Phil 312
Scotus on Intuitive and Abstractive Cognition

1. Relations (q. 13)

Claim: Every [cognitive] operation involves a real relation or a relation of reason.

- **Real relations:** the existence of the two terms is both necessary (13.34: the relata must actually exist) and sufficient (13.34: the relation follows necessarily upon existence of the terms)
- **Relations of reason:** one of the terms may not exist (e.g., an architect thinking about a new house). (Section 13.41)

**Overall structure of q. 13:**
(1) All cognition is either intuitive [grasping its object in a way that comprehends its actual existence] or abstractive [grasping its object but not in a way that comprehends it as actually existing]. [13.27]
   (1a) All sense perception is of the intuitive type.
   (1b) Imagination can be either intuitive or abstractive.
   (1c) Intellectual knowledge (understanding) can be either intuitive or abstractive.
(2) Intuitive cognition involves a twofold real relation between the knower and the known object. [13.34 ff]
(3) Abstractive cognition involves only a potential real relation, but always a relation of reason. [13.40]

So any cognitive operation implies either a real relation or a relation of reason.

2. Two kinds of cognition (Question 6)

*Abstractive cognition:* indifferent as to whether its object exists and is present. [6.18]

- We grasp universals (essences of things) whether or not individual examples exist and are present (e.g., human nature).
- The term on which understanding depends is in the intellect and is equally understood whether the object is there or not.
- Such cognition abstracts from existence and presence.

*Intuitive cognition:* knowledge of a present and existing object as present and existing.

Three proofs that it is possible ((1) and (3) are repeated in Question 13):

(1) **From sense.** Everything sense can do, the intellect can do actually or “eminently”, unless the act involves imperfection. But sense can attain an object as present and existing, and this act does not involve imperfection. Hence, intellect can do this as well.

(2) **Angels.** This must be the mode of cognition for angels: it is how an angel knows itself (and its own acts of thinking).
(3) Beatific vision. The beatific vision of God (in the afterlife) must also be intuitive cognition: otherwise, you could get the benefits of this vision even if God didn’t exist.


(1) Intuitive knowledge.

- This type of knowledge must involve a real relation with the object that implies that the object really exists; otherwise, you do not grasp the object in its existence.

- In fact, intuitive knowledge involves two real relations between mind and object:
  
a. The relation of something measurable to its measure. The likeness in the intellect must ‘measure up’ to the object. [A normative relation and an asymmetric relation: the ‘norm’ is the external object.]

  “X is measured by Y” means: Y (called the measure) makes sure of the specific quantity of X (called the measurable).

  This is a real relation between X to Y (not dependent on our minds). The underlying being which is the reason why something is measurable is caused or ‘participated’ by the measure.

b. The relation of reaching out and coming in contact with the other term (‘becoming one with the term to which one is united’, or “stretching out and extending into the other as term”). The terms of the relation are united (analogy with touch).

(2) Abstractive knowledge.

- has only a potentially real relation, plus a conceptual relation
  
  - does not require a real relationship, since one of the terms (the object) need not be actual (or not known as actual)
  
  - but it can relate to its object as something potentially real: the potential is there for the measurable-to-measure relationship. When the object exists, the likeness in abstractive knowledge is “apt by nature” to depend upon the object qua being a likeness. When the object does not exist, only the aptitude is there.
  
  - The conceptual relation in abstractive cognition: the object of abstractive cognition needs only to be in the intellect; so any actual relation is at most conceptual.

  [Note: this is profoundly different from Aquinas, and may look like idealism.]