

*From Fixture to Proxy:  
Thomas Aquinas and Giles of Rome  
on the Beatific Vision and the Intelligible Species*

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*Abstract*

This paper examines Thomas Aquinas's claim that no intelligible species is required in the beatific vision and its influence on later thinkers, particularly Giles of Rome and Henry of Ghent. It traces how Giles developed Aquinas's view, reconceptualizing intelligible species as proxies for objects lacking direct intelligibility. The author argues that Giles and Henry, despite apparent disagreements, shared fundamental assumptions derived from Aquinas. This shift in focus from species to cognitive acts as the key explanatory factor in cognition set the stage for later developments in medieval theories of cognition.

Between 1286 and 1287, in the fourth of his disputed questions on angelic cognition, Giles of Rome gave a detailed criticism of Henry of Ghent's mature views on the intelligible species. Henry had rejected the need for intelligible species first in angelic self-knowledge, then in human cognition in his *Quodlibet* IV, q. 21 (Advent 1279 or Lent 1280) and then again in his *Quodlibet* V, q. 14 (Advent 1280 or Lent 1281). That was an unprecedented step for Henry of Ghent, who had initially posited an intelligible species in the human intellect. But it was not a totally unexpected move, as Henry's final rejection of intelligible species came at the end of a painstaking process of reassessing their role that had begun back in 1276 with his first *Quodlibet*.<sup>1</sup>

Setting aside the case of self-knowledge, where he conceded that an intelligible species might actually not be needed, Giles of Rome argued against Henry of Ghent that the intellect (both angelic and human) requires an intelligible species any time it cognizes an object different from itself.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Henry of Ghent, *Quodlibet* IV, q. 7 and q. 21, in Henrici de Gandavo *Quodlibet* IV, eds. G.A. Wilson – G.J. Etzkorn, Leuven U.P., Leuven 2011 (Henrici de Gandavo *Opera Omnia*, VIII), pp. 28-53 and 335-49; *Quodlibet* V, q. 14, in Henrici de Gandavo *Quodlibeta*, ed. Jodocus Badius (Paris 1518), repr. Bibliothèque S.J., Louvain 1961, ff. 174r-179v. See Th.V. Nys, *De psychologia cognitionis humanae secundum Henricum Gandavensem*, Excerpta ex dissertatione ad lauream in Facultate Philosophica Pontificiae Universitatis Gregoriana, Roma 1949; G. Pini, "Il dibattito sulle specie intelligibili nel tredicesimo secolo", *Medioevo* 29 (2004), pp. 267-306; M.E. Rombeiro, "Intelligible Species in the Mature Thought of Henry of Ghent", *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 49.2 (2011), pp. 181-220; M. Pickavé, "Causality and Cognition: An Interpretation of Henry of Ghent's *Quodlibet* V, q. 14", in G. Klima (ed.), *Intentionality, Cognition, and Mental Representation in Medieval Philosophy*, Fordham U.P., New York 2014, pp. 46-80. On the dating of Giles of Rome's works, including his *Quaestiones de cognitione angelorum*, see F. Del Punta – Silvia Donati – C. Luna, "Egidio Romano", in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, Vol. 42, Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, Roma 1993, pp. 319-41.

<sup>2</sup> *Quaestiones de cognitione angelorum*, q. 4, in Aegidii Romani *De Esse et essentia, de mensura angelorum et de cognitione angelorum* (impresso per Simonem de Luere, Venetiis 1502), repr. Minerva G.M.B.H., Frankfurt a.M. 1968,

The debate between Giles and Henry on the role of intelligible species in angelic and human cognition might be considered just another example of the opposition between those two thinkers, who seemed to have missed no occasion to criticize one another. In this, as in other cases, Giles appeared to defend Thomas Aquinas's position against Henry of Ghent's critique.

In this paper, however, I will argue that the debate between Giles and Henry on the intelligible species should be regarded as a chapter in a story whose beginning predates both of them. In that larger story, those two thinkers turn out to be on the same side of the debate, and both can be regarded as developing – albeit in different ways – Thomas Aquinas's position. Specifically, I think that both Henry and Giles followed Aquinas in what I take to be one of his most novel (if underappreciated) views, namely that there are instances of cognition where no intelligible species is required. Both Henry and Giles also recognized that holding such a view required reconsidering what an intelligible species is and, in general, what *cognition* is. Aquinas held that there is no intelligible species in three instances of intellectual cognition: first, in the beatific vision; second, in angelic self-cognition; and third, in the sort of self-cognition that human souls have when separated from their bodies.<sup>3</sup> These three cases might look marginal and of merely theological (as opposed to philosophical) interest. Indeed, I think that Aquinas did consider them as marginal. I also believe, however, that his rejection of the intelligible species in those special cases triggered a process that resulted, on the one hand, in Henry's rejection of intelligible species and, on the other hand, in Giles's novel way of conceiving of them.

In what follows, I focus on the beatific vision, which I take to be most controversial of the three issues I have mentioned. First, I sketch Aquinas's position. Second, I turn to the opposition with which Aquinas's view met among more traditionally minded theologians. Third, I consider Giles of Rome's treatment of this issue in the first stage of his career, up to 1278. Fourth, I examine Giles's position after his readmission to the Paris theology faculty and his promotion to master, as he expressed it in his *Questions on angelic cognition* (1286–1287) and his third *Quodlibet* (1287–1288). My conclusion is that Giles's claim that there is no intelligible species in the intellect of the blessed when they see God – a claim he shared with and took over from Aquinas – goes hand in hand with a new model of intellectual cognition and a new understanding of the role played by the intelligible species, which is now considered as a proxy for the object of cognition rather than the formal cause of an intellectual cognitive event. Although the seeds of this new model were present in Aquinas's works, my contention is that they produced something markedly different from Aquinas's standard account of cognition once they were developed into a full account of intellectual cognition by Giles of Rome.

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ff. 81vb-86ra. See G. Pini, "Il dibattito sulle specie intelligibili" (above, n. 1), pp. 291-8. For Giles's view that a soul's self-knowledge might require no intelligible species, see *Quaest. de cogn. ang.*, q. 1, f. 77vb; *Quodlibet* III, q. 14, in Aegidii Romani *Quodlibeta*, ed. Petrus Damasus de Coninck (Lovanii 1646), repr. Minerva G.M.B.H., Frankfurt a.M. 1966, p. 172. On Giles of Rome's theory of cognition in general, see G. Pini, "Cognition", in Ch.F. Briggs – P.S. Eardley (eds.), *A Companion to Giles of Rome*, Brill, Leiden 2016 (Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition 71), pp. 150-72.

<sup>3</sup> On the beatific vision, see the next section. On angels' self-cognition, see *Summa theologiae* I, q. 56, a. 1, in Sancti Thomae de Aquino *Opera Omnia*, t. V, cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum, ex Typographia Polyglotta, Roma 1889, pp. 62-3; *Quaestiones disputatae de Veritate*, q. 8, a. 6, in Sancti Thomae de Aquino *Opera Omnia*, t. XXII, vol. 2, cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum, ad Sanctae Sabinae 1972, Roma, pp. 236-9. On separate souls' self-cognition, see *Summa theologiae* I, q. 89, a. 2, in Sancti Thomae de Aquino *Opera Omnia*, t. V, pp. 315-16.

### 1. Cognition without a species: Thomas Aquinas on the beatific vision

Our story starts with Thomas Aquinas, and more specifically with his claim that when the blessed see God, there is no species distinct from God himself in their intellect. Since seeing God is a cognitive act (albeit a very special one), Aquinas's claim had momentous consequences for intellectual cognition in general, as it amounted to positing that, at least in an exceptional case, there can be an intellectual act without an intelligible species.<sup>4</sup>

So what should we take an intelligible species to be, according to Thomas Aquinas? And why did he defend the claim that there is no intelligible species in the beatific vision? For my purpose, I would only like to stress that he took the intelligible species to be a form present in the cognizer's intellect; through that form, the intellect is "made like" or "assimilated to" the thing cognized. Cognition is explained analogously to natural alterations. A white chair becomes like a red table by acquiring a new quality, redness, when it is painted red; the new redness of the chair is a quality in the chair (i.e., it informs the chair) but is also specifically the same as the redness informing the table. Similarly, the intellect "becomes like" the thing being cognized (say, a dog) by acquiring a new form, the intelligible species. The intelligible species plays a twofold role: first, as a form in the cognizer's intellect, it brings the cognizer's intellect to a state of actuality (namely, it makes it actually *cognize*); second, as a likeness (*similitudo*) of the thing cognized, it makes the intellect cognize that *specific* thing (say, a dog rather than a cat). The same form in the intellect can play both roles because it is a form numerically distinct from but specifically the same as the form of the thing being cognized (say, the form of a dog), even though its mode of existence as it is in the intellect is different from its mode of existence as it is in the thing cognized—which explains why my intellect does not become a dog when I think about a dog.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super Sententiis Magistri Petri Lombardi*, IV, dist. 49, q. 2, a. 1, also included in the *Supplementum* to the third part of the *Summa theologiae* as q. 92, a. 1 (from which I quote), in Sancti Thomae de Aquino *Opera Omnia*, t. XII, cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum, ex Typographia Polyglotta, Roma 1906, pp. 218-21; *Summa contra Gentiles*, III, cap. 51-57, in Sancti Thomae de Aquino *Opera Omnia*, t. XIV, cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum, Typis Riccardi Garroni, Roma 1926, pp. 139-61; *Compendium theologiae*, cap. 105, in Sancti Thomae de Aquino *Opera Omnia*, t. XLII, cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum, Editori di San Tommaso, Roma 1979, p. 121; *Quodlibet* X, q. 8, in Sancti Thomae de Aquino *Opera Omnia*, t. XXV, vol. 1, cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum, Commissio Leonina-Cerf, Roma-Paris 1996, pp. 146-7. See J.-P. Torrell, "La vision de Dieu *per essentiam* selon saint Thomas d'Aquin", *Micrologus* 5 (1997), pp. 43-68. On Aquinas's beatific vision in general, see Ch. Trottmann, *La vision beatifique: Des disputes scolastiques à sa définition par Benoît XII*, École Française de Rome, Roma 1995, pp. 312-317; P.-Y. Maillard, *La vision de Dieu chez Thomas d'Aquin*, Vrin, Paris 2001 (Bibliothèque Thomiste).

<sup>5</sup> For the two roles of the intelligible species, see *Summa theologiae*, I, a. 85, a. 2, ad 1, in Sancti Thomae de Aquino *Opera Omnia*, t. V (above, n. 3), p. 334: "... intellectum est in intelligente per suam similitudinem. Et per hunc modum dicitur quod intellectum in actu est intellectus in actu, in quantum similitudo rei intellectae est forma intellectus; sicut similitudo rei sensibilis est forma sensus in actu. Unde non sequitur quod species intelligibilis abstracta sit id quod actu intelligitur, sed quod sit similitudo eius". For the intelligible species's role as the form actualizing the intellect, see *De Veritate*, q. 8, a. 6, in Sancti Thomae de Aquino *Opera Omnia*, t. XXII (above, n. 3), pp. 236-9; and *Summa contra Gentiles* II, cap. 98, in Sancti Thomae de Aquino *Opera Omnia*, t. XIII, cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum, Typis Riccardi Garroni, Roma 1918, pp. 580-2. For its role as that by which a thing cognized becomes present in the intellect, see *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 84, a. 2, in Sancti Thomae de Aquino *Opera Omnia*, t. V (above, n. 3), pp. 315-16. For a detailed and helpful study focusing on what I take to be the first role of the intelligible species, see T. Scarpelli Cory, "Aquinas's Intelligible Species as Formal Constituents",

According to Aquinas, standard cases of intellectual cognition require such a form: in order to cognize a certain thing, a cognizer must become “like” that thing, and this assimilation can be carried out only if a form is received in that cognizer’s intellect—just as a white chair becomes like a red table only if it receives redness when it is painted red. Aquinas, however, thought that this account could not be extended to the very special act by which the blessed see God in heaven. He held this view already in his commentary on the *Sentences* and defended it until the end of his career.<sup>6</sup>

The view that the beatific vision requires no intelligible species was both novel and controversial. Setting aside several of the arguments by which Aquinas defended it, I would only like to mention what I take to be his main reason for advancing this view. As I have said, Aquinas took intelligible species to be forms present in the intellect, and he took those forms to be specifically the same as the forms of the things being thought about. Accordingly, a species in the intellect is a form of *a certain kind*, or if you prefer, *limited to a certain kind*, just as any created form (say, the form of a dog rather than of a cat) is limited to a certain kind of things (dogs rather than cats). God’s essence, however, is of “no kind”, for God is unlimited. Consequently, no species can make us cognize God’s essence. But it is just God’s essence that the blessed are supposed to cognize. Thus, Aquinas concluded that the beatific vision does not occur by way of a species present in the intellect of the blessed.<sup>7</sup>

If the beatific vision is a cognitive event but does not occur through the reception of a species, how does it occur? Aquinas claimed that in the beatific vision God himself plays the roles of both the object and the species. But he also denied that God literally informs the intellect of the blessed.<sup>8</sup>

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*Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 31 (2020), pp. 261-309. Regarding the second role of the intelligible species, the view that the intelligible species is a form numerically different but specifically the same as the form of the thing cognized has been labeled “conformality”. See P. King, “Rethinking Representation in the Middle Ages: A Vade-Mecum to Medieval Theories of Mental Representation”, in H. Lagerlund (ed.), *Representations and Objects of Thought in Medieval Philosophy*, Aldershot, Ashgate 2007, pp. 81-100, esp. pp. 81-6. It is also called “formal identity” and “sharing of form”. See also E. Stump, *Aquinas*, Routledge, New York 2003, pp. 273-5; G. Klima, “Tradition and Innovation in Medieval Theories of Mental Representation”, *Proceedings of the Society for Medieval Logic and Metaphysics* 4 (2004), pp. 4-11. This view has been rejected in J.E. Brower – S. Brower-Toland, “Aquinas on Mental Representation: Concept and Intentionality”, *The Philosophical Review* 117 (2008), pp. 193-243. But Aquinas clearly expresses his commitment to conformality in his *Scriptum super Sententiis*, IV, dist. 49, q. 2, a. 1, in Sancti Thomae de Aquino *Opera Omnia*, t. XII (above, n. 4), p. 219: “Ad hoc autem quod visus cognoscat albedinem, oportet quod recipiatur in eo similitudo albedinis secundum rationem suae speciei (quamvis non secundum eundem modum essendi, quia habet alterius modi esse forma in sensu, et in re extra animam): si enim fieret in oculo forma citrini, non diceretur oculus videre albedinem. Et similiter *ad hoc quod intellectus intelligat aliquam quidditatem, oportet quod fiat in eo similitudo eiusdem rationis secundum speciem: quamvis forte non sit idem modus essendi utrobique; non enim forma existens in intellectu vel sensu est principium cognitionis secundum modum essendi quem habet utrobique, sed secundum rationem in qua communicat cum re exteriori. Et ita patet quod per nullam similitudinem receptam in intellectu creato potest Deus intelligi ita quod essentia eius videatur immediate*” (italics mine).

<sup>6</sup> See the passages referred above in n. 4.

<sup>7</sup> See the passage from *Scriptum super Sententiis*, IV, dist. 49, q. 2, a. 1 quoted above in n. 5.

<sup>8</sup> *Scriptum super Sententiis*, IV, dist. 49, q. 2, a. 1, in Sancti Thomae de Aquino *Opera Omnia*, t. XII (above, n. 4), pp. 219-20: “Cum enim in qualibet cognitione sit necessaria aliqua forma qua res cognoscatur aut videatur, forma ista qua intellectus perficitur ad videndas substantias separatas ... est ipsa substantia separata quae coniungitur intellectui nostro ut forma, ut ipsa sit quod intelligitur et quo intelligitur. Et quidquid sit de aliis substantiis

Two points should be retained from this brief presentation of Aquinas's position. First, Aquinas admitted of at least one cognitive event with no intelligible species (or at least, no intelligible species distinct from the object of cognition). Second, he held this view because he considered the intelligible species as a form present in the cognizer's intellect. He accordingly regarded the standard cases of intellectual cognition as instances of "information": the intellect of a cognizer receives a form that is specifically the same as the form present in the thing cognized, but no form received in the intellect can be specifically the same as God, and so can cognitively unite the blessed with God, because there is no commonality in kind between any creature and God (who, being infinite, belongs to no kind).

## 2. *In defense of the intelligible species: John Pecham and William de la Mare's Correctorium*

I said that Aquinas's claim that no intelligible species exists in the beatific vision was both novel and controversial. John Pecham attacked it when Aquinas was still alive, in 1270–1271. Pecham's ground for rejecting Aquinas's view was based on the assumption that any instance of cognition requires three elements: a cognitive power, an object, and a species modifying the cognitive power so that actual cognition can occur. Presumably, Pecham took that assumption as straightforward. Accordingly, if there is no species, there is no cognition, no matter whether what is cognized is essentially included in the cognizer or not.<sup>9</sup> So Pecham thought

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separatis, tamen istum modum oportet nos accipere in visione Dei per essentiam: quia, quacumque alia forma informaretur intellectus noster, non posset per eam duci in essentiam divinam. Quod quidem non debet intelligi quasi divina essentia sit vera forma intellectus nostri; vel quia ex ea et intellectu nostro efficiatur unum simpliciter, sicut in naturalibus ex forma et materia naturali: sed quia proportio essentiae divinae ad intellectum nostrum est sicut proportio formae ad materiam". See also *Summa contra Gentiles* III, cap. 51, in Sancti Thomae de Aquino *Opera Omnia*, t. XIV (above, n. 4), p. 140: "Ad huius igitur intelligentiam veritatis, considerandum est quod substantia quae est per seipsam subsistens, est vel forma tantum, vel compositum ex materia et forma. Illud igitur quod ex materia et forma compositum est, non potest alterius esse forma: quia forma in eo est iam contracta ad illam materiam, ut alterius rei forma esse non possit. Illud autem quod sic est subsistens ut tamen solum sit forma, potest alterius esse forma, dummodo esse suum sit tale quod ab aliquo alio participari possit, sicut in secundo ostendimus de anima humana. Si vero esse suum ab altero participari non posset, nullius rei forma esse posset: sic enim per suum esse determinatur in seipso, sicut quae sunt materialia per materiam. Hoc autem, sicut in esse substantiali vel naturali invenitur, sic et in esse intelligibili considerandum est. Cum enim intellectus perfectio sit verum, illud intelligibile erit ut forma tantum in genere intelligibilium quod est veritas ipsa. Quod convenit soli Deo: nam, cum verum sequatur ad esse, illud tantum sua veritas est quod est suum esse, quod est proprium soli Deo, ut in secundo ostensum est. Alia igitur intelligibilia subsistentia sunt non ut pura forma in genere intelligibilium, sed ut formam in subiecto aliquo habentes: est enim unumquodque eorum verum, non veritas; sicut et est ens, non autem ipsum esse. Manifestum est igitur quod essentia divina potest comparari ad intellectum creatum ut species intelligibilis qua intelligit: quod non contingit de essentia alicuius alterius substantiae separatae. Nec tamen potest esse forma alterius rei secundum esse naturale: sequeretur enim quod, simul cum alio iuncta, constitueret unam naturam; quod esse non potest, cum essentia divina in se perfecta sit in sui natura. Species autem intelligibilis, unita intellectui, non constituit aliquam naturam, sed perficit ipsum ad intelligendum: quod perfectioni divinae essentiae non repugnat". Remarkably, the view that a subsistent (i.e., non-inhering) form can be the principle of an action on another thing is not an *ad hoc* move for Aquinas, because he refers to it also when dealing with angelic self-cognition. See *Summa theologiae* I, q. 56, a. 1, in Sancti Thomae de Aquino *Opera Omnia*, t. V (above, n. 3), p. 62: "Nihil autem differt, ad hoc quod forma sit principium actionis, quod ipsa forma sit alii inhaerens, et quod sit per se subsistens: non enim minus calor calefaceret si esset per se subsistens, quam calefacit inhaerens. Sic igitur et si aliquid in genere intelligibilium se habet ut forma intelligibilis subsistens, intelliget seipsum".

<sup>9</sup> John Pecham, *Quaestiones disputatae de beatitudine animae et corporis*, ed. H. Spettmann (†), revised by G.J. Etzkorn, q. 11, in Ioannis Pecham *Quaestiones disputatae*, edd. G.J. Etzkorn – H. Spettmann (†) – L. Oliger (†),

that, by rejecting an intelligible species in the beatific vision, Aquinas could not explain why the beatific vision was a *cognitive* event at all. Also, note that even though Pecham might have attacked Aquinas's view on purely theological grounds – for example, by contending that the claim that in the beatific vision God plays the role of intelligible species risks merging the intellect of the blessed and God illicitly –, he preferred to adopt a philosophical strategy: saying that the beatific vision is a cognitive act while stating that there is no intelligible species in the intellect of the blessed entails a contradiction.

After Pecham, other thinkers (specifically, several Franciscan thinkers) attacked Aquinas's view on the beatific vision. The first article of William de la Mare's *Correctorium fratris Thomae* (1278) – which in 1282 became required reading for any Franciscan deemed mature enough to approach Aquinas's *Summa theologiae* – concerned this topic. De la Mare's criticism was very much in line with what Pecham had remarked: there is no way a cognitive event can occur without a species in the cognizer.<sup>10</sup> But another aspect of de la Mare's treatment is particularly worth stressing. By developing some claims found in Aquinas, he attributed to him a view that Aquinas had never explicitly held, namely that something is cognized by way of a species present in the cognizer's intellect *only if that thing cannot be present to the cognizer's intellect by itself*. In his treatment of the beatific vision, Aquinas had come close to making this claim: he had argued that the reason why no material thing can be the form of something else is that matter is one of the constituents of that material subsisting thing, and what is constituted by matter cannot inform another thing, because matter cannot inform matter (only form can, by definition). Nothing prevents a subsisting form, however, from playing the role of form for something else (this is the case, for Aquinas, of the soul with respect to the body). These claims seem to entail that the reason why the intellect needs an intelligible species of a certain thing is only that the thing being cognized is material—if it were immaterial, nothing would prevent that thing from acting as the form of the intellect and “perfecting it”, namely putting that intellect in a state of actual cognition.<sup>11</sup> Aquinas, however, did not make that inference

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Editiones Collegii S. Bonaventurae ad Claras Aquas, Grottaferrata-Roma 2002, p. 553: “Ad tertium quaesitum dicunt quidam quod quaedam sunt quae per essentiam non sunt in anima, ut lapis, et talia non intelliguntur nisi per similitudines, quae et ipsa, quarum sunt, notificant et calificant vim intellectivam, et informant ad videndum in actu. Sed illa, quae sunt essentialiter in intellectu, non videntur per aliam similitudinem nisi quod ipsa potentia cognitiva assimilatur ipsi cognoscibili, ut possit ipsum videre quod per se est praesens intellectui. Contra. Deus plus transcendit intellectum creatum immaterialitate quam intellectus creatus lapidem. Ergo sicut [non] est proportionatus lapis intellectui creato pro sui materialitate, ita nec Deus pro sui immaterialitate. Ergo sicut lapis videtur per similitudinem, ita et Deus. ... Unde sicut in visione corporali tria sunt, scilicet oculus bene dispositus, et obiectum movens, et impressio obiecta super oculum, ita est in visione gloriosa. Est enim concursus trium luminum quorum unum, id est increatum, est obiectum. Aliud sanat intellectum, ut sit potens videre Deum, quod est habitus gloriae. Tertium est lumen impressum super intellectum per quod formaliter Deus videtur. Sicut anima videt se ipsam per essentiam suam praesentem, et nihilominus per similitudinem aliquam a se expressam. Ita Deus essentialiter videtur et immediate, et tamen per aliquam speciem disponentem intellectum”.

<sup>10</sup> William de la Mare, *Correctorium fratris Thomae*, ed. P. Glorieux, in *Les Premières polémiques thomistes: I. — Le Correctorium Corruptorii “Quare”*, Kain, Le Salchoir 1927, pp. 1-5.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super Sententiis*, IV, dist. 49, q. 2, a. 1, in Sancti Thomae de Aquino *Opera Omnia*, t. XII (above, n. 4), p. 220: “In rebus autem naturalibus res per se subsistens non potest esse forma alicuius materiae, si illa res habeat materiam partem sui: quia non potest esse ut materia sit forma alicuius. Sed si illa res per se subsistens sit forma tantum, nihil prohibet eam effici formam alicuius materiae, et fieri quo est ipsius compositi: sicut patet de anima. In intellectu autem oportet accipere ipsum intellectum in potentia quasi materiam, et speciem intelligibilem quasi formam, et intellectus in actu intelligens erit quasi compositum ex utroque. Unde, si sit aliqua res per se sub-

explicitly.<sup>12</sup> Rather, he mentioned the role that the materiality or immateriality of an object has in intellectual cognition only in passing, to illustrate the special way God can be said to be the form by which a created intellect cognizes him in the beatific vision. I believe that there is a good reason why Aquinas did not explicitly claim that intelligible species are required only because of an object's materiality. Saying so would suggest that any intellect – including the human intellect – could, in principle, cognize immaterial things (as is the case in the beatific vision). But this is a claim that Aquinas is committed to denying: the proper object of the human intellect is the quiddity of material things – separate forms are beyond the limits of what is cognizable for human beings (for humans, separate forms are literally unintelligible).<sup>13</sup> This might also explain why Aquinas did not consider the occurrence of an intellectual act without an intelligible species (such as the beatific vision) as the ideal case of intellectual cognition; quite the contrary, he viewed it as a limit case, in which the form of the cognized thing is, exceptionally, not present in the cognizer as a form inhering in the cognizer. Even in that case, however, Aquinas held that something must play the role of the intelligible species and make the intellect actually cognize its object by playing the role (as it were) of its form (*quasi forma*). By contrast, the view William de la Mare attributed to Aquinas is the same Pecham had already attributed to him, namely that an intelligible species is needed only when the object of cognition cannot be present by itself to the cognizer.<sup>14</sup> According to this view, far from being an essential feature of cognition, the intelligible species is a “second best”, so to speak, to which the intellect resorts when the object is not available by itself. As I have mentioned, John Pecham and William de la Mare were not entirely off the mark when they attributed this view to Aquinas – for Aquinas himself, when dealing with the beatific vision, conceded that a likeness of the object is needed only when the object, due to its materiality, cannot become one with the intellect. By contrast, when this is possible, as in the case of immaterial objects and most of all of God, there is no need for a likeness, and the object (God, in this case) can play the double role of what is cognized *and* of that by which the intellect is made one with the object. Thus, an intelligible species seems to be required only when the object's intelligibility is less than optimal due to its materiality. But Aquinas had made this claim almost as an aside – if developed, it would be in tension with his standard view that to have an intelligible species in one's intellect is a necessary requirement for cognizing something (or, arguably, is *just* cognizing something). By contrast, Pecham and William de la Mare focused on this passing mention in Aquinas presumably because it was the only way they could make sense of Aquinas's denial, on the one hand, of the need for an intelligible species in the beatific vision and the common assumption, on the other hand, that the beatific vision still counts as an instance of cognition.

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sistens quae non habeat aliquid in se praeter id quod est intelligibile in ipsa, talis res per se poterit esse forma qua intelligitur ... Et ideo, cum essentia divina sit actus purus, poterit esse forma qua intellectus intelligit. Et haec erit visio beatificans”. See also *Summa theologiae* I, q. 56, a. 1 (on angelic self-cognition), quoted above in n. 9.

<sup>12</sup> The point is noted by William de la Mare, *Correctorium fratris Thomae* (above, n. 10), art. 1, p. 1: “Prima (sc., ratio) *quam insinuat, licet non expresse*, est talis: similitudo est necessaria ad aliquam cognitionem sensitivam vel intellectivam, ubi res ipsa non potest esse in sensu vel intellectu: oportet enim quod cognoscibile sit in cognoscente. Illud autem quod non est per suam essentiam in cognoscente oportet quod sit per suam similitudinem. Sed Deus est in intellectu per suam essentiam. Non ergo oportet quod sit per suam similitudinem ...” (italics mine).

<sup>13</sup> See for example Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 88, a. 1, in Sancti Thomae de Aquino *Opera Omnia*, t. V (above, n. 3), pp. 364–366.

<sup>14</sup> See William de la Mare's passage quote above, n. 12, and Pecham's passage quoted above, n. 9.

In those years, de la Mare was not the only one to read Aquinas this way. When grappling with this difficulty in Aquinas's theory of cognition, both Henry of Ghent and Giles of Rome adopted the very understanding of the intelligible species we find in William de la Mare.

### 3. Reshaping the Intelligible Species: Giles of Rome's Early Works

Let us now turn to Giles of Rome. From the beginning of his career, he adopted Aquinas's view that there is no species in the beatific vision. Around 1270, at about the same time as Pecham's attacks against it, Giles embraced Aquinas's view when commenting on the fourth book of the *Sentences*, as witnessed in the *Reportatio* Concetta Luna discovered and edited in 2003.<sup>15</sup> It is interesting to consider how Giles defended Aquinas's claim in this early work. He did not mention Aquinas's arguments against the presence of an intelligible species. Instead, Giles's main point was that something is intellectually cognized by way of a species present in the cognizer's intellect only because of the "weakness" of the thing being cognized. By referring to Aristotle's example of a rock (*De Anima* III 8, 431 b 29 – 432a 1), Giles claimed that an intelligible species is required only because of a *debilitas intelligendi passiva a parte lapidis*.<sup>16</sup> So even from this short mention in the *Reportatio*, it is clear that, already at the beginning of his career, Giles adopted the view that intellectual cognition occurs by way of species only as a second best, when the object lacks complete intelligibility and, accordingly, is not apt to be present by itself in the cognizer.

To support his claim that a species is required in intellectual cognition due to a defect in intelligibility on the object's part and not a defect in the cognizer's intellectual capacities, Giles affirmed that even God, who is the perfect cognizer, knows material things by way of those things' likeness and not by their very essence—the likeness in question being God's essence.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, saying that an intelligible species is required in the beatific vision would mean positing a lack of intelligibility in the object of the beatific vision, namely God, and this is unacceptable. Behind the apparent similarity with Aquinas's view (both deny that there is an intelligible species in the beatific vision), even at such an early stage of Giles's career there is a remarkable difference between his and Aquinas's approaches to this topic. For Giles, intelligible species are not needed to inform the intellect and make it actually think about something, as is (at least ordinarily) the case for Aquinas. Rather, Giles held that intelligible species are needed because and only when an object is not intelligible enough. What, for Aquinas, was the standard case of cognition – namely, the cognition of material things – becomes, for Giles, a less-than-ideal cognitive event in which a patch must be introduced to fix the object's lack of intelligibility. Although this might sound slightly paradoxical, Giles's view is that the standard objects of cognition in our present state are

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<sup>15</sup> Aeg. Rom., *Reportatio Monacensis super librum IV Sententiarum*, q. 23, in *Reportatio Lecturae super libros I-IV Sententiarum. Reportatio Monacensis. Excerpta Godefridi de Fontibus*, ed. C. Luna, SISMEL-Edizioni del Galluzzo, Firenze 2003 (Aegidii Romani Opera Omnia III.2), pp. 481-2.

<sup>16</sup> Aeg. Rom., *Reportatio Monacensis super librum IV Sententiarum* (above, n. 15), q. 23, p. 482 ll. 30-32: "Sed si queritur utrum mediante specie intelligitur (sc., essentia divina), credo quod non. Non enim requiritur species media ad intelligendum nisi ex parte debilitatis intelligibilis".

<sup>17</sup> Aeg. Rom., *Reportatio Monacensis super librum IV Sententiarum* (above, n. 15), q. 23, p. 482 ll. 35-38: "Unde lapis, quia intelligibile in potentia, intelligitur per speciem. Et hec est ratio quare Deus intelligit lapidem per similitudinem que est divina essentia, non per esse lapidis. Hoc non facit impotentia intellectus divini, sed hoc est debilitas intelligendi passive a parte lapidis".

ill-suited to our intellectual powers, and so require some extra device (a species) to become capable of causing a cognitive act in us.

As is well known, Giles's academic career was interrupted between 1277 and 1285.<sup>18</sup> In that period of forced suspension from official academic activities, he came back to the topic of the intelligible species in the beatific vision. In 1281, he disputed a quodlibetal question at the General Chapter of the Augustinian Friars held in Padua. One of the questions raised concerned the need for an intelligible species in the beatific vision—another indication that, in those years, that was a matter at the center of the theological debate, even in a relatively peripheral area. Again, Giles answered unhesitatingly that no species was needed. And again, some of his reasons are worth stressing. Some of his arguments concerned a species's inability to put us in a beatific state. But in one argument, he developed what he had already held when commenting on the *Sentences* in Paris: the intelligible species is needed because of an object's defect in intelligibility. Now, Giles added some information about what determined this lack of intelligibility. It is because of its coarseness (*grossities*), its composition, and its lack of simplicity that a thing cannot be present in the cognizer's soul. In turn, being present in the cognizer's soul is a necessary (and possibly sufficient) condition for something to be intellectually cognized. It seems safe to posit that coarseness, composition, and lack of simplicity are, for Giles (always one to like triads!), three different ways of describing the same feature: a thing's materiality. Since a material thing cannot be present in the cognizer's soul, it needs to be there by virtue of something immaterial that might act as its proxy. That device is the intelligible species.<sup>19</sup> As I mentioned above, Aquinas, too, referred to the connection between an intelligible species and a thing's materiality. But what Aquinas had mentioned in passing became the foundation of Giles's theory of intellectual cognition and was linked to a complex metaphysical vision involving a hierarchy of things ranked from more simple to more complex, according to their increasing materiality.

#### 4. *The Intelligible Species in Giles's Mature Works*

Around 1286, Giles briefly mentioned the beatific vision in his disputed questions on the cognition of angels. He argued again that no species is needed in the beatific vision. He also claimed again that an intelligible species is required only if a thing cannot be present in the intellect, so it needs a proxy by which it might become present. He also made it clear that the only role of the intelligible species is to stand for the object of cognition. If something can be in the intellect by its very essence, there is no need for an intelligible species. This is the case with God, who is present in us most intimately, as Augustine says (“intimior intimo meo”, *Confessions* III, 6, 11).<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Ch.F. Briggs – P.S. Eardley, “Introduction”, in *A Companion to Giles of Rome* (above, n. 2), pp. 10-13.

<sup>19</sup> Aeg. Rom., *Quaestiones Paduae disputatae*, in G. Bruni, “Quaestiones I-XX a fratre Aegidio Romano Paduae disputatae in Capitulo Generali O.E.S.A anno 1281”, *Analecta Augustiniana* 17 (1939-1940), pp. 125-50, *Pars* IV, q. 2, p. 145: “Item necessitas et causa sentiendi et intelligendi per speciem est sola grossities et compositio sive defectus, et privatio simplicitatis. ... Sed in deo non est defectus alicuius simplicitatis, quia simplex et purus est in termino puritatis et simplicitatis; ergo potest esse per se in anima essentialiter, ergo non est necesse ipsum intelligi per speciem, sed in gloria beatitudinis videtur deus a sanctis completissimo et nobilissimo modo cognitionis secundum quod est possibile creature. Talis autem cognitio et visio est per se, non per speciem, ergo videbitur tunc per se et non per speciem”.

<sup>20</sup> Aeg. Rom., *Quaestiones de cognitione angelorum* (above, n. 2), q. 1, f. 78rb: “Hiis autem omnibus expeditis,

Giles elaborated on this point in his most focused treatment of this issue, the first question of his third *Quodlibet* (disputed in 1287-88). Suppose an object can be present in the intellect, is intelligible in itself, and can cause a cognitive act in the intellect—in that case, held Giles, there is no need for an intelligible species.<sup>21</sup> These three aspects are closely linked to one another. First, a cognitive act can occur only if its cause is present in the intellect. Second, if an object is in itself intelligible, it can be present in the intellect, and so, third, it can cause a cognitive act. By contrast, if an object is not intelligible in itself, it cannot be present in the intellect and cannot cause a cognitive act. It follows that such an object can be present in the intellect only by proxy, so to speak, and can cause a cognitive act only through that proxy.

Let me illustrate Giles's point with an example he did not make but I hope will faithfully capture his position. Suppose you intend to buy some property when you are out of the country where that property is located. In that case, you need your representative to carry out all the legal requirements to acquire that property in your place—as is said in technical jargon, you give your representative “power of attorney”. Note, however, that this does not mean that you own your representative when your representative completes the transaction on your behalf. Acting as a proxy for someone and being their property are two distinct features. The intellect's coming to cognize an object through an intelligible species is analogous to buying a property through a legal representative. Just as, when you buy a property through your legal representative, it is not the case that you come to own the property only after or because you have first come to own your legal representative, so, when the intellect cognizes an object through an intelligible species, it is not the case that the intellect comes to cognize that object only after or because it has first come to cognize the intelligible species. The intelligible species is a causal, not a cognitive intermediary, just as your legal representative is not someone you must own to own the property. If by ‘representationalism’ we mean the view according to which objects are cognized indirectly, by first cognizing their representations, positing an intelligible species does not entail representationalism—and this is true both in Aquinas's understanding of the species as the formal cause of a cognitive act and in Giles's understanding of the species as a proxy of the object of cognition.

Giles added that being limited to a specific time and place and being material are features that prevent an object from being in a soul. And they are the one and only reason why a species is needed.<sup>22</sup>

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restat exequi de quinto, videlicet ad quid deserviat species intelligibilis existens in intellectu et quare oporteat talem speciem ponere. Sed hoc ex habitis est quodammodo declaratum. Non enim oportet in intellectu ponere presentiam speciei intelligibilis nisi ut suppleat vicem presentie obiecti. Quod ergo illa species informet ipsum intellectum vel non informet, hoc accidit. Per se enim est quod ab ipso obiecto intelligibili causetur actus intelligendi in ipso intellectu. Sed (pro: si) obiectum illud non potest esse presens per seipsum, oportet quod sit ibi per suam speciem. ... Ex hoc autem patere potest quomodo Deus intelligitur a beatis per essentiam suam. Non enim hoc est quod ipsa essentia sit forma inherens alicui intellectui creato; sed quia ipsa per essentiam suam sive per seipsam est presens intellectui beatorum, non requiritur ibi species alia que suppleat vicem presentie eius”. Giles explicitly referred to Augustine's passage in *Quodlibet* III, q. 14, in Aeg. Rom., *Quodlibeta* (above, n. 2), p. 174a.

<sup>21</sup> Aeg. Rom., *Quodlibet* III, q. 14, in Aeg. Rom., *Quodlibeta* (above, n. 2), p. 172b: “Si vero obiectum posset esse praesens intellectui et esset intelligibile in actu per se et causaret intellectionem in intellectu, non requireretur ibi species media. Ubi enim ponimus praesentiam rei intelligibilis, non ponimus ibi aliquam speciem mediam”.

<sup>22</sup> Aeg. Rom., *Quodlibet* III, q. 14, in Aeg. Rom., *Quodlibeta* (above, n. 2), p. 173b: “Signanter ergo Philosophus loquitur cum dicit quod lapis non sit in anima, sed species eius. Nam tota causa quare lapis non sit in anima est quia est hic et nunc et quia est quid materiale. Si autem esset penitus separatus a materia, esset penitus immaterialis et posset per seipsum esse”.

Accordingly, Giles claimed that the presence of an intelligible species is accidental to the occurrence of a cognitive act. Some objects require an intelligible species; other objects do not. If the objects we currently cognize by way of intelligible species could be in our intellect by themselves, those objects would cause a better cognitive act in our intellect than they do now. But because of their materiality, our standard objects of cognition carry in themselves a defect in intelligibility and so need an intelligible species to trigger a cognitive act in us. But this does not mean that cognition, in itself, is impossible without intelligible species—actually, cognition without intelligible species is a very desirable state.

Because there might or might not be an intelligible species when cognition occurs, Giles also noticed that it is not entirely accurate to say that we formally cognize by an intelligible species. Rather, we formally cognize by a cognitive act. A cognitive act does indeed inform our intellect any time cognition occurs, because, clearly, there cannot be cognition without a cognitive act. By contrast, the role of the intelligible species is not to inform the intellect or to make it actual (even though, when there is an intelligible species, that species does inform the intellect). Rather, the role of the species is to replace the object in the causal chain that produces a cognitive act when that object cannot be present in the intellect.<sup>23</sup>

### 5. Conclusion

Before closing, I would like to stress a further point. When Henry of Ghent dealt with the beatific vision in the first question of his third *Quodlibet* (1278-79), he defended the same conclusion that both Aquinas and Giles defended: no species is needed in the beatific vision. What is more, his reasons for doing so were remarkably similar to Giles's rather than to Aquinas's.<sup>24</sup> Although I will not dwell on this, I also believe that some of the most basic assumptions of Henry's account of cognition are remarkably similar to Giles's. I am aware that this claim might be surprising considering the disagreement between Henry and Giles about the need for an intelligible species in "standard" cases of cognition, where Henry eventually argued for the demise of intelligible species while Giles defended them. Both Henry and Giles, however, shifted their focus from the intelligible species to the cognitive act to account for the genuinely cognitive aspect of cognitive events. It is because of this shift of focus and because of the different understanding of the role of the intelligible species that I have illustrated above that the possibility of getting rid of the intelligible species becomes a concrete option, and not just when dealing with extreme cases such as the beatific vision and angelic self-cognition. Henry of Ghent took the radical step of eliminating the intelligible species in any cognitive act. Giles did not follow him along that path. But Giles's arguments for not doing so were not based on the assumption that intelligible species are necessary to account for the cognitive nature of cognitive events. Thus, the divide between Henry and Giles about the need for intelligible species in "standard" cases might be a family quarrel (possibly about the disputed legacy of Thomas Aquinas) rather than a deep disagreement about the nature of cognition.

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<sup>23</sup> Aeg. Rom., *Quodlibet* III, q. 14, in Aeg. Rom., *Quodlibeta* (above, n. 2), p. 175a: "Ex hoc autem apparet quod non sit omnino proprie dictum quod per speciem intelligibilem intelligamus formaliter, sed intelligamus formaliter per intellectionem vel per actum intelligendi. Species autem intelligibilis non requiritur nisi ad supplementum vicem obiecti. Si enim obiectum posset esse praesens per seipsum, non esset forma dependens ab intellectu".

<sup>24</sup> Henry of Ghent, *Quodlibet* III, q. 1, in Henrici de Gandavo *Quodlibeta* (above, n. 1), ff. 47ra-48va.

If this is true, the deep divide turns out to be between Aquinas, Henry of Ghent, and Giles of Rome, on the one hand, and John Pecham, William De la Mare, and other Franciscans such as Matthew of Aquasparta, on the other hand. Curiously enough, arguably the most brilliant and influential Franciscan of the next generation of theologians, John Duns Scotus, followed Giles and Henry rather than his fellow Franciscans when he understood cognition not as the reception of an intelligible species but as the occurrence of an act in the intellect. That was why Duns Scotus could introduce the notion of intuitive cognition as a case of intellectual cognition without intelligible species—something Pecham would have presumably rejected as impossible but both Giles and Henry would have presumably considered with interest.<sup>25</sup> The shift from the intelligible species to the intellectual act as the explanatory device in theories of cognition can also be found in Godfrey of Fontaines and Duns Scotus and will be a recurrent theme in later medieval theories of cognition from Ockham on. If my reconstruction is correct, there might be more continuity in the history of theories of cognition between thirteenth-century and fourteenth-century authors than it is usually thought.

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<sup>25</sup> On Duns Scotus's views on intuitive cognition see G. Pini, "Scotus on Intuitive and Abstractive Cognition", in J. Hause (ed.), *Debates in Medieval Philosophy: Essential Readings and Contemporary Responses*, Routledge, London 2014, pp. 348-65.