

John Buridan (ca. 1295/1300-after 1358)

***TREATISE ON THE SOUL*¹**

Question 26: Whether it is necessary to posit any common sense beyond the external senses?

[642] The question asked is whether it is necessary to posit any common sense beyond the external senses?

[Objections]:

[1.] It is argued that it is not necessary, because either this would be because of the common sensibles or because of the proper sensibles, or at least because of the incidental sensibles, since there are no further types of sensible objects. But this is not because of the proper nor commons sensibles, because we know them sufficiently well through the external senses. Nor is it on account of the incidental sensibles, because those beings are knowable through the external senses, although not in themselves, but through the fact that they are conjoined to the proper sensibles of the external senses. Therefore there is no necessity of positing any sense other than the external ones.

[2.] Again, one account reasonably assign an organ of such a sense, because it seems especially to be in the brain; but it cannot be posited to be in the brain, because, if such a common sense were posited, it would have to be conjoined to the individual external senses, as Aristotle seems to want. Now the brain is not conjoined to the feet, in which, however, the sense of touch is found.

[3.] Again, if there were such a common sense, it would be perceptive of all the proper sensibles, as Aristotle wants. But this seems to be false, because, as Aristotle say, every sense that is one should only be concerned with one pair of contraries and one genus of sensible objects. Therefore [the common sense] is not one sense, if it is perceptive of all of these types of proper sensibles. For one complexion of organ is required to receive the species of colours, and another for receiving the species of sounds or flavours; therefore there cannot be any single sense receptive of the species of this sort. And thus one single common sense of this kind is not to be posited.

Aristotle determines the **opposite**.

[643] Reply:

I say first that beyond the external senses it is necessary to posit another internal sense, which we call the common sense, which is not immuted by the external sensibles except through the mediation of another external sense that was previously immuted. And that conclusion, namely, of the necessity of

¹ *Le Traité de l'âme de Jean Buridan [De prima lectura]*, ed. B. Patar. Louvain: Éditions de l'Institut Supérieur de Philosophie; Longueuil, PQ: Éditions du Préambule, 1991. Translation © Deborah L. Black; Toronto, 2009.

positing an internal sense, can be proven by four arguments.

The first argument is that the external sense is not perceptive of its own act, as I suppose at present, yet nonetheless we sometimes perceive those acts. For you clearly judge not only that this is white or black, or that this voice is sharp or deep,

but you also judge that you are seeing or hearing. Therefore it is necessary to posit an internal sense perceiving and judging the acts of the external senses.

The second argument is that the external sense does not know or judge anything in the absence of the sensible, because it is not preservative of species. Hence we would know or judge nothing for a very short time and without a species, but in the absence of the sensibles we do judge of those very sensibles, positively as well as negatively. Therefore it is necessary to posit another sense beyond the external senses, which knows and judges the sensibles in their absence.

The minor of this argument can be proven as follows: First through the negative judgement, because we judge it to be dark in a room at night in even though external vision perceives nothing; and in the same way we judge it to be silent when external hearing has no sensation through which it can judge. And that mode of judging takes place through an internal sense which has knowledge of the acts of the external sense. Therefore it could know that the external sense is not in act. And in this way when it perceives external vision is not moved to act when the eyes are open, it judges that it is dark; and when it perceives that external hearing is not moved to act when the ears are open, it judges it to be silent.

That minor of the principal argument can be proven because, when the eyes are closed or when things are dark, we apprehend mountains and valleys and stars, and form diverse phantasms within us. And in this case there is not only preservation of the species, but even cognition and actual apprehension of these sensibles, although they are not sensible at present. Therefore, etc.

The third argument is that in sleep, when the external senses are closed, sensibles appear to us as if they were under our gaze; since this simply does not occur through the external senses, because they are closed, it follows that this occurs through another internal sense. And thus the proposition is upheld.

The fourth argument is that we compose and divide the sensibles of different external senses, by positing similarity and difference amongst them: for we judge that this white thing is sweet. And if a person [644] calls a dog and the dog comes to him, the dog will judge that the person whom he sees is the one who was calling him, and he will go to him; now this judgement cannot occur through any [one] external sense nor through many external senses, if there is not another common sense, because vision knows nothing of the calling, but only hearing; therefore it cannot judge that he is calling. And in this way too hearing cannot judge of a properly visible object, nor can both senses compose and divide their proper sensibles simultaneously, because the one positing similarity and

difference between things must know both of them. Hence, as Aristotle puts it so well, if you were to know white alone and I were to know black alone, neither one nor both of us could posit a similarity or difference between white and black: for it is necessary that it be the same power forming an act of composition or division, which it cannot form, if it has not apprehended both of the extremes. By these arguments, therefore, the conclusion proposed at the outset can be drawn.

Secondly, it can be added that the common sense is one sense, namely, it possesses a single organ, and the organs of the external senses terminate and come together at that organ. Otherwise it would not perceive all of the acts of the external senses nor would it posit difference or similarity amongst their objects. And in order that it might be more apparent how this can be true, you should know that three things principally and intrinsically come together in this sense.

First is the sensitive soul, which is the principal form of the body and of the sensitive organ. And by reason of it the common sense is truly one, since it is one in each individual animal and has the same notion [*ratio*] throughout the whole body. For the soul is a simple form in the sense that it is not composed from parts with diverse notion. The second thing that is required is the matter of the organ, by reason of which the sense can also be called one, because the matter is one and undivided in the whole body of the animal, and does not have parts with diverse notions. The third thing which is required is the qualitative disposition of the organ, which is diverse in diverse members, and on account of whose diversity alone are the members and organs called diverse. Hence on account of this sort of diversity, the organs of the external senses are said to be diverse, and the external sense is said to be diverse. And it should also be imagined that with respect to the qualitative dispositions of this sort, the common sense is one in itself and distinct from the external senses. However, you should note that concerning this unity, Aristotle says that the common sense is one and undivided according to number and place; however, it is [645] divided or multiplied in being, which is to say that according to one or another notion it is perceptive of audible things, or visible things, and so on with the sensible objects of the other senses, because insofar as the organ of vision terminates in or is joined to it, it is perceptive of visible things, and thus with regard to the other senses and sensible objects.

Now the [replies] to the objections:

[Ad 1m:] To the first I say that because of the common as well as the proper sensibles, the common sense must be posited, in order to perceive them in their absence and to compare them, as has been said.

[Ad 2m:] To the next some people reply that the organ of the common sense is in the anterior part of the brain. However, in the *Parva naturalia* Aristotle posits that the common sense has its proper organ in the heart. Now all the members conjoin in the heart and receive the vital spirit from it. And a great sign

[of this] is that the common sense thrive in the heart, because, if someone were to touch your hand or foot cruelly, and if you had an abscess on your foot or hand which were touched in such a way as to cause acute pain, everyone would commonly say that the wound went all the way to your heart, and that the pain itself was felt in the heart, and not in the brain.

[Ad 3m:] To the last argument it must be said that Aristotle's phrase, "one sense is of one pair of contraries," should be understood to apply to the external senses. And it is true because in the external senses there is no single complexion suited to receiving one and another of the [sensible] species, but this and that complexion are suitable to receive this and that species; however, in the internal senses the complexion is more subtle and noble, and sufficient for the reception of all species of this kind.

Question 27: Whether there ought to be posited four internal sense powers in humans—the common sense, fantasy, the cogitative power, and the memorative?

[646] The question asked is whether four internal powers ought to be posited in humans: common sense; fantasy, the cogitative power, and the memorative.

[Objections]:

[1.] It is argued that so many are not to be posited. First through Aristotle, who never seems to have posited anything but the common sense, phantasia, and the memorative power [*De an.* 3.1-3, 424b20-429a9].²

[2.] And this is confirmed through the anatomy of the brain: for all anatomists say that there are three chambers and no more in the brain; and it seems that any internal sense whatever should have one chamber as its organ; so indeed it seems that only three internal sense powers should be posited.

[3.] Again: It seems that other cognitive powers over and above the common sense are superfluous, because the common sense is a superior power and is capable of all the apprehensions that the internal powers are capable of, and still more. And therefore we can say that through the common sense we apprehend whatever we can apprehend that is less than the intellect but more than the external senses. Therefore it would be vain to posit any other cognitive power between the common sense and the intellect.³

And this is confirmed because if it were necessary to posit another cognitive power beyond the common sense, this would be for composing and dividing the diverse sensibles, for judging the acts of the senses themselves, and for extracting the intention which is not sensed from what is sensed, as the sheep, from the colour and motion of the wolf, extracts the intention of hostility and flees from it. But it is not necessary to posit anything but the common sense on account of any of these. This is clear: for the common sense can compose and divide, since according to Aristotle it posits the differences and similarities between the sensibles of the diverse external senses,⁴ so that it seems as if Aristotle wishes, and it is also reasonable, that it can extract the intentions which are not sensed, and can do so from the external senses, because otherwise [647] it could not do much beyond what the external senses can do. But this is contrary to the notion of a superior power, because a superior power should always be able to do more; therefore it seems to be superfluous to posit a further cognitive power, or at least one less than intellect.

[4.] Again: Whoever posits the four aforementioned powers, posits that there are two cognitive ones, namely the common sense and the cogitative, and two

² Text: *nunquam videtur posuisse sensum communem nisi phantasia et memorativam.*

³ Text: *alia virtus cognoscitiva inter sensum communem et interiorem.*

⁴ *De an.* 3.2.426b10.

preservative ones, namely, fantasy and the memorative power. Now it seems superfluous to posit these conservative powers over and above the merely cognitive ones, because it is not repugnant to being cognitive to preserve, as is clear first of all in the case of the intellect, which is cognitive, but nonetheless intellectual habits are preserved in it. And the same thing is clear of the external senses which, although they are cognitive, they can nonetheless preserve the sensible species for some time, as it was elsewhere said of vision. Therefore these powers are not to be posited.

[5.] Again, if some preservative power is posited beyond the cognitive ones, it seems that one should suffice: for just as the same sense, namely, the common sense, perceives both the external sensibles and the acts of the external senses, so too the same conservative power can preserve the species of those sensibles, which it is usually said pertain to fantasy, and the intentions of acts, which it is usually said pertain to the memorative power. Therefore only one preservative power, not two, needs to be posited.

[6.] Then it may be argued that there are more [than four internal senses], because beyond the four mentioned above it is customary to posit the estimative power and also the imaginative, and Aristotle often distinguishes between the memorative and recollective powers in the *De memoria*, saying that those who are commonly able to remember are poor at recollecting, and vice versa. And thus the recollective power would be a fifth internal sense.

The opposite the Commentator, Avicenna, and Albert the Great all uphold, along with many other expositors on this book [i.e., the *De anima*] and on the *Parva naturalia*.

[Solution:]

This question is very difficult; therefore it is sufficient for me to recite the probable views given by others.

First, therefore, since the necessity of positing the common sense, or some other cognitive power [than the external senses] has been seen, the necessity of [648] positing fantasy or the memorative power, as well as the cogitative power, as distinct from the common sense, now remains to be seen.

And to this it must be said that beyond the common sense or some other such cognitive power, it is necessary to posit another power which is not cognitive but preservative of the species of the sensibles. This is clear from the following: for when the act of cognizing has finished, as when we are sound asleep, it is still necessary for the species of the sensibles to remain in us, because otherwise we could never apprehend those sensibles unless they returned before us; but it is clear that this is manifestly false, as much in sleeping as in waking. For you can think when you will of those things which you have heard or seen before; but nonetheless those species are not preserved in the cognitive power, because then we would be continually in the act of knowing on account of them. Therefore beyond the cognitive powers it is necessary to posit a conservative

power which is not cognitive. And the authorities say this is fantasy, which is called the imaginative power as an alternative name, because it reserves the images or likenesses of sensible things.

Then one must see why it is necessary to posit more cognitive powers such that the common sense is not sufficient. And concerning this Avicenna, the Commentator, and Albert the Great say that the common sense only knows the external sensibles and the acts of the external senses; therefore it is necessary to posit another power which extracts other intentions that have not been sensed, such as the intention of friendship or that of hostility, or suitability or incompatibility. And they say that this pertains to the cogitative or estimative power. Hence these two names are posited as synonyms, except that we more often use the name cogitative in humans and the name estimative in brute animals. They also say further that the common sense only apprehends through the mode of presence, and if the thing is under our gaze. But the estimative or cogitative powers apprehend through the mode of the past or future in judging that in such a place there was food: for in this way brute animals are moved to a place in which they found food and drink at another time, and in this way you apprehend yourself to have seen or hear this or that. But a persuasive argument can be offered that this pertains to two diverse powers, because in sleep we commonly apprehend things only as if present and as if existing under our gaze; and this only seems to be because the common sense is more quickly and easily freed by the binding of sleep than the cognitive power. Therefore we can then make judgements through the common sense, and nothing yet through the cogitative, because [649] we only judge through the mode of the present alone. Sometimes not only the common sense but also the cogitative power is freed by such a binding, and then at such times we dream with a recollection of things past, that is, sometimes we will dream by syllogizing about universals, which pertains to the intellect, because the cogitative power, which immediately serves the intellect, has been freed from the binding.

Further, it is necessary to see why two preservative powers need to be posited. To this they say that fantasy is posited to correspond to the common sense, and the memorative power to correspond to the cogitative. And they differ in the act of preserving, for fantasy only preserves the species or images of sensible things, and through the mode of presence, as if the thing were under our gaze. And therefore we often dream in this mode, because that fantasy is quickly freed from the binding of sleep. But the memorative power not only preserves those species, but it also preserves the intentions of the acts of knowing, and as accompanied by the differences of times: hence through the cogitative faculty you can judge not only that this is white or running, and not only that you have seen or heard this, but also that at such a time you saw it, and at another time you heard it, and this comes about not only through the intellect, because brute animals remember the past distinctly in this way, and for this reason they return to places where they had been determinately at another time.

And one can confirm that the aforesaid preservative powers are distinct from each other and have distinct organs, because we experience that being wounded in the anterior part of the brain impedes the imaginative faculty; but being wounded in the posterior part impedes the memorative faculty, which the imagination remains good, and on account of this imagination they do not cease to be subtle, although they cease to remember well.

And you should know that these four powers are commonly assigned an order by the authorities. The Commentator and Aristotle posit the common sense in the heart, and fantasy in the first chamber or the anterior part of the brain, and the cogitative in the middle part, and the memorative in the posterior part of the brain. But Avicenna and many others posit the common sense and fantasy to be in the first chamber of the brain, with the common sense in the anterior part of this chamber and the fantasy in the posterior part of the same chamber. But those who uphold this view can respond to the arguments.

[650] Responses to arguments:

[Ad 1m:] To the first it may be said that Aristotle sometimes uses the name of phantasia for the preservative power, and sometimes for the cognitive power, that is, for the cogitative faculty. And thus the things which were said must be reversed.

[Ad 2m:] To the other [argument] concerning the anatomy of the brain, it can be said that the common sense does not have a proper organ in the brain, but in the heart, namely that this is in the same chamber with fantasy, although in another part of the chamber.

[Ad 3m:] To the next it is said that the cogitative power is not superfluous with respect to the common sense for the reasons which were stated in the position. For although the common sense can do more than the external senses, because it knows their acts, however, the cogitative power can still do more, because it extracts intentions which are not senses.

[Ad 4m:] To the other it is conceded that there are two cognitive and two preservative faculties for the reasons assigned before. And when you say that a cognitive power can preserve, as can intellect and vision, I say first of the intellect that it is not unfitting that it should preserve species, but vision does not preserve them without actual cognition, because [the intellect] always needs the aid of the senses in actual knowing. But this cannot be said of the sensitive powers: rather, the cognitive [sense] power does not need to have a species to know, because, if it were to reserve it, it would always be knowing in act.

[Ad 5m:] To the next it can be said that one preservative power does not suffice, on account of the reasons that have been given.

[Ad 6m:] To the next, which argues that there are more, it must be conceded that the imaginative can be granted, but that it does not differ from fantasy; rather, they are synonymous names. And the same thing can be said of the estimative and cogitative.

[Ad 7m:] To the last it must be said that the recollective power adds to memorative power not a fifth faculty, but a collection of powers, for to recollect occurs by way of syllogistic inference, and the power that is discursive in this way is the cogitative power. Now it is possible to have a good memory, but not to have a subtle cogitative faculty; therefore neither will one have good recollection. And on this topic one should consult the *De memoria* for a full treatment.

[A defense of another view]⁵

Another view is founded upon the fact that those senses which we call external, although they have exterior organs proper to them for receiving the species of exterior sensible things, nonetheless no judgement comes about in accordance with those species unless internally, in the organ of the common sense. And many persuasive arguments can be offered in support of this.

[1.] First, through what appears to be the case in those who are mad, because through the indisposition or lesion of that organ of the common sense, those who see a piece of straw judge it to be a huge snake, and those who hear a small sound judge it to be a great din. And it is clear in this way that there is no [651] judgement in the exterior organs, in which the species of those sensibles are first received, because it is not necessary for that madman to be indisposed in his eyes and ears and hands, in such a way that judgements that are so inconsonant with the things must follow, if the judgement had come to be in those external organs.

[2.] Another persuasive argument is drawn from someone who is sleeping, because sometimes certain people have been seen [to sleep] with their eyes open, so that the species of light and colour can be received into them, yet they did not see, because that organ of the common sense, in which the judgement takes place, was closed through sleep. Likewise those sleeping also do not hear, although there is no closing of their ears, nor do they taste, although they continually inhale and exhale, nor do they feel even if you stroke their feet or hand. Nevertheless, the species of the sensibles reach the external [sense] organs and can be received into them. And a cause cannot be given why they do not sense then, unless it is because the organ of the common sense, in which the judgement and the act of sensing must come about, is closed internally.

[3.] The third persuasive argument is that those who are paying close attention (*fortiter attendentes*) to something sad or pleasant do not perceive the things that are said to them, nor the species which their eyes convey to them, although the species of these things are received into the external organs,

⁵ This appears to be a defense of a threefold scheme of internal senses: common sense; a power that comprehends intentions (which is called either fantasy, estimation, or cogitation), and a single memorative or conservative power. The defense begins with three arguments supporting the claim that the common sense is the actual percipient of the sensibles conveyed to it by the external senses.

because the latter are not closed or occupied. And the cause why they do not perceive these things does not seem to be able to be given, unless it is because through their close attention to that sad or pleasant thing that organ of the common sense, in which the judgement should come about, is preoccupied internally.

Therefore, on this basis it can be said that the organ of the common sense is the anterior chamber or the anterior concavity of the brain. And then the common sense is said to be composed from the soul and from that organ, in such a way that no external, judicative cognitive sense is posited distinct from the common sense. Rather, the common sense is sometimes called vision, sometimes hearing, and so too with all the other senses, and it is sometimes called the common sense, but according to divers notions (*rationes*); and Aristotle seems to say that the common sense is in a way vision or hearing, and in a way different from vision or hearing, and thus with the other senses. For the common sense is called vision insofar as it judges and senses colours by means of the eyes, and it is called hearing insofar as it senses and judges sounds by means of the ears, and thus for the other senses which we call external or particular. But it is called the common sense insofar as all the external organs are reduced to it. Therefore Aristotle also says that that common sense is in one way indivisible and in one way divisible, in some way one and in some way many. For it is one really and [652] according to its being, but it is divided and many so that it is multiplied according to reason (*ratio*), in the sense that according to one notion (*ratio*) it is called vision and according to another it is called hearing, and so on with the others. Nor is this prevented if Aristotle should seem to posit the first sensitive power in the heart, because it is only his intention that the origin of all the senses for the sensibles is in the heart, through which the act of sensing is exercised in the aforesaid organ of common sense and in the organ of the estimative or cogitative faculty.

Then, beyond that common sense, a superior cognitive power may be conceded, which is given many namely, that is, sometimes it is called cogitative, sometimes as estimative, sometimes even fantasy: it also belongs to powers of this kind to extract the intentions which have not been sensed from the sensible species, and also to know and to judge the act of the common sense, namely, to judge that we are seeing or hearing. For the common sense cannot judge this, because the sensible powers, insofar as they are material and corporeal, are not innately constituted to reflect upon themselves or their operations; now to see or to hear will be an operation of the common sense, as was said; therefore the common sense, although it judges colours and sounds when seeing and hearing, does not, however, judge that it sees or hears. Rather, that superior power does this, and its organ is in the middle concavity of the brain.

Further, a third power is required which is preservative of all things needing to be preserved. And it is sometimes called the imaginative faculty insofar as it preserves images, that is, the species of sensible things, and sometimes it is

called the memorative faculty, insofar as it preserves the intentions of sensations along with the differences of times. And the organ of this sort of virtue is the posterior chamber or the posterior concavity of the brain. It is for this reason that if a human being is wounded in the posterior part of the brain, he will lose his memory.

And it seems reasonable that only these three internal powers be posited, since only these three chambers are found in the brain. And this view seems to agree most with Aristotle, who is never seen to multiply powers of this sort beyond the three just mentioned. Nor does it appear that he had posited fantasy to be purely preservative, but rather, cognitive too, because it is capable of composition and division. Rather, Aristotle seems to wish that it would immediately serve the intellect, on account of the fact that he said that anyone understanding needs phantasms to contemplate. Therefore, he does not seem to understand by fantasy anything other than [653] the cogitative power. And it seems to me that because these powers move one another, we apply the name of one to the other: hence we often call the act of thinking remembering, namely, because we know the past through species preserved in the memory; therefore, properly speaking, to remember is nothing other than to preserve the species in that memorative power. And thus we would remember, although we were not actually knowing; but in a contrary way memory is said to be the same as actually to judge of the past, because the cognitive power is moved by the species preserved in memory; therefore, the cognitive power is sometimes called memorative and even recollective in this way.

And if this opinion were upheld, then one would reply as follows to the persuasive arguments which the first opinion upheld on its own behalf and against this.⁶

One persuasive argument was that often everything appears in dreams as if it were under the gaze of the sense and not by way of memory. But this does not seem to be possible except on account of a twofold preservative power, namely, one preserving only species without the differences of time, and another preserving the intentions of sensation along with the differences of time, the first of which fades more quickly than the second; therefore in this way we only dream then.

Reply: This does not occur on account of diverse preservative faculties, but because all those internal powers, although they are in some way imperfectly freed from the binding of sleep, however, the bonds still remain in some way. And therefore a perfect representation cannot come about in this state, as it can

⁶ These arguments do not seem to correspond to the arguments labelled *persuasiones* above, which were offered in support of the present view. Rather, the respondent recapitulates the counter-arguments here, and then offers a reply; the arguments themselves do not seem to have been presented in their own right in the text.

in waking, but the only thing that appears is what is innately capable of moving more strongly. Now the species of sensible things preserved in that power are stronger in moving than are the intentions of acts and the differences of times; therefore at this time only sensibles of this kind appear, without the mode of remembering. And since this sensitive nature is more intense with respect to the present than to the past and future, therefore in waking we often attend to the present without regard for the past.

Likewise it does not avail [to have recourse to] another motive faculty which was affected by the injury. For I concede that sometimes the memory is harmed by an injury in the posterior part of the head, and the imaginative faculty is not, if you mean by the imaginative power the cogitative faculty, because it is on account of its excellence that a human being is of subtle genius, namely, able to argue and draw inferences well. However, if you understand by the imaginative faculty the preservative faculty, that is harmed along with the memorative, because it does not differ from it. And the response is the same for the fact that the same people do not remember well and recollect well: for this is not on account of diverse preservative faculties, but because the act of recollecting requires syllogistic inference, which is not ready unless one has subtlety, which subtlety, namely of genius, comes from a good cognitive capacity; now it rarely happens that the memorative and cogitative faculties are simultaneously well-disposed, because the cogitative power requires more moisture for its excellence and more flexibility in which a multitude of spiritual things can abound, whereas the memorative faculty, in order to retain well, requires more hardness and dryness. And that may be seen further in the *De somno et vigilia*.