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Richard Brinkley on the Limits of the Sensitive Power: A First Look at His Epistemology*

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of and limits to the sensitive power in the epistemology of Richard Brinkley, drawing on the recent discovery of his complete *Lectura super Sententias*. Preserved in Florence (BNCF, Conv. Soppr. G.III.367, ff. 47rA–137rA), the commentary substantially expands Brinkley's available theological corpus and makes it possible to examine the intersection of theories of sense perception, epistemology, and theology in his work. Focusing on *quaestio* 1 of the Prologue, the article shows that Brinkley considers sense cognition to be unreliable as, in his view, even the proper sensibles and optimal conditions do not preclude error. Brinkley grounds assent to Christian doctrine in intellectual evidence, which is understood as propositional *apparentia*, and distinguishes natural reason, which is limited to a partial knowledge of appearances, from human reason as illuminated by the divine light. Thus, Brinkley's model indicates a theologically motivated limitation of natural reason and a possible use of skeptical argumentation in service of a theory of illumination.

1. Introduction

In this article, I discuss the role and limits of the sensitive power as described in Richard Brinkley's *Lectura super Sententias*, his question commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*. An English Franciscan of the mid-fourteenth century, Brinkley was long known essentially for his *Summa logicae*. The recent discovery of a substantial part of his theological work, which was previously preserved only in an abridgement by the Parisian master Étienne Gaudet, has enabled a first look at his epistemology, particularly his discussion of sense perception and its limits. In his *Lectura*, Brinkley devotes a lengthy passage to this issue, which Gaudet considered a digression and which remains difficult to situate.

To better understand Brinkley's account and the role that the investigation of sensation and perceptual errors plays in his argumentation, I will first sketch some context for understanding fourteenth-century debates that touch on issues relating to skepticism. Then, I will examine selected relevant passages of Brinkley's text and conclude by assessing the role of sensory errors in his epistemology and considering the kind of knowledge he seems to advocate.

2. The Rediscovery of Brinkley's *Sentences* Commentary

Brinkley's text came to light during the study of the manuscript collection in the Santa Croce medieval library, which was originally housed in the Franciscan convent in Florence and functioned as a *studium generale*.¹ Brinkley's text is preserved in a manuscript that was part of the collection and is now held at the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze,² under the shelf mark Conv. Soppr. G.III.367.³ The manuscript is a large parchment codex containing a set of texts by various authors: theological works by Walter Burley (ff. 1rA–30vA), an anonymous fragment of a commentary on the *Sentences* (ff. 35rA–46vB), and an anonymous commentary on the *Sentences* which close investigation suggests was written by Brinkley (ff. 47rA–137rA).⁴

Although the available biographical information is incomplete and not always reliable, we know that Brinkley was a Franciscan friar who taught at the University of Oxford in the mid-fourteenth century.⁵ The earliest sources record him as the author of an imposing work *Super quatuor Sententiarum libros*.⁶ However, modern and contemporary scholars know him above all

¹ I carried out this research under the PRIN project *Books and Readers in Florence from the 13th to the 15th Century: The Library of Santa Croce*, coordinated for the Bologna unit by Costantino Marmo. The overall aim of the project was to catalogue a considerable quantity of previously unregistered manuscripts and to investigate their use in the Franciscan *studium* of Santa Croce in Dante's time, while our specific research focused on logical and theological texts. For selected outcomes of the project, see Pegoretti, 2022, 2024. Two partial catalogues of the manuscripts from the library's ancient collection have already been published; see Bertelli & Gatti, 2025; Albanese et al., 2021. The catalogue of the *Plutei destri*, compiled and edited by Roberta Iannetti, is forthcoming, and work on the catalogue of the manuscripts held at the National Library of Florence (Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze) is nearing completion.

² Bertelli, 2025.

³ Lanza & Speranzi, 2021.

⁴ The first section of this article contains an abridged outline of the essential background, which I develop in full in an article submitted to the *Bulletin de philosophie médiévale*; see Appolloni, forthcoming.

⁵ Cesalli, 2020; Gál & Wood, 1980, pp. 73–77. See also Van der Heijden & Roest, 2025.

⁶ Gál & Wood, 1980, p. 73.

for an anti-nominalist *Summa logicae*, of which two complete attributed manuscripts are extant and a critical edition is in preparation.⁷

In philosophical terms, Brinkley's *Summa logicae* conveys an immanent or moderate realist stance on universals, which he considers to be "metaphysical parts of individuals."⁸ Moreover, the text endorses a realist account of propositional meaning; specifically, Brinkley criticizes the *modus rei* theory, according to which an intermediate entity called a "mode" is the significate of a proposition.⁹ Instead, his account draws on the tradition of the discussion on *complexe significabile*, which was developed among others by Adam Wodeham and, in particular, by Gregory of Rimini. In this sense, he argues that the propositional significate is a whole that corresponds to a complex order of things in the world—to a state of affairs.¹⁰ As is evident from both his logical and theological works, he is often critical of John Duns Scotus and William Ockham although he shares certain views with the latter, such as the subordination of spoken and written language to mental language.¹¹

Until recently, only one excerpt and a shortened version (*abbreviatio*) of Brinkley's theological work were known to have survived. The *abbreviatio* is an abridgement of another manuscript, which was made by Étienne Gaudet, a Parisian master of the 1380s.¹² The authorship of the excerpt and the *abbreviatio* was discovered and the texts were published by Zenon Kałuza in 1989.¹³ Thanks to Kałuza's efforts, we possess Gaudet's abridgement of Brinkley's commentary on the *Sentences*, including a fragment of a question (1), and abbreviations of two other series of theological questions (2 and 3).

⁷ Brinkley's *Summa logicae* is preserved in full in two manuscripts: Prague, Státní knihovna ČSR, Ms 396 8 (III.A.11), ff. 31rA–140rA, and Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek, Nr. 1360, ff. 1rA–105vB. It is partially preserved in one manuscript (London, British Library, Harley 3243, ff. 47rA–56rB). Laurent Cesalli is preparing a complete critical edition of the text. For partial critical editions, see Cesalli, 2004a, 2004b, 2008, 2013; Spade & Wilson, 1995; Fitzgerald, 1987; Gál & Wood, 1980; Spade, 1969.

⁸ Cesalli, 2013, p. 293.

⁹ Richard Brinkley, *Summa Nova de Logica, V* (ed. Fitzgerald, 1987, pp. 46–65).

¹⁰ Cesalli, 2020, p. 1669; 2007, pp. 279–309, esp. 283.

¹¹ Cesalli, 2020, p. 1666; Kałuza, 1989, p. 213.

¹² On Gaudet, see Baneu, 2025.

¹³ Kałuza, 1989. The Polish medievalist Zenon Kałuza published many French works as Zénon Kaluza, and appears as such in the references.

1. *Lectura / Quaestiones super Sententias* (LS / QS), qq. 1–11¹⁴ [Gaudet's *abbreviatio* + fragment of q. 3 in Florence, BNCF, Conv. Soppr. B.VI.910, ff. 46rB–48vB]
2. *Quaestiones breves* (QB), qq. 12–21 [Gaudet's *abbreviatio*]
3. *Quaestiones magnae* (QM), qq. I–III [Gaudet's *abbreviatio*]

Kaluža, who was the first to attribute these works to Brinkley, edited the excerpt and the abridged version that we have at our disposal today. The abridged version is preserved in six folios of a manuscript in Paris, BNF, lat. 16535, ff. 123r–129r. By comparison, Brinkley's newly discovered commentary is far more substantial, given that the text preserved in manuscript Conv. Soppr. G.III.367 is in fact the complete *Commentarium* or *Lectura super Sententias* and takes up one hundred folios. It is Brinkley's first theological text to be available to us in extenso, and it will likely remain the largest even if the *Quaestiones breves* and the *Quaestiones magnae* are discovered in the future.¹⁵

The eleven questions of the commentary were already listed by Kaluža.¹⁶ They refer to the Prologue and Book I of Peter Lombard's *Sentences*.

¹⁴ The questions are numbered as in Kaluža, 1989. Brinkley's *Lectura super Sententias* (here LS/QS) will be cited as the *Lectura*.

¹⁵ Although we do not have the texts of the *Quaestiones breves* or the *Quaestiones magnae*, we know their proportions from Gaudet's abridged version: they occupied, respectively, one quire and three quires, as opposed to the eight quires of the LS/QS. Contrary to Kaluža's hypothesis, I do not regard the *Quaestiones breves* as part of the commentary on the *Sentences*, both because their themes are heterogeneous, as already noted by Kaluža himself (Kaluža, 1989, p. 177), and because the *Sentences* commentary preserved in Conv. Soppr. G.III.367, which transmits the final question (q. 11) in full, does not refer to them.

¹⁶ The list below presents the eleven questions already identified by Kaluža on the basis of Gaudet's abridged version; they are given here in the form found in the Florentine manuscript, complete with the corresponding folio references. The substantial identity between the text of Conv. Soppr. G.III.367 and the text attributed to Brinkley by Kaluža is further corroborated by a comparison of Conv. Soppr. G.III.367, ff. 71rB–73vA (q. 3) and the fragment of the same question as preserved in Conv. Soppr. B.VI.910, ff. 46rB–48vB, which was published by Kaluža (Kaluža, 1989, pp. 214–222).

q. 1: Utrum secta Christi principalius dependet a fide vel ratione (ff. 47rA–61rA);

q. 2: Utrum regule secte Christi et eius propria principia per se sufficientia ad aliquam conclusionem theologicam scientificè demonstrandam (ff. 61rA–71rB);

q. 3: Utrum potentia volitiva eodem actu quo libere utitur creatura libere fruatur Trinitate benedicta (ff. 71rB–78vB);

Each question is extensive and conceptually dense. Although the text is essentially theological, it deeply engages with epistemological and metaphysical issues, making extensive use of logical tools.¹⁷ As shall be seen, the first question, which concerns the relation between faith and reason, addresses epistemological matters, while the second dwells on the ontological status of the *complexe significabile*, or the propositional significate. Before examining some passages of question 1, let me make two important observations permitted by the availability of the complete text. First, there is an explicit reference to *De obligationibus*, the seventh part of the *Summa logicae*, which supports dating Brinkley's *Sentences* to between 1355 and 1360.¹⁸ Second, Kałuža, and not Gaudet himself, was the first to attribute the theological work to Brinkley. This tentative attribution was primarily based on indirect citations by later authors. Yet, as Kałuža himself acknowledged, the brevity of Gaudet's abridged version tended to preclude any close comparison, an obstacle that can now be overcome. Indeed, comparisons of the text available today with Brinkley quotations in by Peter of Candia, Henry Totting de Oyta, John Hiltalingen, and Denys de Montina provide decisive evidence for Kałuža's attribution hypothesis.¹⁹

q. 4: *Utrum aliquem Deum esse sit evidenter demonstrabile* (ff. 78vB–87vB);

q. 5: *Utrum aliquem Deum esse ex rationibus philosophie evidenter sit demonstrabile* (ff. 87vB–92rB);

q. 6: *Utrum sola passio demonstrabilis sit de suo subiecto* (ff. 92rB–97vA);

q. 7: *Utrum omnis passio sit demonstrabilis de subiecto suo* (ff. 97vA–101rA);

q. 8: [U]numquid aliqua demonstratio <una sit demonstratio> propter quid (add. mg. dex.) (ff. 101rA–107vA);

q. 9: *Utrum Deus Pater sic principiat ad intra quod tantum hec dualitas personarum sit producta* (ff. 107vA–113rA);

q. 10: *Utrum ad creatum et increatum sit aliquid communicabile univocum* (ff. 113rA–120vB);

q. 11: *Utrum preter prioritatem originis sit alia prioritas in divinis* (ff. 120vB–137rA).

¹⁷ For a more detailed account of the content of the questions, see Kałuža, 1989.

¹⁸ This confirms Kałuža's hypothesis (see Kałuža, 1989, p. 169) and diverges from the account proposed by Gedeon Gál and Rega Wood (1980, pp. 77–78).

¹⁹ For an extended discussion of the following points, see Appolloni, forthcoming.

3. Sense Perception and Error in the Fourteenth Century: Some Context for Brinkley's Discussion

The problem of error in perception is a recurring theme in the history of medieval epistemology.²⁰ As Christoph Grellard has shown, the epistemological question of the fallibility and error of the senses primarily derives from the tradition of medieval skepticism as mediated by Augustine.²¹ According to Grellard, the skeptical question that challenges the reliability of knowledge derived from uncertain sources—namely, sensory cognition, uncertainty of which is caused by errors of the senses—sometimes serves as a methodological step toward a theory of illumination.²² While the responses offered throughout the Middle Ages are relevant, Brinkley's context is best understood in juxtaposition with some of the most notable positions on sensory error propounded in the fourteenth century.

One starting point for fourteenth-century discussions on this issue is provided by Ockham's view of divine absolute power in his thought experiment concerning God's deceit. Ockham states that under normal conditions, when God does not intervene, intuitive cognition, which is produced by an external object, generates evident knowledge of the existence of that object. However, theoretically speaking, God might decide to destroy the object of perception and cause in us a cognition of a non-existing object, spawning an erroneous judgment in us.²³

According to the scholarly consensus, Ockham himself did not push his view to a skeptical conclusion, a step that was instead taken by his confrere Wodeham and his critic Chatton in Oxford in the 1320s.²⁴

²⁰ Grellard, 2004, 2005a, 2018, 2020; Lagerlund, 2010, Silva, 2025; Silva & Toivanen, 2020; Tachau, 1988.

²¹ Grellard, 2018, p. 60.

²² Grellard, 2018, pp. 60–65.

²³ Ockham, *Ordinatio*, q. 1 (ed. Gál & Brown, 1967, p. 39:11–16): “Patet etiam quod res non existens potest cognosci intuitive, quantumcumque primum obiectum illius actus non existat, – contra opinionem aliquorum, – quia visio coloris sensitiva potest conservari a Deo ipso colore non existente.” Ockham, *Quodlibet VI*, q. 5 (ed. Wey, 1980, p. 498:72): “Tamen Deus potest causare actum creditivum per quem credo rem esse praesentem quae est absens.” The literature on this issue is extensive; see also Amerini, 2019; Karger, 1999, 2004.

²⁴ Grellard, 2016, 2018; Karger, 1999, 2004. Karger claims that, in Ockham's view, God can give us an erroneous judgement, but one that is not supported by intuitive

Specifically, Wodeham holds that God could maintain an act of perception while destroying the object.²⁵ While he recognizes the grave dangers that this assumption bears for certainty and knowledge (*et ita periret certitudo omnis philosophica*), he accepts the consequences and acknowledges divine deception as a possibility inherent in intuitive cognition, though not in the regular course of things. Therefore, with no supernatural interference to the contrary, intuitive cognition produces an evident judgment.²⁶ This notwithstanding, errors of perception and in judgment are still possible in the natural sphere, but they tend to occur with the common sensibles, that is, those shared by several senses such as figure; this explains why we perceive a burning stick moved in a circular motion as a fiery circle.²⁷ By contrast, drawing on Aristotle's *De anima*,²⁸ the proper sensibles—those perceived by one sense

evidence, or in other words, he can cause in us a cognition that is abstractive rather than intuitive (Karger, 1999, p. 213). This is why she argues that “the possibility of divine deception Ockham concedes is, therefore, devoid of skeptical import”—even if, ultimately, according to Karger, he does not succeed (Karger, 2004, pp. 231–236).

²⁵ Adam Wodeham, *Lectura secunda*, Prol., q. 4 (ed. Wood & Gál, 1990, p. 47:93–98). See also Karger, 2004, p. 228. By “act of perception” I follow Karger in meaning “intuitive cognitions of external things obtained through the senses.” Unlike Ockham, who distinguishes between an intellective soul and a sensitive one, Wodeham posits only an intellective soul, so that perceptions play a direct role in belief formation (without the need to be replicated in intellective intuitive cognition). On this, see Karger, 2004, pp. 225–228.

²⁶ Adam Wodeham, *Lectura secunda*, Prol., q. 2 (ed. Wood & Gál, 1990, pp. 44–49); Adam Wodeham, *Lectura secunda*, Prol. q. 6 (ed. Wood & Gál, 1990, p. 170:47–59). See also Karger, 2004, p. 229, footnote 12.

²⁷ Adam Wodeham, *Lectura secunda*, Prol., q. 4 (ed. Wood & Gál, 1990, p. 105): “Sed tenendo istam responsionem, dicerem consequenter quod quia oculus prosequitur attente extremitatem istam ignitam circulariter motam, intellectus statim ex visione eadem continuata ipsius ignis circulariter moti momentanee – vel alia et alia aequivalentibus – componit propositionem, ponendo visionem ignis pro subiecto, ita quod per illam apprehendatur ipse ignis in alio situ et alio continue, et esse circuli pro predicato. Qua propositione formata, apparet ignis ille esse circulus, quae propositio, propter hoc quod componitur ex cognitione intuitiva quae multum est evidens cognitio, est propositio multum evidens – licet falsa – in tantum ut ipsa sit, vel ex ea, inferri possit discursu quasi imperceptibili ibi existere circulum. Et propositio hoc significans est ipsa apparitio qua apparet ibi esse circulus.”

²⁸ See *infra*, §4.

only, such as color for sight—are generally not associated with perception errors and are never naturally perceived unless they indeed exist.²⁹

Chatton makes a similar argument. He admits the skeptical consequences of vision occurring or persisting in the absence of an object, but he insists that this is precluded in the natural sphere since our sensory certainty is grounded precisely in the certainty of the presence of the things perceived.³⁰ However, he qualifies his statement by accepting that vision can briefly continue in the absence of its object, in phenomena such as the fiery circle or after-images, that is, the shapes of bright bodies we continue to perceive after closing our eyes. Chatton explains that this brief persistence stems from the remaining of light or the species in the eye after the visible object is gone, rather than from the existence of the image as an intentional being, on the model of Peter Auriol's *esse apparens*.³¹

²⁹ Adam Wodeham, *Lectura secunda*, Prol., q. 4 (ed. Wood & Gál, 1990, p. 105): “Hic autem notandum est [quod] aliter est in huiusmodi iudiciis et apparitionibus de sensibilibus propriis, cuiusmodi sunt color, sapor, odor; et aliter de communibus cuiusmodi sunt figura, motus, quies, numerus, magnitudo. Prima enim numquam naturaliter apparent esse nisi existant. Quia hoc est comparare illa ad sensibilia communia, circa quae frequentissime erratur secundum Philosophum, pluries II De anima. Licet igitur naturaliter non possit apparere color ille igneus nisi existat, potest tamen naturaliter apparere figura qualis non figuratur.”

³⁰ Walter Chatton, *Lectura in Sententias*, Prol., q. 2, art. 2 (ed. Wey, 1989, p. 89): “Secundo, contra secundam conclusionem opinionis, probro quod visio rei non potest naturaliter causari re absente, nec etiam naturaliter diu conservari ipsa recedente. Probro primo, quia aliter periret omnis nostra certitudo, quia maxima certitudo nostra de sensibilibus convenit nobis per hoc quod experimur nostras sensationes per quas sensibilia nobis apparent praesentia; si igitur sensatio causatur naturaliter re absente, et etiam diu conservetur sine ea, igitur illa via non est certa.”

³¹ Walter Chatton, *Lectura in Sententias*, Prol., q. 2, art. 2 (ed. Wey, 1989, pp. 93–95): “Aliter dico quod species, licet non possit primo causare visionem sine re ipsa nec etiam diu conservare, tamen cum est intensa, sic quod ipsa species manet per aliquod tempus recedente visibili, tunc illa species sufficit ad conservandum visionem per tantum tempus, quod visio ignis in tali situ remanet in oculo quousque ignis guerit in alio situ, et forte usque ad completionem illius parvi circuli. [...] Ideo dico quod istud experimentum de visione intensi visibilis, et etiam illud aliud experimentum supra positum de circulo igneo, bene probant quod visio prius causata per praesentiam rei in esse reali, potest per aliquod tempus conservari recedente visibili, quia species vel lumen eius remanet; sic igitur similiter potest illa visio, quia quantum experimur, apparet nobis quod etiam lumen dependet a corpore lucido.” See also Wood, 1982, p. 227. For Auriol, see Friedman & Fornasieri, 2026.

For his part, Wodeham considers even this residual and limited phenomenon to cause a serious epistemological problem concerning the certainty of the existence of objects.³² Therefore, to keep human knowledge intact, he rejects any brief continuation of vision after the disappearance of the thing perceived, as well as any medium or species that might substitute that thing as the cause of vision.³³ In his view, such misperceptions are caused by imagination rather than by species.³⁴

The two authors above represent the Oxford Franciscan thought of the 1320s; yet the question of the fallibility and error of the senses, as well as its skeptical consequences, continued to be discussed widely both in Oxford and Paris. Among the authors of the time, Gregory of Rimini is chronologically closer to Brinkley³⁵ and is also a key contributor to the debate on the *complexe significabile*.³⁶ As such, his views are a valid

³² Adam Wodeham, *Lectura secunda*, Prol., q. 3 (ed. Wood & Gál, 1990, p. 71): “Sed absque dubio ista via tollit omnem certitudinem de existentia cuiuscumque visibilis, licet sit cauta evasio.” See also Wood, 1982, pp. 227–231.

³³ Adam Wodeham, *Lectura secunda*, Prol., q. 3 (ed. Wood & Gál, 1990, p. 73): “Ad illud videtur posse responderi ex positione sua quod ideo ‘visio prius causata potest per aliquod tempus manere re visa recedente, eo quod species intensa per quam visio immediate causatur remanet per aliquod tempus recedente visibili.’ Contra istud: si visio immediate causatur a specie, aut igitur sic immediate quod obiectum non causet nec concauset immediate actum in suo genere et ordine, sed tantum causat speciem et conservat a qua immediate causatur visio; vel non sic, sed obiectum etiam est partialis causa immediata visionis. Si secundum, tunc stat argumentum plene, sicut patet de se. Si primum, tunc non esset verum quod dicit quod ‘nunquam visio aliqua nata est naturaliter causari sine praesentia rei visae.’ Quia species potest manere, per te et secundum veritatem, saltem per aliquod tempus sine praesentia causae; et Deus posset impedire speciem illam ab effectu suo in primo instanti, vel forte aliunde posset impediri tunc, et amoto impedimento causari visio. Igitur.” See also Wood, 1982, pp. 227–231.

³⁴ Adam Wodeham, *Lectura secunda*, Prol., q. 3 (ed. Wood & Gál, 1990, p. 78). See also Wood, 1982, p. 228.

³⁵ John of Ripa (fl. 1357–1368, Paris) is another important author whose notions might be instructively examined in this context by way of comparison. However, I have not been able to find an analogous discussion of sensory error in Ripa, although he does address the question of intuitive cognition and briefly develops the notion of the error of *apparentia*. John of Ripa, *Lectura super primum Sententiarum*, Prol., q. 6, art. 1, pp. 364–365; q. 7, art. 1, pp. 441–442. See Nannini, forthcoming.

³⁶ The question of the *complexe significabile* is not only ontological but also epistemological, as it addresses the question of what the object of knowledge and belief is. See also Tachau, 1987, p. 161.

point of comparison. In question 1 of the Prologue to his commentary on the *Sentences*, which was composed in the mid-1340s in Paris,³⁷ Gregory of Rimini addresses an epistemological question reminiscent of the opening of Brinkley's *Lectura*. Having asked whether knowledge can be acquired through theological discourse,³⁸ he answers in the negative since faith is assent without evidence,³⁹ and theological discourse does not produce assent in the mind,⁴⁰ at least not assent of the same kind of knowledge.⁴¹ Gregory's reasoning is that theological discourse cannot yield knowledge because knowledge proceeds from evident propositions or from those derived from them, whereas theological discourse proceeds from believed premises. It is not a demonstration, for if it were, even an unbeliever with proper natural dispositions would have to assent to theological conclusions.⁴² Unlike Brinkley, Gregory of Rimini does not pursue the distinctly epistemological problems in this question, leaving them instead for consideration further on. In general, he holds that the mind only forms knowledge in the form of universals after the apprehension of singular things. For this reason, he attributes sense perception a key role in intellectual knowledge⁴³ and generally places a degree of trust in this cognitive process. Admittedly, he does not rule out errors in judgment by the senses, but believes that the intellect can correct them through its apprehension of the singular, as is the case with the judgment

³⁷ Schabel & Girard, 2022.

³⁸ Gregory of Rimini, *In 1 Sent.*, Prol., q. 1 (ed. Trapp, 1981, p. 1): "Utrum de obiecto theologico per theologicum discursum notitia proprie scientifica acquirantur." Brinkley's question is similar in that it discusses the role of reason in assenting to Christian truths; see *infra* §3.

³⁹ Gregory of Rimini, *In 1 Sent.*, Prol., q. 1 (ed. Trapp, 1981, p. 55): "Quarta conclusio faciliter probatur, quia omnis assensus absque evidentia et formidine est fides."

⁴⁰ Gregory of Rimini, *In 1 Sent.*, Prol., q. 1 (ed. Trapp, 1981, p. 54): "Quoad aliam partem patet conclusio, quia constat quod discursus theologicus non causat adhaesionem in animo alicuius pagani vel alterius non recipientis sacram scripturam ad fidem, esto quod ita ille noverit conclusionem sequi ex praemissis, sicut fidelis theologus."

⁴¹ Gregory of Rimini, *In 1 Sent.*, Prol., q. 2 (ed. Trapp, 1981, p. 67): "Consequentia probatur, quoniam assensus scientialis est proprius actus scientiae, et assensus opinativus opinionis, et assensus creditivus seu credere est actus fidei... potest quis habere assensum evidentem per medium demonstrativum, et alius assensum certum sed inevidentem per medium theologicum, et alius assensum formidolosum per medium probabile."

⁴² Gregory of Rimini, *In 1 Sent.*, Prol., q. 1 (ed. Trapp, 1981, p. 53: 21–23).

⁴³ Schabel & Girard, 2022, §4; Tachau, 1982, pp. 357–366.

on the sun being the size of one foot: this is an erroneous judgement which cannot be corrected by the senses, because the distance of the sun prevents a reliable sensory apprehension, but can be corrected by reasoning.⁴⁴ The possibility of error is also limited by the directness of our perception, which does not make use of species, as in the case of color for sight.⁴⁵ By contrast, our memory operates on species, which are mental representations of remembered perceptions.⁴⁶ Gregory of Rimini contests Auriol's reading, according to which we have no direct access to things but only to their species.⁴⁷ Instead, first he argues that if it were the case, an external thing would not be an efficient cause of sensation, as it in fact is,⁴⁸ and then marshals various arguments to show that sensation,

⁴⁴ Gregory of Rimini, *In 1 Sent.*, dist. 3, q. 1 (ed. Trapp, 1981, pp. 312–313): “Secundo sic: Per intellectum cognoscimus sensum errare in iudicando de aliquo sensibili singulari et demonstrato, ergo per intellectum cognoscimus singulare sensibile demonstratum. Consequentia patet. Nisi enim per intellectum cognosceremus hoc sensibile demonstratum et verum iudicium haberemus de ipso, non cognosceremus per intellectum quod sensus false iudicaret de illo. Antecedens probro; nam constat quod cognoscimus iudicium sensus de aliquo singulari sensibili, verbi gratia de hoc sole qui nunc est super hemisphaerium nostrum et in tali puncto coeli, quo iudicat ipsum esse pedalis quantitatis, esse falsum. Et constat quod illud iudicium esse falsum per nullam virtutem sensitivam possumus cognoscere, cum non nisi quodam discursu et argumentatione ex eius distantia a visu nostro hoc comprehendamus; quod proprium est rationis. Ergo per rationem hoc cognoscimus.”

⁴⁵ Gregory of Rimini, *In 1 Sent.*, dist. 3, q. 1 (ed. Trapp, 1981, p. 306): “Secunda conclusio, videlicet quod de sensibilibus habemus sensualem notitiam simplicem qua res sensibilis immediate secundum se sentitur et aliquam qua mediante aliquo, patet quantum ad primam partem in sensibus exterioribus, per quos immediate sensibilia ipsa sentimus, verbi gratia colorem in pariete, nec aliquid experimur nos intueri per visum, quo viso tamquam medio intueamur colorem in pariete. Si enim aliquid aliud per visum intueremur medium inter ipsum et colorem, ita experiremur et cognosceremus nos illud videre, sicut experimur et cognoscimus nos videre colorem; quod non contingit.”

⁴⁶ Gregory of Rimini, *In 1 Sent.*, dist. 3, q. 1 (ed. Trapp, 1981, p. 306): “Consequentia probatur, quia talis cogitatio vel recordatio non terminatur immediate obiective ad res ipsas sensibiles extra, sed ad earum species in memoria existentes.”

⁴⁷ Gregory of Rimini, *In 1 Sent.*, dist. 3, q. 1 (ed. Trapp, 1981, pp. 320–321).

⁴⁸ Gregory of Rimini, *In 1 Sent.*, dist. 3, q. 1 (ed. Trapp, 1981, p. 322): “Primam conclusionem probro primo sic: Si esset possibile fieri sensualem notitiam exteriorem etc, sequitur quod obiectum sensibile, quando actu est praesens et actu sentitur, nullo modo esset per se causa efficiens totalis vel partialis ipsius sensationis, qua sentitur, aut alicuius ad sensationem illam necessario requisiti. Consequens est falsum secundum omnem

unlike imagination, always occurs in the presence of sensible things.⁴⁹ Consequently, he rejects the notion that vision might remain once the sensible object is destroyed, noting that if it were true, we should continue to see all objects even when hidden from sight.⁵⁰ What he is in fact most concerned about is that this assumption produces skeptical effects; indeed, it rules out deriving any natural certainty of the existence or contingent condition of any sensible thing from the senses and, consequently, from the intellect.⁵¹ Gregory of Rimini repudiates such skepticism on pragmatic and moral grounds, insisting that to doubt that the fire burning one's hand exists is absurd⁵² and that such doubt would have disastrous practical implications for human life and society,⁵³ including for the recognition of anyone's actions.⁵⁴

opinionem. Quaelibet enim opinio ponit obiectum esse aliquo modo causam effectivam exterioris sensationis [...]."

⁴⁹ Gregory of Rimini, *In 1 Sent.*, dist. 3, q. 1 (ed. Trapp, 1981, p. 325): "Item Commentator 2 De anima commento 156: 'Sensus, inquit, semper est cum praesentia sensibilis, imaginatio autem non'."

⁵⁰ Gregory of Rimini, *In 1 Sent.*, dist. 3, q. 1 (ed. Trapp, 1981, p. 325): "Secundam conclusionem probo primo sic: Si destructo sensibili posset visio remanere sic quod per eam ipsum destructum videretur, pari ratione vel potiori possibile esset ipsum quantumcumque occultum existens videri per illam. Consequens repugnat experientiae. Experimur enim quod simul dum occultatur nobis visibile, cessat videri; et si successive, successive, et si subito occultaretur, non est dubium quod subito cessaret videri."

⁵¹ Gregory of Rimini, *In 1 Sent.*, dist. 3, q. 1 (ed. Trapp, 1981, p. 325): "Additio 11: Secundo, quia secundum hoc sequitur quod naturaliter non posset haberi aliqua certitudo de existentia vel aliqua condicione contingenti alicuius rei sensibilis per viam sensus nec per consequens per viam intellectus. Quod videtur absurdum." The additions are materials which, according to the editors, are authentic but were sometimes omitted or added in the final redaction. See Trapp, 1979, xxxiv–xxxv.

⁵² Gregory of Rimini, *In 1 Sent.*, dist. 3, q. 1 (ed. Trapp, 1981, p. 325): "Absurdum enim est quod non habeam naturaliter certitudinem, utrum ignis qui comburit manum meam, posito quod ita sit, sit vere in rerum natura vel solum appareat, immo quod plus est, quod non sim certus quod ipse me calefaciat et comburat."

⁵³ Gregory of Rimini, *In 1 Sent.*, dist. 3, q. 1 (ed. Trapp, 1981, p. 325): "Et huiusmodi alia, quibus positus perit omnis scientia, cuius principia sumuntur a sensu, cum scientia sit certa et evidens notitia. Et quod plus est, sequitur quod tota vita et convictus inter homines non plus procedat ex certa evidetia quam opera eorum qui dormientes ex quibusdam visis in somniis corporaliter loquuntur et alia exterius operantur, quae omnia penitus sunt absurda."

⁵⁴ Gregory of Rimini, *In 1 Sent.*, dist. 3, q. 1 (ed. Trapp, 1981, p. 325): "Consequentia statim patet, quia, ex quo sensatio huiusmodi haberi potest non praesente et pari ratione

That said, Gregory does admit that vision may occur in the absence of a thing, but only by virtue of supernatural causation.⁵⁵ However, this would amount to potential—and not actual—intuitive cognition or vision.⁵⁶

4. Brinkley on Sense Perception and Its Errors

Such is the intellectual and theological context in which Brinkley addresses the limits and errors of the sensitive power. He discusses the issue in the first question of his *Lectura* on Lombard's *Sentences*, which concerns the Prologue. The question asks whether Christian doctrine—Christian truth—depends more on faith or on reason (question 1: *Utrum secta Christi principaliter dependet a fide vel ratione*, ff. 47rA–61rA).

non existente obiecto, non est possibile quod per illam notitiam sim certus quod ipsum existat et sit praesens quando est, potius quam quando non est, et per consequens quod ipsum agat vel non, aut aliquid eiusmodi.”

⁵⁵ Gregory of Rimini, *In 1 Sent.*, dist. 3, q. 1 (ed. Trapp, 1981, p. 332): “Tertia conclusio principalis quantum ad istud dubium est quod talis sensatio potest a deo immediate absque praesentia sensibilis obiecti causari, et causata partialiter a sensibili potest a solo deo immediate conservari absente vel etiam non existente illo sensibili. Haec probatur facilius, quoniam omnem entitatem, quam potest deus concurrente causa secunda causare vel causatam conservare, potest immediate se solo causare vel conservare.” See also Gregory of Rimini, *In 1 Sent.*, dist. 3, q. 1 (ed. Trapp, 1981, p. 340): “Nam concedendum est quod per potentiam dei potest esse sine obiecto existente, non autem est hoc possibile virtute naturali tantum, qualis nunc est ipsa.” See also Gregory of Rimini, *In 1 Sent.*, dist. 3, q. 1 (ed. Trapp, 1981, p. 346): “Hoc cognoscitur mediate cum est absens, ergo potest cognosci absens immediate, sicut nec sequitur: Res absens, vel quod non est, potest esse praesens per suam speciem, igitur et per se ipsum immediate. Et loquor ista de potentia naturali et communi lege naturae, non autem de speciali actione dei aut alterius virtutis supra naturam nostram, si qua est quae causare possit in nobis notitiam absentium aut praeteritorum vel futurorum, qua immediate illa noscantur, de quo ad praesens non curo.” See Tachau, 1982, p. 362.

⁵⁶ Gregory of Rimini, *In 1 Sent.*, dist. 3, q. 1 (ed. Trapp, 1981, p. 340): “Additio 13: Rem illam quae est notitia intuitiva, utique sine obiecto potest conservare, sed non potest conservare illam sine obiecto sic quod sit tunc notitia. Unde quamvis patrem deus facere possit sine filio et conservare, non tamen potest conservare patrem sine filio et quod pater sit pater non habens filium, sic in proposito. Similiter deus potest causare sine obiecto aliquam qualitatem eiusdem rationis cum visione intuitiva, sed illa tunc non erit actualis visio sed potentialiter tantum. Unde posito obiecto suo, a quo naturaliter ipsa potuisset causari, ipsa erit visio eius.”

To answer this question, Brinkley develops a complex argumentative structure, which is also reflected in Gaudet's extensive synthesis.⁵⁷ Having set out arguments in favor of the greater importance, first, of reason and, then, of faith in adhering or assenting to Christian doctrine (ff. 47rA–49vB), Brinkley presents his own position. He begins by investigating what faith and reason are (ff. 49vB–52vA), goes on to define their respective domains (literally, what each extends over and what it concerns) (ff. 52vA–58vA), and depicts the relationship of faith and reason with respect to the act of adherence, that is, assent to Christian doctrine (ff. 58vA–59rA), concluding that it is reason that directs the intellect toward assent to Christian doctrine.⁵⁸ Finally, the question is answered based on evidence from reason and from authority (ff. 59rA–61rA).

Brinkley gives an overview of the debate on the role of reason and the will in determining the intellect's assent to Christian truths. He identifies three positions he rejects. One of them, which is commonly associated with Ockham, gives pre-eminence to the will; another grounds assent in the Revelation; and the third holds that faith itself provides the intellect with evidence of Christian truths.⁵⁹ Besides these concerns, Brinkley's discussion also weighs in on the question of the epistemic value of miracles and testimony.⁶⁰ According to Ockham, while testimonies and miracles may reinforce the habit of faith and assent to Christian doctrine, faith ultimately rests on an act of the will, which causes the intellect's assent.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Kaluza, 1989, pp. 226–227.

⁵⁸ Richard Brinkley, *Lectura super Sententias*, q. 1 (Florence, BNCF, Conv. Soppr. G.III.367 (=F), f. 60vA): “Sit ergo quod intellectiva mediante fide et ratione potest hic in via percipere veritatem sue secte, sed quia ratio secundum omnem statum requiritur et coexistit ad talem cognitionem habendam et fides tantum secundum statum istum, ut patet ex prius dictis, ideo fides solum per accidens requiritur, et ratio per se. Ex quo sequitur quod secta Christi principaliter dependet a ratione quam a fide.”

⁵⁹ Richard Brinkley, *Lectura super Sententias*, q. 1 (F, f. 47rB): “Sed huiusmodi rationis conclusionem doctores communiter non tenent, ideo iuxta eos huic argumento triplex responsio dari potest, dici enim potest: primo quod volitiva creata determinat intellectivam creatam ad assentiendum vero apparenti sibi neutro sed volitiva divina determinat intellectivam divinam ad assentiendum contingenti complexo. Secundo dici potest quod intellectiva assentit tali vero [...] ex revelante illam legem. [...] Tertio dicitur quod hic in via intellectiva primo et principaliter assentit legi Christi ex fide [...]”

⁶⁰ For a discussion of the epistemic value of miracles, see Houston, 1994.

⁶¹ William of Ockham, *Quaestiones variae*, q. 5 (ed. Etzkorn et al., 1984, pp. 187–188): “[...] quaero tunc: a quo causabitur actus credendi huic complexo? [...] Respondeo

By hearing preaching and witnessing miracles, one can only acquire faith, but cannot acquire any evident knowledge of the articles of faith.⁶² As a result, in this way one cannot be brought to assent to Christian doctrine or, for that matter, to the doctrine of any other religion.⁶³

Brinkley is familiar with this Ockhamist background and takes the argumentation on the respective extents of reason and faith as a context for his own examination of the limits and errors of the sensitive power.⁶⁴ In the demonstration of the first conclusion of the question, according to which miracles and, more generally, sensible signs neither produce evident knowledge nor move the intellect to assent,⁶⁵ Brinkley expresses a strong and thorough distrust of sensitive perception. Indeed, Gaudet calls this demonstration a “note on the possible errors in the sensitive powers.”⁶⁶

It makes sense to see whether this discussion is just an isolated digression or whether, and if so, how, it ties in with Brinkley’s broader epistemological concerns. Notably, as shall be seen, most of the reasons that Brinkley adduces in support of his position are drawn not from the supernatural

quod a notitia incomplexa terminorum et apprehensione complexi et ex actu volendi quo aliquis vult assentire tali complexo; quantumcumque nullam evidentiam habeat. [...] Et sic patet quod activitas intellectus nihil facit ad causandum istum actum assentiendi. Quia positus praedictis notitiis cum actu voluntatis efficaci, sive intellectus agat sive non, necessario causabitur assensus respectu illius complexi, et posita activitate intellectus sine actu voluntatis numquam causabitur.” See also William of Ockham, *Quodlibeta* IV, q. 6 (ed. Wey, 1980). See Grellard, 2014, pp. 64–86; Perini-Santos, 2006, pp. 75–93.

⁶² William of Ockham, *Quodlibeta* IV, q. 6 (ed. Wey, 1980, p. 323): “Ad istam quaestionem dico quod audiens praedicationem et videns miracula fieri, non acquirit per hoc notitiam evidentem de illis articulis, sed solum acquirit fidem.”

⁶³ William of Ockham, *Quodlibeta* IV, q. 6 (ed. Wey, 1980, p. 324): “Praeterea si unus praedicaret legem christianam et alius legem Mahometi alicui pagano totaliter indifferenti, et aequaliter quantum ad apparentiam facerent miracula, ille non teneretur assentire legi christianae plus quam legi Saracenorum, ex quo vera praedicatio et vera miracula non faciunt maiorem evidentiam quam falsa miracula.”

⁶⁴ Richard Brinkley, *Lectura super Sententias*, q. 1 (F, f. 52vA): “Uterius ergo videndum <est> [add. in mg. sup.] ad quid fides se extendit et ad quid ratio respectu secte Christi, pro quo pono aliquas conclusiones.”

⁶⁵ Richard Brinkley, *Lectura super Sententias*, q. 1 (F, f. 52vA): “Nulla signa sensitiva vel mirabilia per se et immediate aliquam sectam evidenter probabilem sufficiunt generare.”

⁶⁶ Kaluza, 1989, p. 226: “Nota de errorum possibili<tate> in sensitivis potentiis.”

domain of miracles, but from the sphere of natural phenomena.⁶⁷ Brinkley advances a series of arguments to show that the sensitive power is subject to error. He begins by pointing out a general discordance between judgments and reality when different sensations are involved.

Brinkley contends that the possibility of error is intrinsic to the sensitive power because while it should judge the same object in the same way regardless of which sensation is involved, it sometimes judges things differently from how they actually are. This implies that the source of error must lie within the sensitive power itself since the sensible object affects it in a uniform way.⁶⁸ To illustrate this, Brinkley cites diplopia, a classic visual illusion drawn from physiology and optics.⁶⁹ Specifically, he explains that the species of a visible object, carried by the two eyes, sometimes do not converge at the same point in the common nerve,⁷⁰ but oscillate between right and left. This is caused by the oscillation of the vitreous humor and the visual spirit, which flow from the common sense into the common nerve and the eye. As a result, the sensitive power judges one thing as being two.⁷¹ Brinkley's account eludes any further analysis because he explicitly cuts his discussion short, simply noting that a complete demonstration is a matter of *perspectiva*.⁷²

⁶⁷ Brinkley likely considers miracles to be "experiences that strike the senses and engender sensations" (Kaluza, 1989, p. 199). They serve as a traditional starting point for the discussion, but Brinkley sets them aside in favour of natural phenomena.

⁶⁸ Richard Brinkley, *Lectura super Sententias*, q. 1 (F, f. 52vA): "Primo sic: qualiter potentia sensitiva iudicat de re sensata mediante sensatione aliqua, taliter stat quod iudicet mediante qualibet. Sed media<n>te aliqua sensatione potentia sensitiva aliter iudicat de re quam res est et erronee, ergo stat quod potentia sensitiva mediante qualibet sensatione erronee iudicat de re. Patet consequentia, et pars prima assumpti cum <stat> [add. mg. sn.] quod quodlibet sensatum semper uniformiter se habeat respectu potentie sensitive tam particularis quam communis et <quod> [add. interl.] qualiter aliquod sensibile movet potentiam respectu iudicii veri et erronei, quod taliter quodlibet sensibile actu movens potentiam moveat ipsam."

⁶⁹ See Smith, 2001, p. lxxviii.

⁷⁰ This probably means the optic chiasma; see Smith, 2001, p. lxxviii.

⁷¹ Richard Brinkley, *Lectura super Sententias*, q. 1 (F, f. 52vA): "Et alia pars arguitur sic: quandocumque species visibilis unius rei delate a duobus oculis non quiescunt in eodem loco in communi nervo, sed vacillant secundum dextrum et sinistrum, potentia sensitiva illam unam rem iudicavit duas."

⁷² Richard Brinkley, *Lectura super Sententias*, q. 1 (F, f. 52vA): "[...] totum antecedens est demonstrabile demonstratione propria perspective, quam causa brevitatis dimitto."

Even if briefly discussed, the example of diplopia, explained through a physiological malfunction within the sensitive power, shows that the possibility of error is internal to it.

Brinkley's most extensive, and perhaps most interesting, argument for the intrinsic limits of the sensitive power involves sight and sensible objects, and is inspired by Aristotle's *De anima* II.6. Brinkley cites it regarding the threefold distinction of the objects of the sensitive faculty: the proper and *per se* sensibles, such as color for sight, which cannot be perceived by another sense; the common sensibles shared by several senses, such as motion, which can be perceived both by touch and by sight; and the accidental sensibles, as in "the white is the son of Diares" (*album sit Diarris*), that is, the white patch we see, which happens to be the son of Diares and is therefore only accidentally an object of sense.⁷³ In Aristotle, this distinction comes with different degrees of susceptibility to error. Indeed, Aristotle claims that the senses cannot be deceived with respect to the proper sensibles although he himself qualifies this claim later.⁷⁴ Conversely, error is frequent with the accidental sensibles and even more so with the common sensibles.⁷⁵ In fact, Brinkley radicalizes the standard Aristotelian interpretation as he denies that there is any sphere in which error is impossible or at least minimal⁷⁶; even if the proper sensibles are involved, there is no exemption from error.

⁷³ Aristotle, *De anima*, Iacobus Veneticus (translator), Guillelmus de Moerbeka (retractor), II.6 (418 a7–418 a24) (ed. Gauthier, 1984, p. 118). See also Shields, 2016, pp. 223 ff.

⁷⁴ Aristotle, *De anima*, Iacobus Veneticus (translator), Guillelmus de Moerbeka (retractor), II.6 (418 a6) (ed. Gauthier, 1984, p. 118): "Dico autem proprium quidem quod non contingit altero sensu sentiri, et circa quod non contingit errare, ut uisus coloris et auditus soni et gustus humoris, tactus autem habet plures differencias. Set unusquisque iudicat de hiis et non decipitur quoniam color neque quoniam sonus, set quid coloratum aut ubi aut quid sonans." Aristotle, *De anima*, Iacobus Veneticus (translator), Guillelmus de Moerbeka (retractor), III.3 (428 b17) (ed. Gauthier, 1984, p. 197): "Hoc autem accidit propter hoc: sensus propriorum quidem est uerus aut quam paucissimum habens falsum."

⁷⁵ Aristotle, *De anima*, Iacobus Veneticus (translator), Guillelmus de Moerbeka (retractor), III.3 (428 b20–26) (ed. Gauthier, 1984, p. 197): "Secundo autem de accidere hec, et hic iam contingit mentiri: quod quidem enim album, non mentitur, si autem hoc album aut aliud, mentitur. Tercio autem communium et consequencium accidentia quibus insunt propria (dico autem ut motus et magnitudo accidunt sensibilibus), circa que est maxime iam decipi secundum sensum."

⁷⁶ See also Shields, 2016, p. 226.

The examples examined below constitute the minor premise of Brinkley's argument. Specifically, he argues that because the intellective power cannot ground certainty in the judgments of a fallible and erroneous power, the intellect cannot rely on the sensitive power since the latter is subject to error. Brinkley's example of certainty regarding the founder of a religion has Ockhamist echoes. That the sensitive power is subject to error is demonstrated through the misperceptions and illusions related to the accidental, common, and proper sensibles.

Likewise, the intellective power cannot be made certain about an external object through any power that is fallible in every judgment concerning such objects. But any sensitive power is fallible in every judgment concerning an external object; therefore, the intellective power cannot be made certain of any external object whatsoever through any sensitive power. And furthermore, therefore, the intellective power cannot be immediately and evidently made certain about the founder of any religious doctrine through any sensible signs or miracles. [...] Therefore, the consequent is true, and the other part of the assumption is argued as follows: every external object of the sensitive power is either a proper and essential (*per se*) object, or a common object, or an accidental object, according to Aristotle II *De anima*, comment 63 and 64.⁷⁷ But with respect to each of these, an erroneous judgment is possible; therefore, with respect to any external object whatsoever, the sensitive power is fallible in each of its judgments, which is to be proved.⁷⁸

Brinkley aims to show that even the noblest sense of sight at its highest degree of perfection is not sufficient to give rise to a true judgment. He begins with an example of an accidental sensible. Let us submit Aristotle's example

⁷⁷ Averroes, *Commentarium Magnum in Aristotelis de Anima libros* (ed. Crawford, 1953, pp. 63–64).

⁷⁸ Richard Brinkley, *Lectura super Sententias*, q. 1 (F, f. 52vA): "Item sic per nullam potentiam in omni iudicio errabilem respectu obiecti extrinseci potest intellectiva de illo obiecto certificari. <Sed> quolibet potentia sensitiva in omni iudicio respectu obiecti extrinseci est errabilis, ergo per nullam potentiam sensitivam de aliquo obiecto extrinseco potest intellectiva certificari. Et ultra, ergo, per nulla signa vel mirabilia sensitiva potest intellectiva immediate de alicuius secte legislatore evidenter certificari. [...] Ergo stat quod consequens sit verum, et alia pars assumpti arguitur sic: omne obiectum extrinsecum potentie sensitive est obiectum proprium et per se vel obiectum commune vel obiectum per accidens per Aristotelem II De anima, textu commenti 63ti et 64ti. Sed respectu cuiuslibet istorum stat quod sit iudicium erroneum, ergo respectu cuiuscumque obiecti extrinseci in quolibet iudicio suo est errabilis potentia sensitiva, quod est probanda."

to Brinkley's treatment, where *a* is an object—say, Diares's son—and *b* is the color white, further supposing that the sensitive power, the medium, and *a* are arranged in the most favorable way for vision in what we would call optimal conditions today.⁷⁹ At this point, Brinkley proposes a thought experiment: if God decided to annihilate *a* (Diares's son in our example), while *b*—the white—remained the same, every medium that immediately caused judgment and assent would remain unchanged, including the visible species, which he calls the visual spirit, the light, and so on.

If God were to annihilate *a*, with no other change having been made, with *b* remaining in the form and position in which it now is, and with the vision remaining, then in whatever way a certain sensitive power judged about *a* before its annihilation, it would judge <about *a*> after its annihilation. But before the annihilation of <*a*, the sensitive power> judged *a* to be under *b*, <therefore after the annihilation it would judge *a* to be under *b*>. The consequence looks valid, the minor premise follows from the hypothesis, and the major is argued as follows: all the media that immediately cause judgment and assent behave in the same way after the annihilation of *a* as before since no change has occurred in anything other than *a*. But before the annihilation of *a*, the sensitive power judged that there was a substance through vision(?), and any sensitive power with respect to extrinsic and accidental objects would have an adequate act (of perception) if, that act remaining, all the accidental objects were annihilated, with no other change having occurred; all the interior and exterior powers would then judge the objects to be where they were before, and the objects to be such as they were before, and yet they would not be so; therefore, the power would be deceived.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Richard Brinkley, *Lectura super Sententias*, q. 1 (F, f. 52vB): "Arguo primo quod respectu cuiuslibet obiecti per accidens stat error in potentia sensitiva. Nam signato aliquo colorato quod sit *a*, cuius totus color sit *b*, tunc sic arguitur: si potentia visiva, medium et *a* essent ad invicem proportionata gradu summo dispositionis naturalis, si visionem causatam ab illis causis sic concurrentibus sequeretur naturaliter iudicium erroneum, quamlibet aliam visionem (cod. vlosionem) naturaliter <sequi> [add. mg dx.] posset erroneum iudicium."

⁸⁰ Richard Brinkley, *Lectura super Sententias*, q. 1 (F, ff. 52vB–53rA): "Si Deus adnihilaret *a*, nulla alia mutatione precise facta, stante *b* in forma et situ in quo nunc est, et stante visione, tunc qualitercumque potentia aliqua sensitiva iudicaret de *a* ante eius adnihilationem, iudicaret <de *a*> post eius adnihilationem. Sed ante adnihilationem <*a*, potentia sensitiva> [add. mg. dx.] iudicabit *a* esse sub *b*, <ergo post anihichilationem iudicabit *a* esse sub *b*> [add. mg. dx.]. Consequentia videtur et minor ex hypotesi et maior arguitur: omnia media que immediate causant iudicium et assensum, consimiliter

Before the annihilation of *a*, the sensitive power judged through vision that substance *a* was present and that color *b* was an accident of *a*. In terms of the example from Aristotle, before God's annihilation of Diares's son, the sensitive power judged through vision that there was a substance and that the white it saw was Diares's son; the same act of judgment will be retained even after Diares's son's destruction precisely because all the *media*, that is, the *species* that cause the judgment, remain operative in vision.

Such an act of the visual power would still be adequate and would express the visual power at its highest degree. Yet, despite being in the perfect disposition, this vision would be erroneous and misleading.⁸¹ In the context of the medieval debate, Brinkley's position marks an important departure from Aristotle. Namely, whereas for Aristotle, errors related to accidental objects lie in the identification of the object (one is not mistaken that there is white; "but if one says that this or that other thing is what is white, one is mistaken"⁸²), in Brinkley's case, the error concerns the very existence of the perceived object.

Having dealt with this example, Brinkley states that error can also arise with respect to the common sensibles. He explains that an object may be too excellent, too distant, or too close to be properly perceived. All these aspects fall under quantity, which is a common object of the sensitive power.⁸³

se habent post adnihilationem *a* sicut ante, cum in nullo nisi in *a* sit facta mutatio aliqua. Sed ante adnihilationem *a*, potentia sensitiva iudicavit esse substantiam visiva (*cod.*, corr. ex visivam), et quelibet potentia sensitiva respectu obiecti sibi extrinseci et per accidens haberet actum adequatum si, stante illo actu, omnia obiecta per accidens essent adnihilata nulla alia mutatione facta; omnes potentie interiores et exteriores [f. 53rA] ibi iudicaret esse obiecta ubi prius, et talia esse obiecta sicut prius et taliter non essent, ergo tunc potentia esset decepta."

⁸¹ Richard Brinkley, *Lectura super Sententias*, q. 1 (F, f. 53rA): "Ergo simul arguo: sic potentia visiva, medium et obiectum per accidens sunt ad invicem proportionata summo gradu possibili dispositionis naturalis, et tamen visio sic causata (*cod.* visionem sic causatam) sit error et iudicium erroneum (*cod.* erroneum), ergo nulla visio immediate et per se respectu obiecti per accidens aliquam sectam evidenter probabilem sufficit generare. Consequentia arguitur ex hoc quod quicquid immediate fundatur super errorem, error est."

⁸² Aristotle, *De anima*, III.3 (428 b21–23), transl. Shields, 2016, p. 58.

⁸³ Richard Brinkley, *Lectura super Sententias*, q. 1 (F, f. 53rA): "Secundo arguo quod respectu obiecti communis stat error, et ex hoc quod sensatio habita de obiecto communi non sufficit per se aliquam sectam infallibilem generare, nam arguitur sic: si obiectum commune fuerit nimis excellens, nimis distans aut nimis prope non percipitur res ipsa

Finally, Brinkley also addresses fallibility bound up with the proper sensibles. To be counted as a proper sensible, an object must meet two conditions: it must be knowable by a specific power, and that power must not be deceived about it in *the majority of cases*. Brinkley argues, however, that the latter condition is not in fact fulfilled as the sensitive power can be deceived in various acts of perception: it may be deceived in one out of three acts of perception, but also in all three, and therefore potentially in the majority of cases.⁸⁴ In this sense, the defining criteria of the proper objects of sensation are not appropriately met and cannot be met. Given this, the sensitive power again proves to be unreliable, and consequently assent to truth cannot be grounded either in this power or in its objects.

Brinkley offers further minor reasons why the sensitive power is fallible, but even without considering those, some important insights can already be made. When compared with the views of some of his Oxonian predecessors, Brinkley's discussion may appear radical. Whether one thinks of Wodeham, Chatton, or authors chronologically closer to Brinkley, such as Gregory of Rimini, one is struck by Brinkley's relative unconcern

prout est per potentiam sensitivam. Sed distantia, propinquitas, magnitudo et parvitas continentur sub quantitate que est obiectum commune potentie sensitive, secundo De anima textu commenti 63, ergo respectu obiecti communis stat error. Et sicut <stat error> [add. mg. sn.] respectu obiecti communis, sic respectu cuiuslibet, et sicut aliquando, sic semper; ergo nulla talis sensatio respectu obiecti communis potest per se et immediate aliquam fidem infallibilem generare."

⁸⁴ Richard Brinkley, *Lectura super Sententias*, q. 1 (F, f. 53rB): "Ultimo arguo quod obiectum proprium alicuius potentie sensitive non sufficit aliquam fidem infallibilem etiam de se generare. Arguo sic: cum omnibus illis ex quibus integratur proprium obiectum alicuius potentie stat error et deceptio in potentia sensitiva respectu eiusdem obiecti, ergo ex omnibus vel non immediate et per se aliqua secta infallibilis poterit generari. Consequentia videtur evidens et assumptum arguitur. Nam iste due propositiones integrant alicuius potentie obiectum proprium: prima quod idem obiectum sit precise cognoscibile ab illa potentia; et alia, quod ista potentia non errat circa illud sensibile in maiori parte, unde secundo De anima commento 62: 'sensibilia que inveniuntur alicui soli sensui qui non errat in eis in maiori parte dicuntur propria.' Ex quo evidenter sequitur antecedens probandum. Nam cum isto stat quod potentia quandoque errat contra obiectum proprium, sed hoc eque potest esse in prima sensatione sicut in secunda vel tertia, sicut in prima vel secunda, ergo cum omnibus illis que integrant obiectum proprium alicuius potentie stat error et deceptio quod est probandum." Even if Brinkley is somewhat obscure on this point, I propose interpreting "first, second, and third sensations" as referring to different acts of perception.

with securing certitude in human beings' natural knowledge of the sensible world. Indeed, Brinkley displays a far stronger mistrust of sensory cognition than his predecessors did. His position may be better understood if examined in the broader context of question 1 of his Prologue.

5. *Apparentia*, Evidence, and the Limits of Natural Reason

Having outlined Brinkley's critical framework, we can now explore the constructive dimension of his epistemology to see what kinds of knowledge are reliable, what causes reason to assent to the truths of Christian doctrine, and how, if at all, the skeptical consequences of his position are addressed.

As noted by Kaluza, after rejecting knowledge through signs and sensibles, as well as faith itself, as causes of the intellect's assent, Brinkley claims that assent to Christian truths is grounded in intellectual evidence.⁸⁵ This evidence, as Kaluza observes, takes the form of intellectual reasoning (*discursus applicatus*), that is, of a proposition.⁸⁶ According to Brinkley, such evidence ultimately derives from or simply is the very intellectual *apparentia*, which is understood as the content expressed by a proposition.⁸⁷ In reply to those

⁸⁵ Kaluza, 1989, p. 200.

⁸⁶ Kaluza based his interpretation on Gaudet's version and on indirect sources (Kaluza, 1989, p. 200, footnote 68). The following passage is quoted directly from Richard Brinkley, *Lectura super Sententias*, q. 1 (F, f. 55rA): "Sexta conclusio est hec: quod fides per se et immediate assensum respectu alicuius articuli fidei non sufficit causare, pro qua arguitur primo sic: respectu nullius propositionis habet vel habere potest intellectiva assensum abstractivum que de se non est evidens sine (super, *cod.*) discursu aliquo applicato ad ipsam. <Sed> respectu nullius propositionis inclinatur fides nisi respectu propositionis de se non evidenter, ergo respectu nullius propositionis respectu cuius inclinatur fides, fides immediate causatur assensum."

⁸⁷ Richard Brinkley, *Lectura super Sententias*, q. 1 (F, f. 56rA): "Ad hoc ergo quod intellectiva credatur alicui (aliquam, *cod.*) propositioni requiritur previe illius propositionis aliquis *apparentia*, que est conclusio [...] Ex istis sequitur alia, quod ad intellectualem adherentiam precedentem se habet intellectualis evidentia. Hec sequitur immediate ex priori coassumpto isto vero: quod omnem intellectualem *apparentiam* immediate tanquam propria passio sequitur intellectualis evidentia vel est ipsamet intellectualis *apparentia*." For the notion of *apparentia* in the fourteenth-century epistemological debate, see Grellard, 2005b, pp. 39–65; Salvestrini, 2022; Robert, 2023; Tachau, 1988, p. 345. Nannini is preparing work on possible connections between Brinkley and Ripa, including with respect to this concept. On Ripa, see Nannini, 2024, and the critical editions cited here.

who believe that resorting to *apparentia* cannot explain how the intellect assents to falsehood in the present life—because “the false cannot *appear* as true”⁸⁸—Brinkley crucially distinguishes two senses of *apparentia*. In one sense, it denotes manifestation (*ostendere*), pertains to simple apprehension, and is non-propositional, and in the other, it denotes judgment (*iudicare*) and is expressed propositionally. In the former sense, the thing appears immediately as it is, whereas, in the latter—in judgment—the appearance can be true or false and is therefore subject to error. Such an error can occur for a variety of reasons, such as defects of the power, of the medium, of the object, or of the application.⁸⁹

Providing a complete account of Brinkley’s *pars construens* lies beyond the scope of this article. It includes not only question 1 but also question 2, which ponders the significance of propositions and, as suggested by Kałuža,

⁸⁸ Richard Brinkley, *Lectura super Sententias*, q. 1 (F, f. 56rB): “Tertio sic intellectiva hic in via potest assentire falso credens ipsum esse verum. Sed falsum non potest apparere verum; ergo intellectiva potest alicui hic in via assentire sine apparentia, quod est obiectum utriusque conclusionis.”

⁸⁹ Richard Brinkley, *Lectura super Sententias*, q. 1 (F, ff. 56vB–57rA): “Item est ibi fallacia equivocationis de isto termino apparentia: est enim equivocum ad ostendere et iudicare [...] Sciendum quod apparere uno modo convertitur cum hoc verbo ostendere et alio modo cum hoc verbo iudicare. Sicut ergo nulla res potest ostendere se aliud vel ali<qua>liter quam est, <eo quod> [add. mg. sn.] tunc naturaliter causaret signum falsum sui ipsius, quod est contra intentionem nature, sic nulla res potest <apparere> [add. mg. sn.] aliud vel ali<qua>liter quam est, cum quo bene stat quod potentia tam sensitiva quam intellectiva quandoque iudicet de re aliter quam res est ex causa multiplici: vel propter defectum potentie, medii vel obiecti, applicationis vel alicuius alterius cause accidentalis. Sumendo ergo “apparere” ad diversum modum et loquendo proprie stant ista: simul “A apparet esse intensius album quam B” et tamen “nullum A apparet intensius album quam B”; “apparet hoc esse hominem”, et tamen “nullus homo apparet hoc”; “nulla res apparet alia vel aliter quam est”, et tamen “aliqua res apparet esse aliter vel alia [57rA] quam est” et sic de multis aliis. Primum est verum posito quod A et B sint essentialiter albi et tamen quod quis, sensu errante, iudicet A esse magis album quam B et sic de aliis. Apparere primo modo est respectu incomplexi, secundo modo respectu complexi, ut patet in compositis propositionibus. Et per hoc eius diversitas faciliter poterit deprehendi quomodo iste propositiones non convertuntur “album apparet esse nigrum,” “album apparet nigrum.” Prima est vera [[est vera]] et secunda (*cod.*, secundum) impossibilis.” Nicholas of Autrecourt also employs a twofold sense of *apparentia*—as full and partial, certain and deceptive—but in a different sense, one that does not involve the complex or non-complex form of cognition: unlike Brinkley’s, Autrecourt’s is a distinction of degree rather than of form. On Autrecourt’s distinction, see Salvestrini, 2022, pp. 956–957.

may be considered a continuation of the preceding discussion.⁹⁰ Fundamentally, this inquiry unfolds in an explicitly theological context, which is Brinkley's primary concern. Yet, taken together, these folios contain the most developed extant account of Brinkley's epistemology and undoubtedly merit a comprehensive study.

One point of this account is, I believe, particularly relevant to this first look at Brinkley's epistemology. Building on Kaluza's thesis,⁹¹ let me note that toward the end of question 1, Brinkley gives his answer to it, stating that the act of assent to the truths of faith primarily depends on reason and only *per accidens* on faith. While faith is necessary for acts of assent pertaining to moral life, reason is always and in every case involved in all cognitive acts of assent to such truths.⁹²

Yet reason, Brinkley insists, also has its limits; specifically, natural reason is incapable of grasping the truths of Christian doctrine.⁹³ This makes one wonder in what sense reason can actually assent to Christian truths or, more precisely, how human reason itself should be understood. Brinkley explains that two senses of human reason must be distinguished. In one sense, reason operates according to its natural capacity and enables humans to know things within the limits of nature; in the other sense, human reason is understood insofar as it is illuminated by the supernatural divine light:

To the remaining three authorities I reply by distinguishing the notion of human reason: for sometimes it is said that this human reason is cognitively attained strictly by natural power, so that nothing is required for

⁹⁰ Kaluza, 1989, p. 200. For the folios in which *quaestio* 2 is developed, see footnote 16.

⁹¹ See Kaluza, 1989, p. 201. Kaluza insists on "the certain impotence of the intellect" in Brinkley's account and claims that natural reason makes nothing known, but only makes one believe.

⁹² Richard Brinkley, *Lectura super Sententias*, q. 1 (F, f. 60vA): "Sit ergo quod intellectiva mediante fide et ratione potest hic in via percipere veritatem sue secte, sed quia ratio secundum omnem statum requiritur et coexigitur ad talem cognitionem habendam, et fides tantum secundum statum istum, ut patet ex prius dictis, ideo fides solum per accidens requiritur, et ratio per se. Ex quo sequitur quod secta Christi principaliter dependet a ratione quam a fide. Nam omnis effectus principaliter dependet a causa a qua dependet essentialiter et per se quam ab aliqua causa a qua dependet solum accidentaliter."

⁹³ Richard Brinkley, *Lectura super Sententias*, q. 1 (F, f. 58vA): "Ad propositum ergo redeundo qualiter ratio dirigit intellectivam in secta aliquam pono aliquas propositiones: prima sit hec: precise ratione percepta lumine naturali nulla secta rationabiliter creditur esse vera. Nam deduco omnem habitum infusum et arguo sic [...]."

an appearance to be known as an appearance except what lies within the limits of nature. In another sense, human reason is said to be that which can be cognitively attained by human power when it is illuminated by supernatural light.

In the former sense, by means of human reason, the liberal arts are acquired here in this life; in the latter sense, by means of human reason, habits and the knowledge of the doctrine of Christ are acquired in this life, and the first truth and the other truths are known contemplatively in eternal life. The authorities proceed in the former sense, not in the latter; and in the latter sense, reason is only properly said to be reason if it infers theological conclusions.⁹⁴

In this way, Brinkley elucidates that human reason in the proper sense—that is, the reason that assents to the doctrine of Christ—is an illuminated and divinely assisted reason. By contrast, purely natural reason is confined to a knowledge of things (*apparentia*, that which appears to the intellect and the senses and is expressed propositionally) that only encompasses the sphere of nature and offers no absolute certainty against error.

6. Conclusion

By necessity, any conclusion on Brinkley's epistemology in this article can be partial at best. To grasp the complexity of his model and its embeddedness in the broader framework of fourteenth-century epistemological thought would take a more sustained and comprehensive study of Brinkley's text, ideally accompanied by a critical edition.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Richard Brinkley, *Lectura super Sententias*, q. 1 (F, f. 60vB): "Ad tres auctoritates residuas respondeo distinguendo de ratione humana: quandoque enim dicitur <quod> ista ratio humana cognitive precise virtute naturali attingitur ita quod nihil ad talem apparentiam requiratur ut sit cognita esse apparentia nisi solum que infra limites nature continentur. Alio modo dicitur ratio humana ad quam virtute humana lumine supernaturali illustrata potest cognitive attingi. Primo modo ratione humana artes liberales adquiruntur hic in via; secundo modo ratione humana adquiruntur habitus et notitia secte Christi hic in via, et contemplabiliter veritas prima et alie veritates in patria. Primo modo procedunt auctoritates, non secundo modo; et secundo modo solum ratio inferens conclusionem theologiam percipitur esse ratio [...]."

⁹⁵ I am preparing a critical edition of Brinkley's *Lectura*.

Notwithstanding these limitations, I believe that these further passages and texts work toward corroborating Kałuża's thesis: Brinkley is not uninterested in securing any certainty, but recognizes the limits of human powers and human knowledge. The errors of the senses, inherent in the fallibility of the sensitive power and of human cognitive faculties in general, can render the *apparentia*—expressed propositionally in a judgment—partially or wholly false. For this reason, human knowledge can be subject to error and cannot grasp the truths of faith. This notwithstanding, Brinkley's claim that human reason requires illumination in order to assent to the doctrine of Christ may suggest not so much that he embraces a skeptical position as that his skeptical arguments are a methodological tool. Further research is needed to confirm or disprove this hypothesis.

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