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Presences and Directednesses: Intentionality beyond Aquinas

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Abstract

This paper explores Latin medieval accounts of intentionality developed after Thomas Aquinas, focusing in particular on the theories of mental presence and mental directedness defended by Hervaeus Natalis and Peter Auriol. As the paper aims to show, these two authors distinguish between the intentional and the real presence of objects to the mind, and consequently, between intentional directedness and real directedness towards objects. The paper argues that their theory, which combines detailed phenomenological insights with careful considerations about the way our mind relates to objects and reality, constitutes a valuable alternative to Aquinas's views on presence and directedness as reconstructed by Therese Cory.

Introduction

The golden age of theories of intentionality in the Latin Middle Ages was certainly the beginning of the fourteenth century. At that time, there were lively debates on the ontological status of mental acts, the nature of the content of those acts, the existence of mental mediators, the mode of being of things insofar as they are thought of, causal vs. non-causal accounts of intentionality, the relation between intentionality and attention, etc. While these themes were always more or less explicitly addressed in Aristotelian philosophy of mind, which strongly inspired medieval thinkers, the sophistication of the debates in the first decades of the fourteenth century is arguably unprecedented in the Western world. Traditional

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Aristotelian philosophical material came under growing scrutiny, theoretical elements were increasingly adopted from Augustine and Arabic thinkers, notably Avicenna, and, as happens today in analytic philosophy, the intensive debate among philosophers brought conceptual distinctions to a peak. The major players in this historical episode were Durandus of Saint-Pourçain, Hervaeus Natalis, John Duns Scotus, Peter Auriol, William of Ockham and a few others.[2]

There is one interesting, though less investigated topic in medieval theories of intentionality which also appeared during this golden age, namely, that of the intentional vs. real presence of objects to the cogniser. The intentional presence of the object is its givenness to the cogniser from the point of view of experience, while the real presence of the object refers to its real existence in (spatio-)temporal contiguity to the cogniser. Distinguishing these two sorts of presence made it possible also to distinguish two sorts of mental 'directedness': a primitive, intentional directedness relating the mind to the object as intentionally present, and a real directedness understood as a relation of conformity of the mind to reality. These distinctions were defended by Hervaeus Natalis, a member of the Dominican order, to which Aquinas had also belonged, and in the writings of Peter Auriol, an author from the competing Franciscan order, for which the major reference was Duns Scotus.

Aquinas died in 1274, before the golden age of intentionality. However, his work anticipated several later medieval debates, sometimes with clear consciousness of the issues at stake and of the available theoretical options, sometimes addressing them in a more inchoate way. In her paper for this symposium, Therese Cory praises Aquinas for aptly dividing the inquiry on intentionality into investigation of presence and of directedness. While I find the contrast between presence and directedness highly fruitful for analysing intentionality in medieval philosophy (and indeed, in general), and while it also very much inspired the present paper, I contend that the theory of presence and directedness that Cory attributes to Aquinas is less sophisticated than that of Hervaeus and Auriol.

This paper will be devoted to comparing the theories on presence and directedness developed by Aquinas on the one hand, and Hervaeus and Auriol on the other. As I will argue, these authors have different phenomenological descriptions of presence: according to Cory's reconstruction, Aquinas seems to understand the mental presence of objects as a presence *in* our mental acts, while Hervaeus and Auriol claim that objects are not present *in*, but *to* our mental acts, that is, they appear 'in front of us', as it were. While Hervaeus's and

[2] On intentionality in the Middle Ages, see Pasnau 1997 and Perler 2002.

Auriol's view seems to adequately describe our sensory experience, it might be that Aquinas's account better captures our intellectual experience. However, Hervaeus and Auriol's complex distinctions between intentional vs. real presence and intentional vs. real directedness allow them to clearly set apart two different features of our mental acts, namely, their intentionality and their reference to reality, a distinction which, in my opinion, is less explicit in Aquinas.

In the first part of this paper, I will present Cory's reconstruction of Aquinas's views on presence and directedness and discuss some problems that I identify in his theory. In the second part of the paper, I will present the theory of presence and directedness of Hervaeus and Auriol, pointing out its most valuable aspects and comparing it with that of Aquinas.

I. Aquinas on Presence and Directedness

As Therese Cory points out, a puzzling feature of our mind, one which is part of our experience of intentionality, or our 'phenomenal intentionality', is the fact that our mind 'make[s] present what is other' (2025, 100). How is this possible? Aquinas, Cory argues, has an elegant solution. What allows for this presence is a specifying feature which he calls a *ratio*. This *ratio* is a part both of our mental acts and of the objects our acts are about, and while it specifies the object as the kind of object it is, it specifies the act in such a way that it thinks *of* the object in question. For example, while it makes some material substance be a cat, it makes intellection be *of* cats, and while it makes some quality be heat, it makes intellection be *of* heat. Cory suggests translating *ratio* as 'determinacy' in the present context (rather than the more usual 'reason' or 'definition'). By specifying thinking as being *of* this or that object, the *ratio* explains mental presence. And when the mind is specified so as to be thinking of this or that object, it becomes *like* (*simile*) the object in question, as Aquinas often says (see *In IV Sent.* 49.2.1, resp., quoted in Cory 2025, 104).

In the Aristotelian tradition, what explains why some material substance is some determinate substance or some quality some determinate quality is its *specific difference*, namely, the part of the essence that is responsible for making something that belongs to a given genus belong to this or that species of the genus in question (see, e.g., Aristotle, *Met.* Z.12 and X.8). For example, rationality is the specific difference which, when combined with animality, is responsible for something being a human being. However, this kind of specification, apparently, is not the specification the *ratio* is providing, at least not on the side of thought, for thought does not *become* a cat or heat, but it comes to *think of* cats or *think of*

heat. That is, the *ratio* specifies mental acts 'content-wise', so to speak,[3] by making them be about this or that object. Considering the explanations provided by Cory, it seems that the kind of specification at stake – the content-wise one – is not explained further by Aquinas. In other words, this specifying feature seems to be primitive, which, in my opinion, brings Cory's interpretation close to primitivist readings of Aquinas's theory of intentionality.[4]

This theory of the *ratio* is supposed to be about our *experience* of presence. However, in this account, the presence of the object is described as its *ratio* being a specifying part of our mental acts. This apparently means that the object, or at least its specifying feature, is present *in* our mental acts (as Cory 2025, 100 also suggests: 'catness begins to "be there", so to speak, in my thinking'). In other words, Aquinas's account of presence seems to be 'immanentist'.[5] Now, one might wonder whether this immanentist account of mental presence is faithful to our experience. Indeed, there is at least one type of mental act for which the immanentist description seems to be inadequate, namely, sensory experience. In sensory experience, be it perceptual or hallucinatory, that is, whether its object really exists or not, things seem to be present not *in* our mental acts, but rather *to* our mental acts, or to us as cognisers. They appear, as it were, as *facing us*. Aquinas's view seems to be unable to capture this aspect of our experience.

The idea that objects in general (not just sensory objects) are not part of our mental acts, but entities that face them, as it were, was developed in phenomenology. The way phenomenologists put it is that objects are 'transcendent' to our mental acts.[6] A central episode in the development of the theory of the transcendence of objects was Husserl's criticism (1984, pp. 385-387) of his teacher Brentano, whom he accused precisely of treating objects as 'immanent' to mental acts, that is, as parts of them, thereby misreporting our experience of intentionality. Importantly, the transcendence of objects does not mean that they exist in mind-independent reality, nor with some alternative, mental or abstract mode of being: transcendence is an ontologically neutral property which entails neither the existence nor the non-existence of objects, but simply describes the way they are given to us. Both objects of sensory experience, either real or hallucinated, and other, imagined objects, including fictional objects, and even objects of intellection, are transcendent. What

[3] This expression is found in Friedman 2015, p. 155.
[4] See notably Brower and Brower-Toland 2008, who also discuss several non-primitivist alternatives found in the literature.
[5] I am grateful to Dominik Perler for proposing this label and suggesting emphasising the contrast with the transcendentist view mentioned below.
[6] On similar notions in contemporary analytic philosophy, see Taieb 2017.

transcendence means, as phenomenologists put it, is that the features that the objects of our mental acts exhibit differ from the features of these mental acts themselves (Ingarden 1931, p. 120). My mental acts have intentionality, consciousness, mineness, etc. A seen or hallucinated cup of chai, an imagined golden mountain, or a number thought about have neither intentionality nor consciousness nor mineness.[7] Interestingly, as I will show below, an account of presence as presence-*to*, understood as a phenomenal presence and distinct from the *real* presence of objects, was already defended in the Middle Ages by Hervaeus Natalis and Peter Auriol.

As Cory argues, another important aspect of our mind which is also experiential, or part of our 'phenomenal intentionality' (2025, 106), is the fact that it is *directed at* objects or 'stretching out' to them. Aquinas explains this directedness in terms of an 'imitation' (*imitatio*). Imitation, as Cory describes it, is the 'striving' of our mind to *become like* external reality. In this respect, imitation is processual, or at least similar to a process, for it is 'motion-like' (Cory 2025, 106). Indeed, imitation has a teleological structure, the object being the final cause of imitation, that is, that towards which imitation is directed as its goal. In this framework, the mind is understood as an 'image' of reality: it aims to copy reality and, correlatively, reality is the model to be copied. Given its teleological structure, imitation explains the directedness of the mind, that is, our 'actively aiming toward something': this directedness is our striving to be like reality, and ultimately succeeding in being like it (Cory 2025, 107).

But this account of phenomenal directedness might also be questioned. For it seems to fail to sharply distinguish *two different aspects* of our mental life, and arguably even two different directednesses, namely, intentionality and our mind's fitting with reality, or its 'reference'. Intentionality is the experiential feature of our mental acts of being directed at objects regardless of whether those objects really exist. It belongs to *all* mental acts, not just those that fit with reality. Indeed, from the point of view of experience, we are directed at objects in perception and in hallucination in indistinguishably the same way. Now, this property of intentionality is to be distinguished from the reference of the mind to reality, which is *another* aspect of our mental life. Reference is our mental acts's being veridically directed at the outer world: it occurs when the object the act is intentionally directed at also

[7] A difficulty arises with thoughts about mental acts, but a solution is offered by 'mineness': my mental acts present themselves to me with the primitive feature of *belonging to me*, while others do not. As for recollected mental acts of my own, they have the temporal feature of *having been* mine, while imagined mental acts of my own are presented *as if* they were mine (hypothetically). Further theoretical work would be needed here.

exists in reality, and exists in the guise under which it is represented.[8] What distinguishes perception and hallucination is that while both have intentionality, only the former has the feature of reference.

Now, it is unclear what exactly imitation accounts for in Aquinas. On the one hand, Cory describes it as a striving to be like outer reality, which sounds like an account of intentionality, for we can indeed strive to be like an object irrespective of its existence. On the other hand, it seems that imitation cannot be just a striving: when I imitate cats, I must *be like* cats. I cannot imitate something without being assimilated to it (but merely striving to), for in this case I *fail* to imitate it. So taken, imitation seems to account for the reference of our mind to reality rather than for intentionality. Aquinas's theory of imitation seems to ambiguously oscillate between two sorts of mental directednesses, intentionality and reference, by capturing aspects of both. As I will show, Hervaeus and Auriol, by contrast, clearly distinguish these two sorts of directedness of the mind towards objects.

While Aquinas, in Cory's reconstruction, develops views on both presence and directedness, his account seems to have questionable aspects. First, his immanentist understanding of presence as presence-*in* might misrepresent our experience of intentionality, especially our sensory experience. Second, his understanding of mental directedness as imitation seems to involve aspects of both intentionality and reference, but these are arguably two different features of the mind. Let us see whether Hervaeus and Auriol have more convincing views on presence and directedness.

II. Two Kinds of Presence and Directedness: Hervaeus Natalis and Peter Auriol

The contrasts between intentional vs. real presence and intentional vs. real directedness are found in more or less scattered ways in different figures at the turn of the fourteenth century. In one relatively little studied text, however, they are developed in a more concise and systematic way than elsewhere, in particular as regards presence, namely, Hervaeus Natalis's

[8] On the distinction between intentionality and reference, see Crane 2013 and Kriegel 2011. (One might argue that reference and our mind's fitting with reality are different properties: if I think of Socrates as white-Socrates when Socrates is not white, my thought refers to reality but does not fit with reality. However, one could also say that in such a case my thought only partly refers to reality or, correlatively, that it still partly fits with reality, and so the two notions would collapse into one.) For a criticism of this distinction, see Zarepour 2018. On intentionality and reference in medieval philosophy and in Brentano, see Taieb 2017 and 2018a, which this symposium has been the occasion to revisit and develop.

Quodlibet 4, question 11.[9] Similar distinctions are also found in the writings of Peter Auriol.[10] I will discuss both authors together, while noting where one or the other stands out for his contribution to the discussion.

Two kinds of presence

Hervaeus and Auriol explicitly distinguish between two sorts of 'presence' (*presentia*) that an object can have relative to a cogniser: 'intentional presence' and 'real presence', as Auriol calls them.[11] The intentional presence of the object is a constituent of our experience, or of our 'phenomenal intentionality', for it is 'nothing other than the fact that the thing is in the purview (*prospectu*) of the cogniser as cognised' or given to the 'gaze' (*aspectus*) of the cogniser (*Quodl.* 4.11, 272, translation slightly modified, and *Scriptum*, 27.2.2, 19.695).[12] The mention of a 'purview' or 'gaze' does not restrict the theory to visual experience, however, since the thesis is that all objects of cognition are intentionally present, including merely imagined ones, even though the modalities of the presence vary: the way objects present themselves to us in sensory experience – 'in the flesh', so to speak – is different from the way they present themselves in imagination, that is, as merely 'envisioned'.[13] Even objects of intellectual cognition are intentionally present for both Hervaeus and Auriol (see, e.g., *Quodl.* 4.11, 276, and *Scriptum*, 27.2.2, 23.856-859).

[9] An exception to the neglect of Hervaeus's text is Piché 2010. The topic of presence in Hervaeus and Auriol is studied by Biard 2001, Perler 2002 (who holds that both Hervaeus and Auriol defend the 'model of intentional presence' in their theory of intentionality) and Klein 2020, but without a focus on Hervaeus's quodlibet. The text has been recently re-edited by Piché; I follow the translation of Wengert, based on his own older edition, but correct it following Piché when needed, or sometimes modify it independently of this.

[10] As pointed out by Piché, the similarity between the views of Hervaeus and Auriol led some scholars to argue that the text of Hervaeus should rather be attributed to Auriol (see Tachau 1988: 86-87 n. 5, quoted in Piché 2010, p. 213 n. 20), but this opinion has generally not been adopted (see Piché 2010, Friedman 2007, p. 437 n. 107, quoted in Piché 2010, p. 213 n. 21, and Klein 2020). While I agree that the views of Hervaeus and Auriol are close, I note that typical expressions used by Auriol, such as 'appearing being' (*esse apparens*) and the synonymous 'judged being' (*esse iudicatum*), are not found in Hervaeus's text. It might be that the text is by a third author inspired by Auriol. For the present paper, however, at least for its theoretical aspects, it is not of great importance whether the text is by Hervaeus or not.

[11] Hervaeus Natalis, *Quodl.* 4.11, 272, and Peter Auriol, *Scriptum*, 9.1.1, 9.418, quoted in Friedman 2015: 154, and 35.1.1, 14.709, as well as *Scriptum*, Prooem.2.3, 200.123-126. (All quotations from Auriol's *Scriptum* are from the electronic *Scriptum*, with the exception of *Scriptum*, Prooem. and d. 2, quoted from Buytaert.) The phrase 'intentional presence' is also used by Cory 2025, 100.

[12] For a comparison of Hervaeus and Auriol on the mental gaze, see again Klein 2020.

[13] The distinction between perception giving things 'in the flesh' (*leibhaftig*) and imagination merely 'envisioning' them (*vergegenwärtigen*) comes from Husserl (1984).

Auriol provides a description of the differing phenomenologies of perception, imagination and intellection. His view is that in perception, objects appear to us spatio-temporally, as either close to us or far from us.[14] Something analogous happens in imagination, which is a reproduction of sensory experience made with the help of mental images: according to Auriol, when imagining something, one mentally 'interjects a space' between oneself and the object. In intellection, by contrast, there is no spatiality involved in the way the object appears. The object of the intellect, as Auriol says, has 'a presence without distance and closeness, without inside and outside, and without here and there'. Importantly, however, Auriol still claims that in all three cases the object appears *to* the mental act – more precisely, that the mental act, or the cogniser, is that *to which* (*cui*) the object appears (*Scriptum*, Prooem.2.4, 208.46-209.66, trans. Pasnau, and 35.1.1, 8.381-401).[15]

Instead of speaking of intentional vs. real presence, Hervaeus distinguishes between presence 'according to cognised being' and presence 'according to real being' (*Quodl.* 4.11, 272). In his quodlibet, he does not explicitly say whether 'cognised being' is a mode of being, and so it is not clear whether he commits himself to objects with an *ad hoc* ontological status; elsewhere, however, for intellectual cognition at least, he accepts objects with what he calls 'objective being', which is a mental mode of being distinct from real being, so I take it that he does so in his quodlibet as well.[16] As for Auriol, things that are intentionally present have 'apparent and present being', and apparent being (which for him is the same as 'objective being') is a mode of being distinct from real being (*Scriptum*, 27.2.2, 30.1120 and 18.645-648). As has often been pointed out, 'objective being' in scholastic jargon does not mean 'mind-independent', but refers to the specific mode of being that things have when they are thought of. In Latin, the word *ob-iectum* is a substantive form of the perfect passive participle of the verb *obicere*, which means 'to throw before', 'to offer' or 'to present'. The verb itself is composed of the preposition *ob*, 'in front of', and the verb *iacĕre*, 'to throw' or 'fling' (to be distinguished from *iacēre*, 'to lie').[17] Drawing on this etymology, objects can be described as things that one throws in front of oneself and, thereby, present to oneself. It is built into the very idea and the etymology of the term that objects are things present *to* cognisers.

[14] On why being given 'in the flesh' is not easily understandable in terms of spatio-temporal presence and might in fact be primitive, see Kriegel 2019.
[15] On the phenomenology of perception, imagination and intellection in Auriol, see also Klein 2024, pp. 382-385 and Taieb 2024, pp. 188-189. On Auriol's account of cognition as something 'to which' something appears, see Taieb 2018b.
[16] *De Sec*. *Int*. 4.3, 507; on objective being in Hervaeus, see also Amerini 2006. For a different reading of the quodlibet, see Piché 2010.
[17] I thank Ian Drummond for his help in formulating this distinction.

Hervaeus holds that a mental act cannot occur without the intentional presence of an object, nor vice versa. However, there is also an order of dependence between act and object: the object depends on the act, but not vice versa (*Quodl.* 4.11, 272). One way to understand this is that while act and object occur together, the object is a (necessary) *product* of the act. As Auriol says explicitly, the object is produced by the act through a primitive, 'intentional' production (see, e.g., *Scriptum*, 35.1.1, 11.554-556).

Is perception too about an object that is intentionally present with cognised being? In Auriol, this holds for mistaken perception at least: in hallucination, sight is directed at things with only apparent being (*Scriptum*, Prooem.2). It is not clear whether Hervaeus agrees, for he claims that sight, when mistaken, is directed at the 'likeness of a thing', that is, a really existing mental image, despite the impression that it is about an external thing (*Quodl.* 4.11, 271).[18] One way to understand this is as saying that in such a case, the cogniser is related to a real mental image, but wrongly sees it as a thing of the outer world, when in fact it does not exist, and thus has no real being. Ultimately, then, and from the point of view of the cogniser, the act is not about a real entity; but then, presumably, it is directed towards an object with cognised being. This interpretation seems to be confirmed by Hervaeus's claim that when one is deceived in perception, one is directed at the likeness of a thing but takes it 'as a certain thing' (*ut quadam re*) (*Quodl.* 4.11, 271).[19]

What about correct perception? I think that for Hervaeus and Auriol, even in this case cognition is directed at something intentionally present with cognised being. Auriol, to my knowledge, never says that a mental act is directed *merely* at a real object; an appearance must always be there.[20] Hervaeus seems to confirm this in the following passage, which is about intuitive cognition, a mental mode that includes perception (more on intuitive cognition below):

> In order for such a cognition to be true, however, it would require such a presence of its object, since on the part of termination the cognition requires, in order that it be true, that the object really be such as it appears to be. But in intuitive cognition so taken, the object appears to be present in its own real existence, therefore, etc. (*Quodl.* 4.11, 276, translation slightly modified)

[18] Neither Hervaeus nor Auriol takes perception to be factive, for they allow that perception can be either true or false.
[19] For a different reading, see Piché 2010, p. 217.
[20] See also Perler 2002, pp. 280-281.

In correct intuition, including correct perception, the thing appears in a certain way, that is, it has an intentional presence, *and* it is really present as it appears.

This brings us to real presence. For Hervaeus, the real presence of a thing can be of three sorts: 'according to time', that is, simultaneous to the mental act of the cogniser; 'with regard to place', that is, being in the vicinity of the cogniser or at least with 'no corporeal obstacle whose appearance (*aspectum*) or influence might block the respect (*respectus*) of the thing to that to which it is said to be present', and, finally, according to causality, which refers to the presence of a cause to its effect (*Quodl.* 4.11, 272, translation slightly modified). Unlike intentional presence, the real presence of a thing is not a constituent of experience: it is a *real event* occurring 'outside' the mind, as it were, in the outer world.

In contrast to intentional presence, the real presence of an object, of whichever of the three sorts, is not required for a cognition to occur. First, causal presence is not required, for the same mental act can be caused by different things, for example, our 'interior organs', or ultimately God, who can always substitute for the causality of things (*Quodl.* 4.11, 274). Second, the (spatio-)temporal presence of the object is not necessary either, since cognition can be about non-existing objects, for example, merely imagined objects. As seen above, even acts of cognition whose objects appear as spatio-temporally present, that is, acts of intuitive cognition such as seeing, can be about non-existent objects.[21] The object of sight appears to sight 'in the flesh', that is, according to Hervaeus, as spatio-temporally really there (cf. *Quodl.* 4.11, 269 and 277). However, it is one thing to appear as really present, it is another thing *to be* really present.

Importantly, the real presence of an object is not irrelevant for cognition. However, it is not required for the existence of cognition, but only for what both Hervaeus and Auriol call its 'truth' (*veritas*), as seen in the passage quoted above. What is meant is not propositional truth, but a broader notion of truth, which one might call 'veridicality'; it also applies to mere objectual mental acts such as sight, which divide into 'true' and 'false' (*Quodl.* 4.11, 271, 276-277 and *Scriptum*, Prooem.2.3, 200.123-126; see also *Scriptum*, 2.3, 549.49-52 on objectual mental acts of intellection). A cognition is true in this sense, or veridical, when 'the object really is such as it appears to be' (*Quodl.* 4.11, 276). Thus, while the intentional presence of the object is required for all mental acts, the real presence of the object is required only for mental acts *whose objects are presented as real* and *which are veridical*. In fact, the

[21] In fact, Hervaeus distinguishes several senses of 'intuitive cognition', but I cannot discuss them here. On intuitive cognition as presenting things as really present, see also Auriol, *Scriptum*, Prooem.2, and Perler 2002, pp. 258-261.

real presence of the object is the veridicality-maker of those acts, and this veridicality-maker is fixed internally by the intentional presence of the object, for the act is veridical if and only if what is intentionally present to the cogniser is also really present 'as it appears'.

The account of mental presence by Hervaeus and Auriol differs from that of Aquinas. It is a sophisticated and *explicit* theory of presence which identifies and contrasts two sorts of presence, phenomenal and real, and analyses how they relate to each other, in particular with respect to the veridicality of mental acts. In this account objects do not present themselves as parts of our mental acts, but precisely as *ob-iecta*, that is, things that are in front of us, or as 'transcendent' entities, as phenomenologists would say. This holds not only for existing objects, but also for hallucinated ones and even imagined or intelligised ones: all objects have their specific sort of presence *to* us, be it 'in the flesh' or as merely envisioned or 'without here or there', but never as being *in* our mental acts. Indeed, I think that the phenomenological notion of transcendence is already inchoate in the medieval thesis that our mental acts are directed at *ob-iecta*, that is, things thrown in front of us as opposed to parts of our mental acts.[22]

Which then is the better account of presence, the immanentist or the transcendentist? Aquinas seems to be committed to the rather implausible view that objects of perception and hallucination appear as parts of our mental acts or as present *in* them; Hervaeus and Auriol seem to describe our perceptual and hallucinatory experience more adequately, saying that in these experiences objects appear *to* us. However, the idea that objects are thrown 'in front of us' becomes less obvious when it comes to intellection. In this case, as Auriol himself says, the object is given 'without distance and closeness, without inside and outside, and without here and there'. It is thus not clear in what sense the object can still be said to be 'in front of us' and an *ob-iectum* in the etymological sense.[23] Perhaps Aquinas's phenomenology of presence is more adequate in this case: objects of intellection, one might argue, are experienced as being *in* our mental acts by having a kind of diffuse, immanent presence within our thoughts themselves. Thus, it seems that the transcendentist account of phenomenal presence works well for sensory experience, and perhaps imagination, while the immanentist account had a future in the phenomenology of intellection. In fact, the transcendentist view of presence seems to take the phenomenology of perception as a model for understanding the phenomenology of intentionality in general, which is confirmed by its

[22] On the similarity of Auriol's philosophy of mind to phenomenology, see Vanni Rovighi 1978.
[23] I am grateful to Martin Klein for pointing this out to me. See Klein 2024, pp. 383-385.

use of the metaphor of 'purview' and 'gaze'. The immanentist view, by contrast, might actually start with intellectual experience and then attempt to generalize it to all mental acts. But in fact, the phenomenology of intentionality does not need to be unitary: one might grant that objects appear as present *to* us in some intentional modes, while they appear as present *in* us in others.

Like Aquinas, Hervaeus and Auriol develop an account of mental directedness, but they frame theirs with the help of their sophisticated account of presence. The distinction between intentional and real presence leads them to identify two types of directedness of the mind towards objects: an intentional directedness towards objects intentionally present, and a possible conformity of the mind to reality.

Two kinds of directedness

According to Hervaeus, all mental acts have a *sui generis* relation, or 'relationship' (*habitudo*), to an object, which he describes as a 'relationship of the *terminus ad quem*,' in which the object is 'the cognised terminus in which that cognition terminates' (*Quodl.* 4.11, 273, translation slightly modified). Both the idea of a relationship and the description of the object as the terminus suggests that Hervaeus is speaking of the mind pointing at or *being directed towards* objects. Importantly, this directedness occurs independently of the real presence of the object: 'Cognition can be terminated in a thing not existing in reality' (*Quodl.* 4.11, 274). Since cognition always requires the cognitive presence of the object, however, what the relation or relationship is arguably directed at is the object with *intentional* presence (including in cases of correct perception, as argued above).

Similarly, Auriol claims that an object intentionally present to the mind is 'produced or posited in present being and *terminative* being' and that it '*terminates* the gaze of the mind' (*Scriptum*, 27.2, resp., 41.1543 and 9.1.1, 8.350; my emphasis); also, the mind has a 'relationship' (*habitudo*) to this object (*Scriptum*, 27.2.2, 21.762-767). The mention of the object as terminating a 'gaze' suggests that what Auriol is describing is our experience. This is confirmed by his claim that the directedness, or 'crossing over' that he is speaking of does not occur 'really', but only 'intentionally' (or 'objectively'); I take this to mean that it is experiential:

> The intellectual act is not an intuition really crossing over (*transiens*) to the object, but only intentionally and objectively; and for this reason it suffices that things be posited as present in such apparent being. (*Scriptum,* 27.2, resp.*,* 42.1557-1558)

The directedness Hervaeus and Auriol are describing is the mind's primitive grasping of an object with intentional presence. Given its correlation to such an object, I suggest that it be called 'intentional directedness'.[24] Arguably, this property is the same as what I call 'intentionality', that is, the aboutness of mental acts towards objects irrespective of their real existence.

Note that the Latin *habitudo* is used in medieval philosophy to refer both to relations properly speaking and to properties that resemble relations, such as monadic (i.e., non-relational) properties whose description is relational, the name for the ontological category of relation being *relatio*.[25] It is therefore not obvious that Hervaeus and Auriol have an *ontologically* relational account of intentional directedness. Certainly, they agree that intentionality 'feels' relational, for they speak of it in terms of a pointing and a relationship. The reason might be that in their account objects present themselves to us as transcendent, or as *ob-iecta*, and, thus, that we (or they at least) have an impression of 'stretching out' to them.[26] Their claim that objects are things standing in front of us might also explain why they are tempted to attribute to them some sort of being. However, philosophers who distinguish the phenomenological and ontological analysis of the mind, as Hervaeus and Auriol do, can speak of intentionality in terms of a directedness and say that it 'feels' relational without necessarily maintaining that it is relational from an ontological point of view. It is always possible to contrast the *phenomenal fact*, or the 'appearance', of intentionality *feeling* relational and its *being* relational, and thus accept a mismatch between the phenomenology and the ontology of intentionality. While you can't have your cake and eat it too, you can eat your real cake and still have your phenomenal one.[27]

In fact, Hervaeus leaves the question open as to whether cognition is ontologically relational, while Auriol has an ontologically non-relational theory of cognition. They both face difficulties because real relations require two real relata and objects with cognised being are therefore ontologically not robust enough to play the role of a second relatum in a real

[24] Cf. Cory's (2025) use of 'intentional direction/directing' to speak of imitation in Aquinas.
[25] On relations in medieval philosophy, see Henninger 1989. An example of a monadic property whose description is relational is dispositions whose manifestations occur in or through an entity other than the bearer of the disposition, for example, fragility. On dispositions in Aquinas, see Löwe 2021.
[26] This might also be why Brentano initially adopted a relational theory of intentionality (see Taieb 2017). In fact, the views of Hervaeus and Auriol are close to those of the early Brentano in various respects, which I cannot list here.
[27] I thank Dominik Perler for pushing me on this point.

relation.[28] They could have been more parsimonious and even eliminated objects with cognised being from their ontology by simply keeping them as merely *phenomenal facts*, which they seemingly did not do.[29] Since they drop the relation – at least Auriol does – but not the relatum, they are not full-fledged monadists, but, so to speak, quasi-monadists about intentionality.

In addition to intentional directedness, both Hervaeus and Auriol accept the view, standard in medieval philosophy, that mental acts can have a 'conformity' (*conformitas*) or 'assimilation' (*assimilatio*) to their objects. However, this relation or relationship is distinct from that between a mental act and an object with intentional presence. As Auriol explicitly says, in the context of an analysis of sight, the relation or 'respect of conformity' (*respectus conformitatis*) holds between a mental act and an object with '*real presence*'; and not all mental acts require it, but only 'true' ones (*Scriptum*, Prooem.2.3, 200.123-126, my emphasis).[30] I take Hervaeus to have a similar view, for in his quodlibet he claims that the 'truth' of mental acts requires the real presence of the object, and he accepts elsewhere a relation or relationship of 'assimilation' (*assimilatio*) between act and object, which is a standard account of truth and veridicality in medieval philosophy (*Quodl.* 4.11, 276, quoted above, and *De intellectu et specie*, 161.26-36, where Hervaeus also speaks of 'conformity', *conformitas*; cf. Aquinas, *De veritate* 1.1 on truth and assimilation). Since this feature of the mind is, as Auriol says, a 'respect', even if not a relation, it is reasonable to describe it as a sort of 'directedness'. Unlike intentional directedness, however, it is not a constituent of experience (and is not accessible to us from within our conscious experience), but rather connects our mind and the outer world, for it accounts for the reference of our mental acts to reality. Since it holds between the mind and an object with real presence, I suggest calling it *real directedness*.

Thus, Hervaeus and Auriol admit a purely phenomenal directedness, which points to the object with cognised being, and a real directedness, which depends on the real existence of the object. In fact, it is the distinction between two sorts of presence, intentional and real, that enables them to identify these two sorts of directedness, each correlated with one sort of presence. Intentional directedness, which is a primitive experiential feature, accounts for intentionality, that is, the grasping of an object irrespective of its real existence, while real

[28] On Hervaeus, see Taieb 2018a, p. 99; on Auriol, see Taieb 2018b.
[29] One reason for rejecting mental objects is that they might block the cognitive access to reality. I cannot evaluate the *epistemological* advantages and disadvantages of Aquinas's view versus that of Hervaeus and Auriol, focusing here on their philosophy of mind.
[30] On Auriol's text, see also Taieb 2018a, p. 150.

directedness, which is a relation or relationship of 'conformity' or 'assimilation' to reality, accounts for reference. In other words, Hervaeus and Auriol's contrast between intentional and real directedness allows them to make a clear-cut distinction between intentionality and the reference of our mental acts to reality, thereby distinguishing these two important, and arguably *different* aspects of the mind.

One general question which remains open, however, is whether describing intentionality in terms of phenomenal directedness is correct for *all* mental acts. This is the counterpart to the question whether objects are present *to* us in all our mental acts. If this is not the case, and instead the objects of at least some mental acts, such as intellection, appear rather as present *in* our mental acts, then the idea that we are accessing them via some sort of directedness seems actually mistaken. This leads us to ask whether talk of intentionality as directedness, which is the usual way of describing it in the philosophical literature, is in fact an inappropriate generalisation which takes perception as the model and imprudently extends it to all mental acts, just as the extension of presence-*to* to all mental acts seemed to be based on a generalisation of the way objects are given in sensory experience.

Before concluding, let us consider whether Aquinas makes a distinction between intentionality and reference. Cory claims that he does. As mentioned above, in Aquinas cognition is explained by a mental act and an object sharing the same *ratio*; thanks to this *ratio*, the object is present *in* the cogniser, brings the cogniser to strive to be like the object and possibly makes the cogniser like it. Now, one might argue that the likeness that holds between the mind and its object is indeed a relation that is distinct from this *ratio* and the striving, and *founded* on the *ratio*. As Cory writes:

> this determinacy is something *non-relational* and *internal to thought*. It is because a thought is fiery in itself that it bears a relation of likeness to any existing things (for example, wildfires) whose forms have the same determinacy. (Cory 2025, 105)

On such a reading, according to which the *ratio* or presence-*in* is a monadic property grounding a possible relation of likeness to the object, one could say that the *ratio* – together with the striving that accompanies it – accounts for the intentionality of the mind, while the likeness grounded in it accounts for the reference to reality. On this interpretation, intentionality is *not* a relation of likeness, and Aquinas does distinguish between intentionality (*ratio* + striving) and reference (likeness).

While I think that this interpretation constructs a philosophically valuable theory, I think it goes beyond what Aquinas himself is claiming. Aquinas does not say that mental likeness is *grounded in* a *ratio*, but rather that the *ratio specifies the likeness itself*, for he speaks of a 'likeness of the same *ratio* [as that of the object] in species', using what seems to be a genitive of specification.[31] In other words, treating the *ratio* as a monadic property grounding a relation of likeness is an appealing interpretation, but Aquinas himself seems rather to say that the *ratio* is a specifying part of the likeness which explains why the likeness relates to this object rather than to another; he seems not to mean that it is the *ground* of the likeness.

One additional reason leading me to think that for Aquinas mental likeness is not grounded in intentionality, but *is* the very property of intentionality itself, or at least that Aquinas does not distinguish clearly enough between his relation of likeness and a possible underlying monadic property accounting for intentionality, is his claim that 'representation' (*representatio*) in general (not just *correct* representation) is a likeness. Here again, what seems to be the property of thinking of objects irrespective of their existence, namely, representation, is understood with the help of a notion that is supposed to explain the conformity of the mind with reality.[32]

Arguably, the same problem affects Aquinas's account of imitation. There is some textual evidence that he understands imitation as a sort of likeness, or more precisely, as a one-sided likeness going from the copy to the model and not vice versa. At any rate, when speaking of the likeness between a creature and God, which he compares to the likeness of an image to its model, he claims that this likeness is one-sided and he calls it a 'likeness of imitation' (*similitudo imitationis*).[33] Provided Aquinas *also* attributes a conative aspect to imitation, due to its teleological nature, then he has the conceptual tools to distinguish our *striving* to be like the outer world, that is, arguably, an aspect of our intentionality, and our

[31] *similitudo ejusdem rationis secundum speciem* (*In IV Sent.* 49.2.1, resp., 483, quoted in Cory 2025, 104).

[32] See *De Veritate* 7.5, ad 2, 205.67-206.75 (quoted in Brower and Brower-Toland 2008, p. 199). Note that Aquinas does not speak here of 'representation' (nor therefore of mental likeness) in a factive sense, for he gives the example of a craftsman thinking of something to be built; cf. *SCG* 4.11, 3474 and Taieb 2018a, p. 139 for discussion. Brower and Brower-Toland 2008 describe intentionality in Aquinas in terms of likeness *and* take this likeness to be monadic, which is incompatible with the relational nature of likeness. The theoretical importance of distinguishing between intentionality and the 'referring' of our mind to reality has been pointed out by Brower and Brower-Toland in their work on Aquinas (2008, pp. 231 n. 52 and 236-237 n. 68); it seems to me, however, that Aquinas misses the distinction.

[33] On likeness of imitation, and the comparison between the relations God-creature and model-image, see *ST* 1.4.3, ad 4, 54b, and 2a-2ae.163.2, resp., 329b-330a, and the discussion in Taieb 2018, p. 139.

being like the outer world, that is, the reference of the mind to reality. However, it is one thing to acknowledge that there is some theoretical potential in Aquinas's texts to construct such distinctions, but it is another thing to claim that he himself was aware of them and theorized them explicitly.[34]

Thus, while it seems that Aquinas has the theoretical resources to distinguish intentionality from reference, some ambiguities in his statements, beginning with his understanding of representation in terms of likeness, seem to prevent him from doing so as clearly as Hervaeus and Auriol do.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have presented the views of Hervaeus Natalis and Peter Auriol on intentionality. These two authors have a sophisticated theory of mental presence, distinguishing between the intentional and real presence of objects to a cogniser. Accordingly, they also accept two kinds of directedness of the mind towards objects, intentional and real directedness, accounting for, respectively, intentionality and reference to reality. Aquinas seems to have a less clear distinction between our thinking of things irrespective of their real existence and the conformity of our thoughts to reality. The view of Hervaeus and Auriol is based on the idea that the objects of our mental acts are present *to* them, that is, they are experientially 'facing us'. This implies that we always need to 'stretch out' to them by a specific, experiential directedness. This account anticipates the phenomenological theory of the transcendence of objects, according to which objects appear not as parts of our mental acts, but 'in front of us'. This is opposed to Aquinas's view as reconstructed by Cory, according to which objects are present *in* our mental acts; this latter account constitutes an alternative, immanentist understanding of presence. While the transcendentist account seems to be well-suited to describing our experience of perception and hallucination, it is less obviously adequate for describing our intellectual activities. In the latter case, Aquinas's view might be more suitable. At the end of the day, the question medieval philosophers lead us to

[34] Cory (2025, 112 n. 28) also cites a text of Aquinas (*In I Sent.* 19.5.1, resp., 486) where he claims that 'imitation' (*similatio*) is the 'perfection' of truth, and uses it as evidence that Aquinas has a distinction between intentionality and reference, for the text, according to Cory, precisely contrasts imitation (which captures aspects of intentionality) and the truth of mental acts (or reference). Without entering into a detailed exegesis, what the text seems to me rather to say is that even if truth has a foundation in the things, for things are truth-makers, it is ultimately a property of the mind, truth being achieved or 'perfected' by the imitation of reality. In other words, the text seems to identify truth and imitation, rather than distinguishing them.

consider is whether the phenomenology of intentionality is unitary across all our mental life and experience.[35]

[35] I am grateful to Martin Klein and Dominik Perler for their incisive comments on an earlier (and indeed quite different) version of this paper. I also thank Jessica Leech for her valuable suggestions on the first submitted draft.

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