an *accidens* a predicable opposed to the *proprium*.³⁵ In his question 28B, Brito goes on to explain in what sense an accident does not determine its own subject or its cause in the subject; namely, a common accident might be caused either by something external to its subject (such as the dark color of the human skin caused by the sun), or by something internal but anyway accidental to its subject (for instance, an apple tasting bitter because of indigestion), or by the nature of the subject’s complexion (such as the blackness of a crow).³⁶ In his question 28A, Brito suggests an easier way to distinguish between common accidents and distinctive properties (*accidentia propria*). As he explains, a common accident, even if inseparable (like the blackness of a crow), cannot pick out one type of subject because it can exist in several different ones, whereas a distinctive property picks out precisely the individuals of the species of which it is distinctive.

³⁵ Radulphus Brito, *Quaestiones super Porphyrium*, q. 28A (*M*, f. 145vb; *O*, f. 10ra; *V*, f. 37r): “notandum quod ‘accidens’ potest dupliciter sumi: uno modo potest sumi ‘accidens’ pro omni eo quod est distinctum contra substantiam, et sic non est unum de quinque predicabilibus et isto modo proprium continetur sub accidente, quia isto modo est inferius ad ipsum accidens; alio modo potest sumi pro omni eo quod sibi tale subiectum non determinat, et sic accidens est accidens commune quod distinguitur contra proprium.” See Radulphus Brito, *Quaestiones super Porphyrium*, q. 28B (*N*, f. 75va): “accidens dupliciter potest considerari: vel ut distinguitur contra substantiam, ita quod accipitur pro omni eo quod non est substantia, et sic non est predicabile, et ut sic proprium et accidens non distinguuntur; vel pro eo quod non determinat sibi subiectum, nec causam in subiecto, cuiusmodi sunt accidentia communia, et sic accidens est predicabile distinctum a proprio et e converso.”

³⁶ Radulphus Brito, *Quaestiones super Porphyrium*, q. 28B (*N*, f. 75va): “Accidens autem commune vel causatur ab aliquo extrinseco, ut nigredo in homine causatur a sole; vel aliquando aliquod accidens causatur ab aliquo intrinseco accidentali, ut dulcedo in pomo ab aliqua digestionem et amaritudo ab aliqua indigestione; vel aliquando accidens causatur ex natura complexionis, ut nigredo in corvo causatur ex natura complexionis corvi.” The last case is the classic example of an inseparable accident, one that can be separated from its subject only by our thought; see Porphyry, *Isagoge*, ed. Busse, 1887, pp. 12: 26–13: 3.

The crow's blackness is an interesting case because it might seem to resemble the distinctive property as the color of the crow's plumage depends on its complexion, which is an intrinsic cause and, as such, it overlaps with the *proprium*. Yet Brito suggests that the complexion of an animal is a mixture of primary qualities that is an accident of its matter, and not of its form. By contrast, distinctive properties derive from the essence of the subject itself, that is, from its substantial form.³⁷ As a consequence, the distinctive property is predicable only of one species and is convertible with it, while a common accident can be predicated of more than one species and therefore is not convertible with them. I will revisit this point in the conclusion.

4.2. The Various Types of Proprium

As Brito makes clear in questions 30B and A,³⁸ the distinctive property of a thing is a feature (*passio*) caused by the essential principles of that thing, and as such it differs both from common accidents that depend on an internal cause and from properties in a broader sense, which depend on external causes. As explained above, the crow's blackness and the swan's whiteness derive from the principles of their subjects (their complexions), but since these colors can exist in other subject, they are just common accidents.³⁹ At the same time, the eclipse of the moon is a property (*proprium*) of the moon, but it is just an accidental feature to which the moon is predisposed by its circular motion around the earth. It cannot exist without the interposition of the earth between the moon and the sun.

³⁷ Radulphus Brito, *Quaestiones super Porphyrium*, q. 28A (M, f. 145vb; O, f. 10ra–b; V₄, f. 37v): “proprium causatur ex principiis essentialibus subiecti [propriis principiis speciei, O], quia proprie passionem consequuntur formas substantiales subiectorum, sed accidens commune non causatur ex principiis pertinentibus ad formam, sicut nigredo in corvo non causatur ex aliquo pertinente ad formam corvi, ymmo causatur ex aliquo quod consequitur corvum ratione materie, quia in corvo est talis commixtio qualitatum primarum ad quam consequitur color; modo complexio est accidens materie et non forme.”

³⁸ Radulphus Brito, *Quaestiones super Porphyrium*, q. 30B (N, f. 76ra): *Utrum proprium causetur ex propriis principiis speciei cuius est proprium*; q. 30A (M, f. 145vb; O, f. 10rb; V₄, f. 38v): *Utrum proprium causetur ex principiis propriis subiecti*.

³⁹ Radulphus Brito, *Quaestiones super Porphyrium*, q. 30A (M, f. 145vb; O, f. 10va; V₄, f. 38v): “accidentia communia causantur ex principiis subiecti, sicut albedo in cigno causatur ex principiis cigni, quia ex complexione sua; eodem modo nigredo in corvo.”

Since the interposition is an extrinsic cause, the eclipse is a property in the broad sense, but not, strictly speaking, a distinctive property of the moon.⁴⁰ Distinctive properties of the human species, in the narrow sense, include understanding (*intelligere*) and being able to learn (*esse perceptibile disciplinae*) since these are operations directly stemming from the human essence. The ability to laugh (*esse risibile*), a classical example of human *proprium*, is instead a characteristic that follows from human beings' typical operations (such as understanding and being able to learn), but it relies on external factors for being actualized and perfected, since one laughs at something delightful that is understood and moves the appetitive part of the human soul. Laughter may be typically human, but the ability to understand and to learn are its essential prerequisites.⁴¹

The examples of distinctive properties provided by Brito partially correspond to those he usually mentions to illustrate the notion of *apparens*: the ability to reason (*intelligere* or *ratiocinari*), perceive (*sentire*), and move autonomously (*moveri*). These operations correspond to the distinctive properties of each species, intermediate species and genus of the category

⁴⁰ Radulphus Brito, *Quaestiones super Porphyrium*, q. 30A (*M*, f. 146ra; *O*, f. 10va; *V*, f. 38v): “secundum declaratur, scilicet quod in passionibus propriis que sunt ab extrinseco subiectum non sit causa efficiens istarum, sed ad istas tamen cooperatur, quia eclipsari est propria passio lune; modo eclipsari non causatur effective et sufficienter ab ipsa luna, ymmo causatur ex interpositione terre inter solem et lunam: quando enim terra est interposita inter solem et lunam, ita quod sol sit in capite vel cauda draconis et luna est ex opposita parte, tunc causatur eclipsis lune. Et sic apparet quod ista passio que est ipsius lune non causatur ex propriis principiis ipsius lune, ymmo ab extrinseco, quia ab interpositione terre inter solem et lunam; tamen cooperatur ad hoc subiectum, quia ad eclipsim lune cooperatur motus lune, quia si luna semper quiesceret extra caput vel caudam draconis, tunc non esset eclipsis lune.” See Radulphus Brito, *Quaestiones super Porphyrium*, q. 30B (*N*, f. 76ra); and q. 28B (*N*, f. 75va).

⁴¹ Radulphus Brito, *Quaestiones super Porphyrium*, q. 30B (*N*, f. 76rb): “notandum est quod species quandoque producit suum proprium in esse completo, sicut ignis complete ducit in esse suam propriam passionem que est caliditas nullo alio extrinseco adveniente; aliquando species est causa secundum habilitatem solum, ita quod suum proprium ex aliquo extrinseco perficitur et completur, sicut aer et aqua et alia diaphana sunt cause diaphanitatis secundum habilitatem; sed diaphanitas perficitur et completur ab aliquo extrinseco ut a corpore luminoso, puta a sole. Et eodem modo homo est causa risibilitatis secundum habilitatem et aptitudinem, ita quod talis passio reducitur ad actum et completur <per> aliquod extrinsecum, sicut per aliquod delectabile excitans et movens appetitum, quia homo non ridet nisi secundum appetitum ipsum moventem ad ridendum.”

of substance and enable us to understand general names such as *animal* or *homo*.⁴² Using a terminology reminiscent of the Neoplatonist lexicon, Brito says that these properties derive from the essence of each category “through simple emanation” (*per simplicem emanationem*), rather than by physical causation, which occurs through movement and alteration.⁴³

5. Conclusion

Radulphus Brito changed his views, from the *Questions on Porphyry* to the *Questions on the De anima*, on whether substances (or essences) can be known through their accidents, ascribing anyhow a central role to the internal senses and to proper accidents as opposed to common ones. This distinction helps to highlight the epistemological and semiotic implications of this discussion. The examples (in particular, the lunar eclipse) combined with the term *passio* and the reference to the cause-effect relationship between the mutually convertible essence of a thing and its distinctive properties bring to mind discussions on the different types of demonstration (*propter quid* and *quia*) in commentaries on the *Posterior Analytics*. As shown in a recent study,⁴⁴ the *demonstratio quia* is connected in Neoplatonic commentaries with the inference that uses signs as premises, while this connection is often obscured or removed in Latin commentators. Rather than talking of “signs,” the latter prefer talking of “effects” from which one can demonstratively (albeit in a weaker sense) infer the corresponding causes (but they certainly know that an effect can be regarded as a sign of its cause).

This is precisely the case with the lunar eclipse, which, as noted in Section 4.2, is a property derived not only from the moon’s motion around the earth (which is essential to it in a Ptolemaic cosmos), but also from extrinsic causes (such as the interposition). It is no coincidence that

⁴² It was a commonplace among Parisian masters of arts at the end of the 13th century to hold that general names (even the names of categories) derived from proper modes of being, also called *apparentia*. On the *apparens*, see Roos, 1974; Donati, 2013.

⁴³ Radulphus Brito, *Quaestiones super Porphyrium*, q. 30A (*M*, f. 146ra; *O*, f. 10va; *V*, f. 39r); q. 30B (*N*, f. 76rb).

⁴⁴ See Marmo & Bellucci, 2023.

the Pseudo-Kilwardby takes the lunar eclipse as an example of a natural sign convertible with its own meaning, the foundation of a syllogism based on the sign.⁴⁵

If this holds for the lunar eclipse, it is all the more applicable to the *proprium* in its broad sense (for one infers *homo* from *risibile*), to the modes of being typical of a subordinate genus (one infers *animal* from *sentire et moveri*) or of a species (one infers *homo* again from *rationari*), to the *proprium* in the strict sense (one again infers *homo* from *esse perceptibile disciplinae*), and finally to the *accidentia propria* that make it possible to know the essence or the substance.

Although Brito does not link our capacity to know the substance through accidents to the *demonstratio quia* in any way, all the premises are already in place: one need only admit that even brute animals make inferences from sensible species, and that the knowledge of the substance through accidents is discursive, that is, associated with the second and third operations of the soul, rather than with *simplex apprehensio*.

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⁴⁵ Marmo & Bellucci, 2023, pp. 361–363. The Pseudo-Kilwardby is a grammarian who wrote an extensive commentary on the first 16 books of Priscian's *Institutiones grammaticae* (the so-called *Priscianus maior*), probably during the 1250s.

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