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From Agent to Active sense: Was there an *Augustinianism-Averroisant*?

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Medieval Augustinians developed an account of perception aligned with what they perceived were the central theses of Augustine's philosophy of perception. According to this theory, perception is not caused by the action of external things on the soul; rather, it is the soul which is the agent of its own perceptual acts, following the affection of the body, as expressed in Augustine's definition of perception as 'an affection of the body that does not go unnoticed by the soul'. In this paper, I do not go into the details of this model but assume its existence as uncontroversial, despite possible disagreements on how to read particular epistemological and metaphysical commitments. This is not the only medieval account of active perception. Following Averroes, some medieval thinkers defended the existence of an agent sense in addition to the traditional five external senses to explain how perception is possible. According to this model, sensory representations or species issued by external material things must somehow gain a special way of being that makes them able to act upon the senses qua faculties of the soul. Debates issued not only about the existence of such a sense, but also about whether it is internal or external to the perceiving subject. In what follows, I am particularly interested in the version of the theory that takes the agent sense to be a power of the soul.

The purpose of this article is not however to investigate this active model of perception as such. Instead, the aim is to show the connection between this Averroist model and the Augustinian philosophy of perception. In order to do so, I will focus on the 'Prince of the Averroists', John of Jandun and his formulation of the problem the agent-sense model is intended to address. Hopefully this will show that both these traditions start from a common concern about the capacity for material objects to generate representations of themselves that, once received in a suitably endowed cognitive subject, trigger a cognitive action or operation. In the case of color generated out of a colored object, once it reaches the eye it brings about an act of seeing. If this account is right, like any Aristotelian would assume, the cognitive act is directly caused by the object. For some authors, this raises two major concerns for some authors: first, how can a material object cause such a representation and, second, how can this representation cause a cognitive act, which is a proper operation of the soul. One way to conceptualize these questions is to reflect on the nature of the representation, a species in

medieval parlance, as it is found both in the medium and in the sense organ: is this species material and if so, why does it not cause the medium and the organ to take on that sensible property, like color? The other way is to understand this species as having spiritual or intentional being and then the question that needs to be answered is: How can such a spiritual entity arise out of a material entity, the physical object in the world?

Medieval authors responded to this challenge in a diversity of ways. One of these ways was to locate this action in the object. Aristotelians like Aquinas and Albert argue that the object acts by means of its form, so that the species is a formal, thus intentional, entity rather than a material one – it is material only in the sense that it is instantiated in matter, although this is a particular way of instantiation, characterized by the matter not taking on the property of the species, like the medium not taking on the color. A second one was to assign this role to agents external to the perceiving subject and the perceived object, like celestial bodies. Some Averroists, like Giles of Rome, defended such a solution. A third one was to assign this to the action of the cognitive subject, and it is here that some Averroists come very close to the Augustinian model of the philosophy of perception. Some Averroists, like Jandun, proposed the theory that there is a sense power that acts on the species in the organ with the explicit aim of upgrading its ontological status from material to spiritual being. Augustinians remain largely neutral with respect to the nature of the species; their concern is rather with the reception of the species in the organ. In their view, reception is a step in the process but is not the act of perceiving itself, as this would entail the passivity of the soul. What these two theories have in common is the refusal to accept that the species, as issued from a material object, has the power to elicit a cognitive act on its own; in other words, the common ground they occupy is that the object is the efficient cause of perception. They claim instead that the soul must play an active role in causing perceptual experience. With significant differences, however: whereas the Augustinian model assigns activity to the sensitive soul, the Averroist assigns activity to a special power of the sensitive soul, the agent sense. My article has, however, a more specific claim: that the borderlines between these two traditions became progressively blurred. The way I intend to show this is by focusing on some of the authors who inquire about the existence of an agent sense and answer negatively, while arguing for the activity of the soul in perception in terms that echo the Augustinian model of perception.

Although there is a substantial amount of scholarship on both of these traditions, rarely has the connection between them been established. One of the few exceptions is Joël Biard, who wrote some seminal articles on the topic, which are indicated in the bibliography and throughout in the footnotes. I hope my contribution will both strengthen and extend his groundbreaking suggestions. It should become clear from the arguments that follow that, although the focus of the paper is on a very

specific historical question, it aims at painting a different picture of our understanding of the development of medieval theories of perception, in particular in two traditions – that of the agent sense and that of the active sense – which emphasize the active nature of perception on very different grounds. Nevertheless, where they agree is on the active nature of this process as against the dominant Aristotelian model. In this respect, my claim is not that some late medieval thinkers programmatically took the two traditions as being one and the same; the claim is rather that their similarity explains how the two distinct questions they aim at addressing are often taken together. In disentangling these questions, I find myself on a similar programmatic path as the renowned medievalist Étienne Gilson (1884–1978).

I. Conceptual Influences

In 1926, the influential scholar of medieval philosophy, Étienne Gilson, published an article in the *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* entitled 'Pourquoi saint Thomas a critiqué Saint Augustin?' This was soon followed up by another article entitled 'Les sources gréco-arabes de l'Augustinisme avicennisant'. In these seminal articles, Gilson argued for two main claims, one general and another specific. The general claim was expressed in the opening words of the earlier article:

On s'accorde généralement à considérer la substitution d'une nouvelle synthèse doctrinale à celle de saint Augustin comme l'événement philosophique le plus important qui se soit produit au cours du XIII^e siècle. S'il fallait indiquer le point critique où s'effectue la dissociation entre l'ancienne scolastique et la nouvelle, c'est sans doute la théorie de la connaissance qu'il conviendrait de choisir.¹

Gilson's general claim states the existence of a progressive but swift replacement of the dominant Augustinian philosophy by the new dominant Aristotelianism. The specific claim is that this transition was operated in the field of epistemology and that for some time elements of both traditions – the old Augustinian model and Aristotelianism in its Arabic interpretation – coexisted. It is in this context that he argued for the existence of the concept of Augustinianism-Avicennizant (*Augustinisme-Avicennisant*) to describe the way medieval thinkers in the early thirteenth century combined, often

¹ Étienne Gilson, 'Pourquoi saint Thomas a critiqué Saint Augustin?', *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* (1926), 6.

unwantedly, the doctrine of the separated agent intellect of Avicenna and the doctrine of divine illumination of Augustinian origin. Gilson's hypothesis concerned 'the influence Avicenna's thought exerted on the nature of medieval Augustinianism',² which is a charitable way of saying that Avicenna's account of the intellect suffused the existing Augustinian one, with arguments from the former used to confirm the latter (and vice-versa). Gilson's specific thesis initiated an important debate, which as such need not concern us here: my aim in this paper is not to revisit, in any way, this issue, not even to consider the merits of Gilson's historiographical approach. Instead, my aim is at a general level to reflect on this kind of historical appropriation of historical ideas by different strands of thought, in this case how different solutions to the problem of certain universal knowledge emanating from two very different philosophical traditions were conflated by some medieval authors into one. One could be inclined to take this historical appropriation for a philosophical misunderstanding, but the fact of the matter is that the appropriation is not fully unwarranted, because these two solutions do share remarkable structural similarities. In a more specific level however I want to take this philosophical conflation as a starting point for formulating a hypothesis of my own concerning the development of late medieval active models of perception.

The controversial claim in this paper is that in the late medieval period, the Augustinian active model of perception was conflated with the debate over the Averroist model of the agent sense.³ Or, how some of the Augustinian arguments for the activity of the soul in perception found their way to the debate over the agent sense. The common thread that explains this assimilation is the refusal by these two models of accepting a fully passive account of sense perception. So, in the same way as we find the conflation of the agent intellect with the illuminative role of God in the Avicennian thought, we find, it will be argued, the conflation of a sense power that is responsible for the spiritualization of the received sense data of Averroes with the spiritual power of the soul that produces its own act of perception. This assimilation is a clear-cut example worth considering by intellectual historians interested in the nature of conceptual change and the possibility of translating concepts among different theoretical frameworks. What exactly should serve as an explanation for this particular case – whether the shared Platonic roots of these two strands of thought on cognition – is beyond the scope of this article.

My claim is simply that the conceptual proximity of these two strands, from an agent sense to an active sensation, allowed for their non-programmatic partial identification by later thinkers. In

² 'Telle est l'hypothèse que, sur un point unique, nous voudrions soumettre à l'épreuve des faits, en recherchant quelle influence la pensée d'Avicenne peut avoir exercée sur les destins de l'augustinisme médiéval', idem, p. 7.

³ I therefore side with E. Mahoney, 'Agostino Nifo's *De Sensu Agente*', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 53 (1971), 119–42 and against James South, 'Zabarella and the Intentionality of Sensation', *Rivista di Storia della Filosofia* 57:1 (2002), [5–25] 25, n. 48.

order to demonstrate my claim, I proceed in the following way. In the first section of my paper I review first the Augustinian model and next the Averroist model. In the second section I consider the way in which the activity versus passivity of perception is debated in the works of some late medieval thinkers that may allow for the conflation of the agent sense with the activity of sensation. Finally, I attempt to draw some preliminary conclusions on the matter that hopefully can be taken as a starting point for further research.

II. From active to agent sense and back

The core thesis of Augustine's philosophy of perception is the nature of the relation between the bodily affections and the soul, expressed in his often-quoted passage from the *De quantitate animae* 23.41 (but found in other works) that perception is 'an affection of the body that does not go unnoticed by the soul'. This has been unpacked in two different aspects: the first is the relation of the soul to the body *simpliciter*, as the principle of life, characterized by a mode of being that Augustine (384–430) describes as 'vital attention': the soul is wholly in each and every part of the body it vivifies or animates. The second is the relation of the soul to the affections of the body, the awareness of which *on their own* by the soul constitutes perception.⁴ It is on this twofold model that late medieval thinkers will build their own Augustinian-inspired accounts.⁵

Implicit in this model, which later medieval thinkers attempted to unpack, is a twofold causal account of the process of perception: on the one hand, the causal interaction between two corporeal things, the object and the sense organ, which is another way of saying between two forms – the form of the object in the object and the form of the object in the sense. On the other hand, the causal event of the soul becoming aware of the affection of the body, which cannot be efficiently caused by the external thing. The soul as a spiritual entity cannot be acted upon by corporeal things. The soul must thus be able to bring about the act of perception – the awareness of the external thing causing the bodily affection – on its own.⁶ In this Augustinian model, the soul cannot be actualized as the result

⁴ This awareness of awareness, as well as the distinction between the form of the thing in the thing and the form of the thing in the sense, are rational events.

⁵ See J.F. Silva, *Robert Kilwardby on the Human Soul. Plurality of Forms and Censorship in the Thirteenth Century*. Leiden: Brill, 2012, 4.2; and J.F. Silva, "Augustine on Active Perception", in J.F. Silva and Mikko Yrjönsuuri (eds), *Active Perception in the History of Philosophy*. Dordrecht: Springer, 2014 79-98 for a detailed examination of these claims and references; see also J.F. Silva & J. Toivanen, "The Active Nature of the Soul in Sense Perception: Robert Kilwardby and Peter John of Olivi", *Vivarium* 48:3-4 (2010), 245-278.

⁶ Whether or not it suffices to avoid this accusation of crossing ontological orders in causation, in order to claim, as Albert the Great does, that 'sensible things do not act upon the soul, but only in the bodily organs [...] the organs however are animated and therefore the motion from the sensible thing reaches the soul' (*De anima in Alberti Opera Omnia*, ed. A. Borgnet, Paris: Vivès, 1890-1895, II.3.1, 98), is another question.

of the causal action of the object bringing about the actualization of the perceiver's power, but simply determined from its general aptitude for knowing to the actual perception of a property of an individual present to the senses.

This question is as much about the nature of the species as it is about the nature of causation. In perception, we have an object that is a material thing and sense organs that are also material things; species generated by the material thing to make itself present to the senses; the senses, which are powers of the soul, which is a spiritual substance. To explain perception is to explain how the species of a thing come to be present in the sense organ in a way that is conducive of perception; that is, come to explain perception in terms of an act of awareness by the soul of the external thing represented by, and generating, the species. The question then becomes: How can the thing generate such species which is ontologically higher than itself? How can the effect be ontologically superior to its cause? The solution is to allow for the interaction between bodies (object and organ) but to deny that the existence of direct causal connection to the soul: this is done by positing a power of the soul, the agent sense, to elevate the ontological nature of the species, in the case of the Averroists; or by positing the soul itself producing from and by itself an internal representation of the thing following the reception of the species in the sense organ, in the case of Augustinians.⁷ I have said something about the latter and will now say something about the former.

The model in question is the theory of the agent sense (*sensus agens*). Like I said before, my concern and interest is with what the theory has to say about the issue of the activity and passivity in the process of perception that allows for the sort of historical appropriation/assimilation that I am arguing for. With that purpose in mind, it comes as no surprise that the focus will not be on Averroes himself – the little he has to say on this in the *Long Commentary on the De anima of Aristotle* –⁸ but on the version of the theory that has proven to have greatest impact in the medieval Latin West: that by the thirteenth-century Parisian Master of Arts, John of Jandun (c. 1280–1328).

According to Jandun, there must be an agent sense in addition to the traditional five external senses. The task of this power is to act on the species received from the material object, making them more spiritual and thus capable of being taken on by a (passive) sense faculty. By doing so, it effects sensation. The reception of the sensible species is not to be identified with perception (*species sensibilis non est idem cum ipso sentire*), as John of Jandun remarks against Bartholomeus of

⁷ See for instance the interesting passage from Peter of Auvergne published in Pattin and quoted by J. Biard ('Le sens actif selon Jean Buridan', in G. Federici Vescovini, V. Sorge, and C. Vinti (eds.), *Corpo e Anima, Sensi Interni e Intelletto dai Secoli XIII-XIV ai Post-Cartesiani e Spinoziani*. Turhout: Brepols, 2005, [227–46], n.14, pp. 232–33), clearly associating the activity of the soul and its nobility in both Averroes and Augustine (interestingly enough Aristotle is also brought into the mix).

⁸ *Averrois Cordubensis commentarium magnum in Aristotelis de anima libros*, ed. F.S. Crawford, II.60, 221. On this, see J.-B. Brenet in Silva & Yrjönsuuri 2014.

Bruges),⁹ but a further explanation is required to account for the species' transition from a physical to the spiritual nature that befits existence in the soul. Arguing against the power of material things to bring about that change, the cause needs to be found in the activity of the subject, either by means of the existence of an agent sense or by means of the active nature of the sensitive power itself. If the former, the act of the agent sense supervenes on the reception of the species, operating the ontological upgrade of the sensible species and therefore enabling it to be received in the passive power;¹⁰ if the latter, the reception is an event in the sense *organ* that is necessary but not sufficient for the perceptual act which is an event of the sense *power*.

In his *De anima*, especially question 16 of book 2, Jandun asks about 'whether there is an active power of sensation or agent sense'.¹¹ The question begins by an acknowledgment that 'some of the modern doctors in philosophy have inquired about this same question and after much debate and consideration have answered negatively'.¹² I take the disjunction here to have a philosophical meaning by suggesting an alternative, rather a slip of the tongue (or of a 'quill pen' to be more precise). According to these doctors in philosophy, who are in the majority, all the powers of the sensitive soul are passive with respect to sensible things,¹³ which are the efficient causes of perception. If that were not the case, one would perceive even in the absence of any external object, but simply be able to bring about one's own acts of perception.¹⁴ For these philosophers and their followers (*sequaces*), Jandun remarks, there is no need to posit an agent sense because the species of the external thing acting on the senses is the immediate per se active principle of perception.¹⁵

Jandun strongly objects to their view, which he takes to be 'against both Aristotle and the truth' because for the Philosopher, the species are accidents and, as such, cannot act upon something that is nobler than them like a power of the soul, eliciting perceptual acts.¹⁶ Again and again Jandun

⁹ See A. Pattin, *Pour l'histoire du sens agent*. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1988, 116.

¹⁰ J.-B. Brenet, 'Agent sense in Averroes and latin Averroism', in J.F. Silva and M. Yrjönsuuri (eds.), *Active Perception in the History of Philosophy*. Dordrecht: Springer, 2014, 150.

¹¹ I use the following edition: *Ioannis de Ianduno viri acutissimi super libros Aristotelis de anima subtilissimae quaestiones*, Venice 1552, colls. 32r–37v.

¹² 'Quidam autem modernorum doctorum in filosofia inquisiverunt de ista quaestione, & post multam disputationem & considerationem determinaverunt eam ad partem negativam, dicentes in anima sensitiva nullum esse sensum activum ipsis sensationis', Q.16, 32vb.

¹³ '... sed omnes virtutes ipsius animae sensitivae esse passivas a sensibilibus', Q.16, 32vb.

¹⁴ '... si esset sensus agens, tunc contingeret animal sentire absente sensibili', Q.16, 32vb.

¹⁵ 'Sed, si quaeritur ab eis, quid sit immediatum per se principium activum sensationis, ipsi multum diversificat in hoc. Dicit enim unus & Prior, quod species rei sensibilis est immediatum per se principium activum ipsius sensationis, eo modo quo actus secundus indiget agente, sicut etiam species intelligibilis est immediatum principium & activum & elicativum intellectionis', Q.16, 32va.

¹⁶ 'species rei seu formae sensibilis non est simpliciter nobilior quam virtus animae sensitivae [...] species sensibilis est quodam accidens', Q.16, 32va. The argument could also be formulated (as Jandun does) by appealing to two central assumptions: that to bring about its own act is superior to being actualized by something else; and that to be active with respect to another is superior to receiving something from another, i.e. to produce a change is superior to being acted upon.

disparages against the view that sensation is caused by sensible species, because that would entail their ontological superiority with respect to the soul and its powers, which is absurd (*quod est absurdum*). Instead, he claims, functions proper to living beings must be caused by the same principle responsible for their being alive: that principle of animation is the soul, which means that the (sensitive) soul must have in itself a power that is per se active in sensation.¹⁷ Jandun suggests that this can be framed in syllogistic form (q.16, 32rb):

A power of the cognitive soul is nobler than an accident, which can exist in inanimate things,
The sensitive power is a power of the cognitive soul whereas the species is an accident,
Therefore, the sensitive power is nobler than the species

A cognitive power is nobler than a non-cognitive power
Sense is a cognitive power whereas the species is non-cognitive
Therefore, sense is nobler than the species

Extra-mental things are able to generate species which are able to impress themselves on the sense organs, but lack the power to bring the sense to its act of sensing (Q.16, 35va). (To claim otherwise, would be to claim that the species are nobler than the sense, ‘which is impossible’ (Q.16, 36rb). Moreover, if it were the case that the external thing, via the species, were the efficient cause of sensation, then whenever the species were received in the sense organs, sensation would issue; but that is not the case, which speaks instead for taking the act of sensation as something else in addition to, and not causally dependent on, this reception (Q.16, 36rb). From these ontological and epistemological difficulties, it follows that sensation must originate in an immediate active principle per se;¹⁸ therefore, there must inhere in the soul a natural power that is active in sensation, which he calls the agent sense.¹⁹

Jandun insists therefore that, contrary to some of ‘our colleagues’ (*sociorum nostrorum*), sensation is a proper end to the animal nature – *finis per se intentus a natura animalis* – and as such cannot have a cause which is external to it, but exhibits an internal principle of agency.²⁰ The implicit

¹⁷ ‘... necesse est in anima sensitiva esse virtutem naturalem per se activam sensationis’, Q.16, 33ra.

¹⁸ ‘sensatio necessario indiget aliquo per se principio actiuo immediato’, Q.16, 32va.

¹⁹ ‘Et dico ad presens, sicut alias dixi, quod necesse est in anima sensitiva esse virtutem naturalem per se actiuam sensationis. & haec postest vocari sensus actiuus’, Q.16, 32va.

²⁰ ‘Alius vero sociorum nostrorum, de quo tactum est, dixit, quod sensatio non indiget aliquo per se principio activo & quod ipse sensus non est in potentia essentiali ad ipsum sentire. Sed salva amicitia eius Mihi videtur quod ipse peccat, quia, cum sensatio seu sentire sit finis per se intentus a natura animalis, necesse est ipsum habere in animali causam per se agentem’, Q.16, 33rb.

metaphysical premise in the argument is that anything able to intentionally produce a given effect – in the sense of being the kind of thing that has the conditions for it – must be the efficient cause per se of that effect. Applied to living beings, sensing is the kind of effect intended by the animal's own nature and thus cannot be caused by the thing that is sensed.²¹ Instead of talking of material to spiritual causation, it is therefore better to say that the species representing the sensible object is received in the sense organ and on the basis of this reception, the sense brings about or elicits its actuality from its own nature.²² Sense is not transformed as the result of this impression in the organ and remains per se active in its operation and therefore the principle sensation is internal to the perceiver.²³ In his own words:

I consider the natural power of the soul completely efficacious of this act, which is to sense.²⁴

Whereas the species contribute to perception by being on their own (*per se*) the immediate principle of receiving sensation,²⁵ the agent sense is the immediate active principle of sensation by acting on the passive sense disposed by the species generated by, and representative of, the external thing.²⁶ Jandun expresses this by saying that 'sense receives sensation by means of the species received' (Q.16, 33vb).²⁷ Sense must receive the species in order to operate, otherwise it would operate at will, without any corresponding objects;²⁸ this reception functions as the necessary disposition or preparation (*praeparatio*) for the reception of the completing or perfecting act of sensing by the power of the soul (Q.16, 35rb). Jandun hence introduces a distinction between two aspects of any one of the five sense modalities, one passive and another one active: the passive sense (*sensus passivus*) is the subject of sensation and that in which (*in quo*) sensation is received, by receiving the sensible species

²¹ 'ipsa sensatio est quidam effectus per se intentus ab animali [...] naturae est quid per se intentum ab illa natura [...] sentire est finis ipsius animalis', Q.16, 32va.

²² 'Item, in verbis istius, si bene considerantur, conceditur nostrum propositum, dicit enim quod, *cum sensus habuerit in organo suo speciem representantem ipsum sensibile, exhibit sensus in actum suum de se absque quod ad actionem transmutetur ab aliquo per se agente, ita quod suum actum eliciet ex sui natura*', Q.16, 33vb (emphasis added).

²³ 'ergo sensus est per se activus sui actus. & sic habeo, quod sensatio dependet ab aliquo principio activo per se', Q.16, 33ra. Jandun scornfully dismisses the view according to which the agent sense would act directly upon the external thing in order to make it generate its representations (*intentiones seu species*): Q.16, 33vb.

²⁴ 'Sed pono virtutem naturalem animae omnino effectivam huius actus, qui est sentire', Q.16, 33rb.

²⁵ 'species sensibilis est immediatum per se principium receptivum sensationis seu ipsius sentire', Q.16, 33ra.

²⁶ 'Istis rationibus coniunctis dico, quod necesse est esse sensum agentem modo predicto, scilicet, quod est immediatum principium activum sensationis in sensu passivo disposito speciem rei sensibilis a sensibili generato', Q.16, 33rb. On a similar reading, see Jean Baptiste Brenet, *Transferts du sujet*. Paris: Vrin, 2003, 182.

²⁷ 'Ex his arguo sic, si species sensibilis non est per se principium actuum sensationis, necesse est ut sensus agens fit eius actiuus', Q.16, 33vb. On how this model is seen to transfer to the passive sense-agent sense relation, the same problems are found in the species-sense relation, with special focus on Zabarella, see J. South, 'Zabarella and the Intentionality of Sensation', 19–20.

²⁸ 'sensus nunquam recipiat actum sentiendi sine specierei sensibilis', Q.16, 33vb. See also Q.16, 35vb, where Averroes argues against a completely active sense, like the view proposed by the Ancients (*sicut dixerunt antiqui*).

which dispose it to the reception of the act of the agent sense; the agent sense (*sensus activus* or *agens*), on the other hand, is the active principle of sensation that brings about the act of sensing (*efficit actum sentiendi*).²⁹ This distinction is introduced because, for Jandun, sensation cannot be directly caused by the substance of the soul, but rather the soul only operates by means of its powers (Q.16, 33ra). It is at this moment in the argument that the Averroist model parts ways with the Augustinian model: the issue is not so much that the soul cannot directly produce sensation, but rather that there is one aspect of the same soul that is passive as the result of receiving the sensible species.³⁰

What I would note now – and this is essential to my argument – that in this text (as in others, as we shall see) the debate about activity occurs at two levels: on the one hand, as the defense of a particular sense, the agent sense, in addition to the five sense modalities; on the other, as a general description of the activity of sense. In other words, the core of the debate is about whether the act of perception can be efficiently caused by the object or requires another efficient cause, as Averroes himself seems to suggest.³¹ As we have just from Jandun’s formulation of the problem, the issue of activity can be about the relation between two aspects of the sense power – the one receptive, the other active – and about the relation in non-causal terms between the reception of the species in the organ and the operation of the sensory power. It is this latter reading that potentiates the assimilation of the Averroist with the Augustinian model, so I claim, with both arguing against the view that takes the external object via the species as the efficient cause of perceptual acts.³² The way I shall attempt to show how the connection between these two strands of thought develops is to present the view of later authors, who are committed to the activity of sense notwithstanding their rebuttal of an agent sense. In other words, I demonstrate that these authors keep the core thesis common to both strands – that perception is active in the sense of having an efficient cause internal to the perceiving subject – while dismissing the additional agent sense specific to the Averroist tradition.

III. Activity without agent sense

II.1. Buridan

²⁹ The overall claim then is that there are only five external senses, but that each of these has a passive and an agent sense (‘unicuique sensui passiuo correspondet virtus actiua sensationis’, Q.16, 34rb; ‘sensus actiuus est in eodem organo cum passiuo’, 146); the agent sense is not an extra sense, a sixth sense as it were, above and beyond the five sense modalities established by Aristotle, but an aspect of any sense modality. On the full argument, see 143–49.

³⁰ ‘[continuation of the text quoted in footnote 24] recipitur huiusmodi actus in quadam alia virtute naturali animae informata & preparata specie rei sensibilis, quae ipsum sensibile representat’, 33vb.

³¹ Comm. II.37, ed. Crawford 188; see Sobol, p. lxxix. On the distinction between the two issues, see Sobol 1984, p. lxxxii.

³² Jandun explicitly asserts that the reason why Averroes introduced the issue of the agent sense was because he took as a fact that the object cannot move the senses (to actual sensation); see Q.16, 35rb.

I start with the question *whether sense is a passive power* in book II of a *Quaestiones in De anima* attributed to John Buridan and edited by Pattin (1295/1300–1358/61).³³ In this question, Buridan argues that we should resist the idea of taking the object as the main cause of perception because the soul is the cause of the body as an agent and the senses, as part of the soul, must be active rather than passive.³⁴ Operations of the soul, such as sensation and understanding are immanent actions, which means that they must be explained by an internal active principle.³⁵ That the senses must be active follows from the fact that to act is more noble than to be acted upon, and this ontological superiority belongs more properly to the soul than to the object.³⁶ Moreover, we give names to things for a reason and that is why the object is called the sensible thing (*sensibile*), i.e. *that which can be sensed*, whereas the sensing subject (*sensitivum*) is so called because it is *that which can sense*.³⁷ But to grant to the soul the role of active element just goes halfway in explaining the process of perception; we need to understand what exactly this activity means. First of all, to perceive does not mean the same as receiving the species of external things, otherwise the air in the medium would also be sentient.³⁸ This should not be taken to mean that the reception of species is not necessary for perception; on the contrary:

although sense really has the potentiality for receiving sensation, it has not the sufficient actuality to produce the act of sensation without the sensible species, which must be made by the external object.³⁹

Buridan argues that ‘sense, that is the sensitive soul, is an active and passive power’:⁴⁰ it is active because it is productive of sensation and passive because it receives the sensible species in the sense organ. The soul uses the sensible species in the organ as its instrument in the same way the vegetative

³³ John Buridan, *Quaestiones in De anima*, edited by A. Pattin in *Pour l’histoire du sens agent*, 241–60; edited as question 9 of book II by Peter Sobol in *John Buridan on the Soul and Sensation: An Edition of Book II of His Commentary on Aristotle’s Book of the Soul, with an Introduction and a Translation of Question 18 on Sensible Species*. Ph.D. dissertation: Indiana University, 1984, 124–45.

³⁴ ‘... manifestum quod Aristoteles volens declarare quod anima est causa corporis sicut agens [...] Ideo debet dici quod sensus est virtus activa’, 241.

³⁵ ‘... sensatio et intellectio sunt actiones immanentes [...] Igitur sensus est agens sensationem; igitur est virtus activa’, 242.

³⁶ ‘Consequentia ut prius, quia eius operatio est nobilior, cum agere sit nobilior quam pati et sensibile ageret sensationem ad quam sensus non se haberet nisi passive’, 242.

³⁷ ‘Notandum est igitur quod “sensibile” est illud quod possibile est sentiri et “sensitivum” quod est potens sentire’, 242.

³⁸ ‘... sentire non significet adaequate idem quod habere in se speciem illius sensibilis quia tunc era sentiret’, 243.

³⁹ ‘Licet sensus bene sit in potentia ad recipiendum sensationem, tamen non est in actu sufficienti sine specie sensibili ad agendum istam, quam tamen speciem oportet fieri ab objecto exterior’, 260.

⁴⁰ ‘... sensus, id est anima sensitiva, est virtus activa et passiva. Dico virtus activa quia ipsa est potentia vegetativa et motiva secundum locum et etiam quia ipsa agit ad sensationem producendam, ut dicitur postea. Dico etiam quod est virtus passiva, quia ipsa recipit sensationem, ut dicitur postea’, 244.

soul uses heat as the instrument for taking nourishment. The object also contributes to the causal account of the process by being that which generates the sensible species received in the sense organ of sense by means of which the soul realizes the act of perception.⁴¹ It is clear that the soul does not make the species in the sense organ,⁴² but it receives it from the object via the sense organ:⁴³

as the sensible thing does not act except via the sensible species and the soul does not receive it but only the organ, it is clear that the sensible thing does not act on the soul which is the sense. And hence the sense is in no way affected by the sensible thing. Similarly, I believe that properly speaking the sensible thing in no way acts in the sense. Therefore, the sense, i.e. the sensitive soul is in no way acted upon by the sensible thing.⁴⁴

The soul is not affected by the external thing but rather sense is affected or acted upon by the object to the extent that the organ of sense is affected.⁴⁵ Buridan insists in this very basic distinction between the passive physical reception of the species in the bodily sense organ and the psychological act of the sensitive soul actively producing or making sensation.⁴⁶ If, however, perception is not simply the reception of the species, but the action of the soul that follows this reception, which produces a perceptual act,⁴⁷ does this entail the existence of an agent sense? Buridan replies that

the sensitive soul [both] in us and in non-rational animals acts in the production of sensation and this way must be called agent sense.⁴⁸

In other words, there Buridan's view is that we must take the soul, which is the main agent of perception in producing the act of perception proper, as the agent sense of the Averroist tradition. The activity of the soul is not, however, restricted to the perceptual act, like that of seeing, but includes

⁴¹ 'Sed quia non est alia res sensus agens et sensus patiens, sufficiebat igitur distinguere organa in quibus fiunt sensationes et obiecta a quibus fiunt species sensibiles in illis organis per quas species anima exercet actum sentiendi', 260.

⁴² '... anima non agit ad productionem speciei sensibilis in organo sensus exterioris ut in oculo', 244.

⁴³ '... anima nihil operatur passive ad recipiendum speciem sensibilem in organo sensitivo', 245.

⁴⁴ 'cum enim sensibile non agat nisi speciem sensibilem, nec anima recipiat illam, sed organum solum, videtur quod sensibile nihil agat in animam quae est sensus. Et sic sensus nihil patitur a sensibili. Similiter credo quod sensibile nihil agat in sensum proprie loquendo. Et sic etiam sensus, id est anima sensitiva, nihil patitur a sensibili', 251.

⁴⁵ 'anima non patitur proprie a sensibili, sed dicitur pati ab eo secundum improprium locutionem et attributionem, scilicet ex eo solum quod subiectum in quo est, scilicet organum, patitur a sensibili', 251.

⁴⁶ '... Secunda conclusio est quod organum subiectum animae se habet ad speciem sensibilem apud sensationem passive scilicet in recipiendo illam speciem et obiectum, active scilicet in producendo eam, quia vel anima vel organum se habet passive ad illam, sed non anima, ut dicitur postea, ergo organum', 244.

⁴⁷ 'Item, anima non agit ad productionem speciei sensibilis et ipsa agit ad productionem sensationis', 258.

⁴⁸ '... anima sensitiva sive in nobis, sive in brutis, agat ad producendam sensationem et quod sic debeat dici sensus agens', 256.

also the apprehending and the judging of incoming sensory information.⁴⁹ Activities of this kind are not limited to the human soul, but Buridan admits that the sensitive soul of non-rational animals is capable of at least certain types of judgement, such as a dog judging a voice as being that of his owner.⁵⁰

In question ten of his *De anima commentary*, Buridan inquires further about whether an agent sense is required for perception. In a very scholastic fashion, he starts by presenting arguments in favor. The first such argument focuses on the hierarchical nobility of powers: the nobility of a power is determined by the nobility of the function that is proper to it. In the case of the sensitive soul its proper function is sensation; therefore, if sensation were caused by an external object, then things like stones would be nobler than the soul.⁵¹ That this is false is particularly clear in the case of human beings, whose power of sensation serves the intellect, in contrast to the sensitive powers of non-rational animals which ‘just’ serve the purpose of persevering in life.⁵² Elaborating on the model of the intellect, which requires an active and passive power, Buridan argues that also in the senses there must be both receptivity and activity, with passivity referring to the reception in the sense organs of sensible species and activity to the soul. Both in us and in other animals, the sensitive soul is active in perception, its activity being expressed in the production of perceptual acts:

Therefore, it is false to say that the sensitive soul does not produce its own sensation.⁵³

Displaying such a commitment to the activity of sense does not however entail commitment to the existence of an agent sense; that is, the existence of a special sense in addition to the traditional five sense modalities. Buridan is clear in noting that activity means neither a new power in the sensitive soul, nor an operation of an existing power but rather that *the soul* is productive of sensation.⁵⁴ In other words, what is active is not a special power of the soul but the soul as such.

⁴⁹ See also q.10, 154–55.

⁵⁰ On this, see Biard 2005, 235-ssg.

⁵¹ ‘Supponebant enim quod non argui posset nobilitas potentie nisi ex nobilitate operationis vel modi operandi.[...] Si dicatur quod non agit eam [anima sensitiva] sed solum patitur et recipit eam, tunc oportet dicere quod obiectum agit eam, etiam tamquam principale agens, et non potest argui maior nobilitas anime sensitive quam ex sensatione, cum ista sit eius nobilissima operatio’, edited by Peter Sobol in *John Buridan on the Soul and Sensation: An Edition of Book II of His Commentary on Aristotle’s Book of the Soul, with an Introduction and a Translation of Question 18 on Sensible Species*. Ph.D. dissertation: Indiana University, 1984, q.10, pp. 147–48.

⁵² ‘Ymo etiam sensatio sit nobis data ad serviendum intellectui quantum ad intelligere, tamen brutis non videtur esse data nisi ad nutritionem vel augmentationem vel similis generationem et omnino ad necessitatem vite exercendam et procurandam’, q.10, 149–50.

⁵³ ‘Igitur falsum est dicere quod anima sensitiva non agit ipsam sensationem’, q.10, ed. Sobol, p. 149.

⁵⁴ ‘anima sensitiva, sive in nobis sive in brutis, agat ad sensationem sentientis producendo, et quod sic debeat dici sensus agens’, ed. Sobol, p. 153. See Biard, p. 235.

I have pointed out already that, for Buridan, the soul's agency is concurrent with the action of the sensible thing; but, up until now I have placed great emphasis on the soul's side of the process. In fact, Buridan seems to fall within what I elsewhere have called a 'hybrid model of perception':⁵⁵ neither the soul nor the object acting upon the sense organ are, on their own, sufficient for bringing about the act of perception (q.10, 155). That the species in the sense organ is not enough is clear because sensation is not simply this reception: to smell an odor is not simply to be affected by the odor.⁵⁶ The species however constitute a necessary disposition, but not a sufficient condition, for sensation (*dispositio necessaria preexigita ad sensationem*). On the other hand, it is clear that smelling the odor cannot take place without the species representing the odoriferous quality of the object being present in the sense organs.⁵⁷ The soul produces sensation, it does not produce species.⁵⁸ There is no sensation without an external object (*non fit sensatio sine obiecto exteriori*, 159), meaning that prior to this reception the sensitive power remains in a state of potentiality;⁵⁹ when this reception takes place, the soul as the agent of perception concurrently brings about its own act.⁶⁰ This is the opposite of how this 'active' view is described by other authors, e.g. Albert the Great, who in a caricature take activity of a power to mean that it is 'perfect [in the sense of complete] to act without the need of something external'; 'this way', Albert goes on to say, 'the sense should be able to sense without requiring anything external'.⁶¹ But that is clearly to miss the point: *to be active* is not to act without the presence of what the act is about; rather, it simply is *not to be caused* by it. But one issue remains unclear; namely, how can the same thing be both active and passive at the same time? Buridan replies by saying that it is not the same thing in the same respect: the sense organ receives the species (thus is passive) and the soul effects perception (thus is active) (q.10, 160).

Perception is hence a joint venture of the sense, which receives the species (or intentions), and the soul, which produces sensation, i.e. actually perceives. Orthodox Aristotelians have such a strong commitment to equate cognition with causation that for them to deny efficient causal power to the object means to deny cognition; as such, in their view, active theories fail to provide the *explanans* to how we acquire knowledge of the external world. For active theories or at least hybrid

⁵⁵ See J.F. Silva, 'The Chameleonic Mind', (forthcoming).

⁵⁶ 'quasi dicit quod odorare est actus sentiendi adveniens ultra passionem ab odore, scilicet ultra receptionem speciei odoris ab odore', q.10, 157.

⁵⁷ 'species sensibilis se habet ad sensationem tanquam dispositio necessaria preexigita ad sensationem, quia experitur quod non est sensatio nisi organum receperit a sensibili exteriori representationem ipsius, quod vocamus istam speciem sensibilem', q.10, 157–58.

⁵⁸ 'Item anima non agit ad productionem speciei sensibilis. Et ipsa agit ad productionem sensationis', q.10, 157.

⁵⁹ 'licet sensus bene sit in potentia ad recipiendum sensationem, tamen non est in actu sufficienti sine specie sensibili ad agendum istam', q.10, 159.

⁶⁰ 'Et sic expressit satis quod anima est agens ad sensationem et non solum recipiens', q.10, 160.

⁶¹ *De anima* II.3.1, 96. For Albert, sense is a passive power because it cannot be an act except when the external (causing) object is present (*De anima* II.3.1, 97).

models like that of Buridan in these passages, the explanation resides in the power of the soul bringing its own act on the occasion of the sensible species impressed in the sense organ but is not caused by this reception. Accepting the activity of sense, Buridan has no need to postulate an agent sense in addition to the sensory power/sensitive soul.

III.2. Pseudo-Blasius of Parma

Another position skirting some of these issues is found in a text edited by Graziella Federici Vescovini with the title *whether an agent sense should be posited* ('Utrum sit ponere sensum agentem') and attributed to Blasius of Parma (c. 1365–1416). There are however serious doubts that this attribution is correct.⁶² For my present purposes the authorship of this text is not significant; rather what is significant is the existence of such a view, whoever its author was. I shall therefore refer to this author as pseudo-Blasius. Pseudo-Blasius starts with the analogy between the way senses and intellect operate, both including passive and active aspects. According to him, for Aristotle the soul is the agent and efficient cause of all its vital functions, including perception; therefore, as this internal principle, the soul cannot be passive in the perceptual process, but on the contrary it must be active.⁶³

Perception is an immanent (*immanens*) vital operation, which means that it remains in the subject of action, the soul, and that it must be active rather than passive (II.10, 152). It is however not only from this consideration of the soul as the principle of its vital functions that the rebuttal of passivity is argued for. Also from the point of view of the nobility of the senses in contrast with the lower ontological stand of the object: if perception were passive, the sensible thing (the *sensibile*) would affect the perceptual powers as the cause of perception itself (*ageret in sensationem*, II.10, 154). Therefore, he concludes,

sense is the active principle of sensation therefore an agent sense must be posited.⁶⁴

and

⁶² I am grateful to Joël Biard for pointing this out to me in a personal communication, which revises his own view from Biard 2002.

⁶³ 'In oppositum est Aristoteles in secundo huius. Nam dicit quod ipsa anima respectu operationum vitalium se habet multiplici genere esse, scilicet agentis, et efficiens etc., unde dicit quod ipsa respectu operationum vitalium motuum est principium, ex quo videtur animam contrahere ad sensationem. Et, per consequens, non est ponendum animam respectu sensationis esse pure passivam. Ymmo etiam activa', II.10, ed. Vescovini, p. 152.

⁶⁴ 'Igitur sensus est principium activum sensationis et per consequens ponendus est sensus agens', II.10, 153.

Second conclusion: there is [also] an agent sense and not only a passive sense. It seems [to follow] from the above conclusion that the sensitive soul is the main agent of its own operations.⁶⁵

After having stated the existence of this agent power, pseudo-Blasius expands on the issue, clarifying what he means by it. The first thing is that he takes the species to play an important role in the process because without species there is no sensation.⁶⁶ The species, which are issued by the object and multiplied throughout the medium,⁶⁷ are not however the cause of the act of perception. Such causation is impossible due to their low ontological status and what is shown by experiential evidence: if the reception of species was sufficient to bring about or elicit perceptual acts, then whenever species were received perception would take place, which is clearly false.⁶⁸ On the other side, the sensitive soul, higher in that hierarchy, actively concurs to the act of sensation and as such should be considered as the main or primary agent in sensation. Without the sense attending to the species, there is no perception.⁶⁹ This is an important way of arguing: if the sense power were not active as the primary agent in perception we could not demonstrate that the soul is ontologically superior to the object and its species.

To reply to the objection concerning the Aristotelian principle of activity and passivity, pseudo-Blasius distinguishes between the active and the passive sense as two aspects of the same substance:

in receiving the sensible species, it is called passive sense [*sensus passivus*] and in eliciting the common sensation, it is called active sense [*sensus activus*].⁷⁰

It is the same soul which is passive and active, receiving the species in sense (*in sensu*) – meaning the sense organs, which are a composite of body and sensitive soul – and active in concurring to the

⁶⁵ ‘Secunda conclusio: quod est dare sensum agentem et non solum sensum passivum. Patet, nam anima sensitiva est principale agens suae operationis’, II.10, 154.

⁶⁶ ‘si in sensu non est aliqua species sensibilium, non vadit in actum sentiendi’, II.10, 155.

⁶⁷ ‘obiecto praesente, ipsum obiectum multiplicat speciem suam per medium usque ad sensum inclusive’, II.10, 155.

⁶⁸ ‘Alio modo si obiectum et species solum concurrerent ad sensationem, sequitur quod quodcumque species esset in sensu sentiret, hoc est falsum’, II.10, 154.

⁶⁹ ‘non fit sensatio nisi sensus advertat’, II.10, 155.

⁷⁰ ‘Quantum ad secundum sit ista conclusio: sensus activus et passivus non sunt substantiae distinctae, sed eadem substantia est activus et passivus: in recipiendo speciem sensibilis dicitur sensus passivus; et in eliciendo vero sensationem communem dicitur sensus activus’, II.10, 154.

this by eliciting its own act.⁷¹ This is the reason whereby it is said to be the main agent with respect to the perceptual act.⁷² A clear statement is that in which pseudo-Blasius says that

although sense does not make the sensible species, sense makes the act of sensing from the species.⁷³

Which is to say that the act of sensing arises concomitantly with the reception of the species, but has an internal principle of action. To conclude, pseudo-Blasius' view is that the soul is the active principle of all its operations, including perception, and that sense (or the sensitive soul as informing the bodily organ of sense) is passive in the reception of the sensible species in the organ and active in the production of its own act of sensing *upon this reception but not caused by it*.⁷⁴

Despite not constituting the dominant model in the period under examination, the model that takes perception to be not fully passive but requiring the activity of the perceiving subject even without being committed to postulating an additional agent sense, constituted a force to be reckoned with. Waves of this influence were still being felt in the late sixteenth century and it is to that period that I now turn.

III.3. *Conimbricenses*

The running series of commentaries on Aristotle known as the Coimbra commentaries has received renewed attention in recent decades. Their authorship is well established as being the teachers of the Arts College (*Colégio das Artes*) in Coimbra (Portugal), namely Pedro da Fonseca, Manuel de Góis, Baltasar Álvares, Cosme de Magalhães e Sebastião do Couto (here in the Portuguese spelling). The series started with the publication in 1592 of the commentary on the *Physics* and was completed in 1606 with the treatise on *Logic*. In this paper, I concentrate on the *Commentary on the Three Books of Aristotle's De anima*, which was published in 1598 and has been safely attributed to Manuel de Góis.⁷⁵ (In what follows I refer to him as the Coimbra Commentator (CC) or de Góis.)

⁷¹ 'Et cum illa species recipitur in sensu, videlicet in ipso composito ex corpore et anima sensitiva, ipsa anima immediate ipsam speciem movet et *ducit se ipsam in actum sentiendi*', II.10, 155 (emphasis added).

⁷² 'sensus dicitur principale agens respectu actus sensus sentiendi', II.10, 155.

⁷³ 'quamvis sensus non faciat speciem sensibilem, tamen sensus facit quod species sensibilis sit actus sentiendi', II.10, 155.

⁷⁴ 'Sensus enim dicitur virtus passiva, quia recipit speciem ab obiecto et dicitur activa, quia elicit active sensationem mediante illa specie recepta', II.10, 156.

⁷⁵ *Commentarii Collegii Conimbricensis Societatis Iesu, In tres libros de Anima, Aristotelis Stagiritae*, editio prima, Conimbricæ 1598. I use the transcription by Mário Santiago Carvalho, which is available online at: http://www.uc.pt/fluc/lif/publicacoes/textos_disponiveis_online/pdf/de_anima.

In question one of article six of the second book of the commentary, CC starts by presenting the main difficulty for any theory wanting to argue for the activity of the senses: something needs to be received in the senses for perception to be about something. That being the case, however, perception cannot be active because the same power ‘cannot at the same time act and be acted upon’.⁷⁶ De Góis picks this quotation from John of Jandun in his *De anima*.⁷⁷ In what follows, de Góis simultaneously criticizes the agent sense model at the same time that he retains the distinction between the reception of the species in the material sense organ and activity of the sense faculty suggested by Jandun’s theory. De Góis argues against the view that takes senses to be entirely passive, making perception to be the result of the causal action of sense objects upon sense powers. CC accepts that the object is needed in the process as to prepare and dispose the sense to the perceptual act by receiving the likeness of the thing (i.e. the species),⁷⁸ but he goes on to deny that this suffices for or that it can be identified with the perceptual act.⁷⁹ De Góis proposes then to consider the sensitive power in three ways:⁸⁰

- (i) as it receives the species from the object [*ut recipit speciem ab obiecto*]
- (ii) as it produces the act of sensing when informed by the species [*ut ea informata actum sentiendi profert*]
- (iii) as it receives in itself the act [of sensing] [*ut eiusmodi actum in se recipit*]

When considered from the viewpoint of (i) and (iii), sense is a passive power, although in different ways: in (i) it is passive with respect to the external thing, whereas in (iii) it is passive with respect to its own act. But when considered as (ii), that is in so far as it performs its operation, sense is active.⁸¹

The aim of the argument seems to deny that simple reception of sensory impressions suffices for perception, otherwise perception would take place in the particular senses instead of taking place

⁷⁶ ‘Ducuntur uero ea potissimum ratione, quod una eademque uirtus simul pati, et agere nequat’, Book II, Chapter 6, question 1, article 1, page 87 (II.6, 1.1, 87).

⁷⁷ ‘Ducuntur uero ea potissimum ratione, quod una eademque uirtus simul pati, et agere nequat’, Book II, Chapter 6, question 1, article 1, page 87 (II.6, 1.1, 87).

⁷⁸ ‘... quo etiam pacto obiectum sensi[bi]le, quod a sensu re ipsa distinguitur, sensum praeparat, ac disponit, sui ad ipsum transmittendo similitudinem’, II.6, 1.1, 88.

⁷⁹ ‘Aliorum opinio est sensum esse potential tantummodo passiuam. Hi autem bipartita uia incedunt; quidam putant sensum nihil praestare aliud, quam recipere speciem a re obiecta, sicque sensionem non a sensu, sed a re sensibili effici’, II.6, 1.1, 88. The other alternative presents the soul as pure potentiality to receive forms.

⁸⁰ ‘Dicendum potentiam sensituiam tripliciter spectari posse; uidelicet, ut recipit speciem ab obiecto, ut ea informata actum sentiendi profert, ut eiusmodi actum in se recipit’, II.6, 1.1, 89. Something very similar to this account seems to be at play in Zabarella, *Liber de Sensu agente*, chapter 3, p. 384 (Leijenhorst in Silva 2014, 174), with the qualification that (iii) means the reception of the act in the power rather than in the animated sense organ.

⁸¹ ‘Si igitur primo, uel tertio modo consideretur, haud dubie potentia passiuata est; cum sic non operetur, sed patiatur: si secundo, est potentia actiua, quia sic non patitur, sed operatur’, II.6, 1.1, 89.

in the soul. Moreover, if (i) were sufficient as a description of perception, it should apply to all things capable of receiving species — like mirrors (II.6, 1.1)⁸² — entailing also that a perceptual act takes place whenever a species is received in the sense organ (which experience disproves).⁸³ To demonstrate this, CC refers to Nemesius of Emesa who, in his *De natura hominis* chapter 6, distinguishes between the organ of sight and the faculty which informs it. According to Nemesius, in de Góis' reading, if all other requirements are met, that is (i) there is distance between object and subject (ii) the medium is transparent, there can be both action and passion in the process without entailing that the same faculty acts and is acted upon. This is because, de Góis argues by returning to the original quotation from Jandun, the acting and being acted upon refer to two aspects of sense, namely that the organ is affected and the power or faculty is active. The important distinction is between the physical reception and the act of perception as two different and differently caused aspects of the same event that constitutes the particular perceptual experience.

Now, if the same event — the perceptual experience — is given two descriptions, one from the perspective of the sense organ and the other from the perspective of the sense power, the issue to consider is whether the cause of these two aspects is one and the same. CC will argue that it is not. In the text this is followed by an extensive discussion about two classic views on visual perception: (i) that of some Ancient philosophers, especially Plato and the Stoics, that argue for the existence of visual rays emitted by the eyes that constitute the cause of vision; and (ii) a view according to which perception needs to be explained by appeal to the reception of species originating in external material things (II.7, 5.1). CC heavily criticizes the visual ray theory and will ultimately subscribe to a qualified view of the species theory. I cannot however go into this discussion here, but would rather focus on the question of what is the cause of the perceptual experience, that is to say what makes one come to have the sort of awareness of external things the way one does.

De Góis starts by considering that the species play the role of material causes, in the sense of determining the power of perception to a particular object.⁸⁴ Their role is then to constrain a cognitive power that has an unlimited capacity to know all things by determining it to a particular object and a particular operation. But soon after he adds that their role is more significant, contributing to cognition by helping to elicit the operation of the sense power.⁸⁵ CC notes that causes may concur in

⁸² '... asserentem uisionem esse operationem obiecti, quia tunc etiam speculum uideret, cum in eo obiectum per speciem ab eo productam eluceat', II.6, 1.1, 89.

⁸³ 'Adde quod saepe recipimus speciem rei in oculo, nec tamen rem uidemus: quod fieri non posset, si receptio speciei esset uisio', II.6, 1.1, 88.

⁸⁴ 'Sunt qui putent species concurrere tantum in genere materialis causae, determinando uidelicet potentiam, quae discriminatim se habet ad percipiendum quodlibet particulare sub obiecto suo comprehensum, ut paulo supra diximus', II.6, 2.3, 94.

⁸⁵ 'Aduerte autem speciem concurrere non solum actiue ad operationem, uti diximus: sed etiam formaliter, quatenus concurrat ad specificationem actus, determinando potentiam ad hanc potius, quam ad illam operationis speciem', II.6, 2.3,

the production of an effect.⁸⁶ In the same way as the form of the agent resembles the form of the effect,⁸⁷ thus playing a role in its production, also the species produced by the act of knowing resemble the species that give rise to the act of knowing.⁸⁸ In other words, the species has an efficient role to play by acting on the organ,⁸⁹ while the soul concurrently produces the act of knowing. Therefore, both (species and power/soul) are causes of the act of knowing.

The main issue here is how CC distinguishes between the action of the species and the act of the power as not bearing a necessary causal connection. I take this to be an objection to the general metaphysical explanatory scheme of medieval Aristotelianism such as we find in Aquinas, according to which there is a correspondence between the power's being acted upon (in the form of receiving the species) and the perceptual act. The latter just is the former under a different description. This reading is further strengthened by a passage that claims that the attention the soul pays to the object is directly related to the intensity experienced in the perceptual experience.⁹⁰

What CC proposes then is that the determination the species brings about to the power is in terms of the content of that cognitive operation, not the cause per se of the operation. As the result, he prefers to talk about the role of the species in terms of formal cause rather than material (as suggested above) or even efficient cause, which he wants to restrict to the soul proper. The soul is via the senses the efficient cause of its own alteration,⁹¹ as the impressed image of the object is not enough, a point he claims Augustine makes in *De Trinitate* (II.6, 1.1, 89). CC insists unequivocally that the species must be primarily understood as the formal cause, whereas the soul is the efficient cause.⁹² But, what sort of efficient cause? According to CC, different powers of the soul have different modes of action. Whereas the vegetative powers are able to take in nourishment, the sensitive powers

95. See also II.6, 3.1, 97: '...concurrit Socrates ad praedictam uisionem in genere causae formalis extrinsecae, eam terminando, specificandoque'.

⁸⁶ 'Et esse eundem actum sensus et sensibili, idest, tam obiectum quam sensum concurrere ad eundem actum, quia ad actum sentiendi, quem potentia sensitua exercet, concurrit etiam obiectum interuentu speciei, quam in eodem sensu produxit', II.6, 1.1, 89.

⁸⁷ 'Secundo, quia omnis forma agentis, cui per se assimilatur effectus, concurrit actiue ut principium talis effectus [...] quia huius forma [of the species] est similis formae illius [of the object]', II.6, 2.3, 94.

⁸⁸ '...ita ut ambae tanquam duae partiales causae diuersae tamen rationis, seu tanquam duae partes unius integri agentis immediati uires suas conferant, iungantque ad actionem cognoscendi', II.6, 2.3, 95.

⁸⁹ '...multo uerisimilior tamen est contraria, quae statuit speciem concurrere etiam actiue cum potentia ad eius actionem', II.6, 2.3, 94.

⁹⁰ 'Respondemus non ita se rem habere, sed potentiam uendicare suam peculiarem uirtutem ad agendum, similiterque speciem uendicare suam; ita ut ambae tanquam duae partiales causae diuersae tamen rationis, seu tanquam duae partes unius integri agentis immediati uires suas conferant, iungantque ad actionem cognoscendi. Nam quod species suam habeat actiuitatem probatum est. Quod uero illa non sit tota actiuitas potentiae ex eo ostenditur, quia saepe accidit, ut potentia ex eadem specie eliciat intensiorem notitiam; quia nimirum profert ex se maiorem conatum: quod non esset, nisi ipsa haberet propriam actiuitatem distinctam ab actiuitate potentiae', II.6, 2.3, 95.

⁹¹ '[Aristotle] docuit animam esse causam efficitricem alterationis eius, quae scundum functiones sensum fit', II.6, 1.1, 88–9.

⁹² 'Et uero, quia prius est potentiam uniri intentionaliter cum re cognita, quam tendere in obiectum; prius se habet species ut principium formale, quam ut principium efficiens', II.6, 2.3, 95.

are able to cooperate with external things by receiving their likenesses.⁹³ A series of textual references to Ancient authors is intended to stress that de Góis takes Aristotle's view to be that the senses are passively affected by their objects, but de Góis insists that 'senses' here means 'organs of sense'. What he declines is to extend this 'being acting upon' to the sense powers, preferring instead to stress how the powers concur with the species to the production of the perceptual act.⁹⁴ I would like to emphasize how CC returns to the main idea, all things considered, that

even though knowledge proceeds from species, it originates nonetheless in the soul as from the source of life and in so far as it is the cause of the vital actions, whose instruments are the powers and the species.⁹⁵

For De Góis, then, a perceptual act is better characterized as the immanent action of a living being.⁹⁶ A mirror cannot see because as non-living is not capable of the vital acts of cognition. Vital operations, like those of cognitive powers, cannot be caused by the species.⁹⁷ While receptivity is proper to matter, human beings are endowed with divinely given cognitive powers with the aim of knowing the world. CC at some point denies that we need to posit, against the view he attributes to Philoponus, the existence of a faculty that has the function of directing our attention to the objects present to the senses; rather it is the same power (e.g. of sight) that is distracted or paying attention to that particular object.⁹⁸ The species do contribute to perception by acting on the sense organs and this way determining the potentiality to perceive to the particular acting object. Perception is then the result of concurrence of species and power, with the cognitive power as the proper efficient cause. As late as the transition to the seventeenth century, the debate over the passive versus active nature of perception continues to take center stage. Even in hardcore Aristotelian authors, such as the Coimbra Commentators, we see the pervasiveness of the active or at least the hybrid model of perception.

⁹³ '...quaedam potentiae agunt in sua obiecta, ut altrices in alimentum; aliae ab iis patiuntur eorum in se imagines recipiendo, ut sensu', II.6, 1.1, 90.

⁹⁴ 'Ad tertium dicendum Aristotelem eo loco tantum docere potentias sensitivas immutari ab obiectis, non autem negare eas operari simul, concurrente cum speciebus', II.6, 1.1, 90.

⁹⁵ '...licet cognitione ab specie proficiscatur; oriri nihilominus ab anima ut a vitae fonte, praecipuaque uitalium functionum causa, cuius instrumenta sunt potentia, et species', II.6, 2.3, 95.

⁹⁶ 'Sequitur etiam functiones sensuum non esse uitales, siquidem omnis uitalis actio ab interno principio dimanat', II.6, 1.1, 88.

⁹⁷ '...actio uitalis a solo principio uitae, quale species non est', II.6, 2.3, 94.

⁹⁸ '...reiecta opinione Philoponi, et aliorum, qui uirtutem quandam animaduersoriam, siue attentricem finxerunt; dicendum interdum oculum rei praesentis imagine imbutum non elicere uisionem. Uerum id non ex eo prouenire, quod desideretur actio alterius facultatis, cuius sit ad obiectum aduertere; sed quia ipsa uis cernendi non tendit in obiectum; quod tunc accidit, cum in rem aliam uehementi applicatione intendi sumus', III.1, 1.4, 239.

IV. Conclusion

The general argument of this article is that the Augustinian theory of the activity of the soul in perception has become part of the background of the debate concerning the Averroist doctrine of the agent sense in late and very late medieval thought. In these pages, I attempted to show how late medieval thinkers discussed together what originally were two separate issues: one, the existence of an agent sense in addition to the traditional five external senses; the other, the nature of sensation as a passive or active process. The authors examined argued against the Aristotelian passive model, whereby objects via sensible species are the efficient cause of perceptual acts; instead, they take perception to have an internal cause, which produces perceptual acts, concurrently or on the occasion of the reception in the sense organs of sensible species. More importantly, they argued for this despite refusing to accept the existence of a special agent sense; the soul or its power of sensation suffices for this activity. What then started as two distinct strands ended up converging in a model of perception whereby lower physical things cannot bring about or efficiently cause actual sensation. A question that was not addressed in this article but must be central to any attempt to further our understanding of late medieval theories of cognition is the WHY-question: why it became so important to defend the activity of sense or more generally the activity of the soul in cognition? Allegiance to a Neo-Platonic ontological hierarchy of the world, in which material things do not affect spiritual things, or the persistence of epistemological questions about why we fail to perceive things in our visual field if things are efficient causes of perception, provide useful suggestions but might not tell the whole story. Joël Biard has suggested over a decade ago that this activity may be connected to the two central issues in the Franciscan tradition, unity of the soul and the plurality of forms.⁹⁹ As in many other things, he may well also be right on this one. Only future research will tell. Future research will hopefully also reveal whether my suggestion concerning the convergence between these two traditions is justified. Certainly, much work remains to be done in tracing a more finely drawn connection between the dots, but I would still like to insist that the dots are there and that the line I have drawn connecting them may well be thin, but it is there nonetheless.

⁹⁹ Biard 2005, 242; in page 246 he goes as far as to suggest 'Franciscan Augustinianism'. Thank you to Joël Biard calling my attention his article to me and for clarifying discussions. I address the question of the relationship of unity and activity in a different forthcoming article.