

Translation of excerpt of William of Hedon's *Tractatus de anima*

Translation by Michael Stenskjær Christensen, made for the seminar within the Forschungskolloquium Kirchengeschichte, Faculty of Theology, University of Basel, Friday 19 October 2018.

Note that this is only a translation of selected parts of the chapter. The parts that are not translated are explained a little bit in the <brackets>.

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Treaty on the soul

Distinction three, chapter six: Whether the intellect knows itself and how the same thing can be a sign of itself, arguments attacking that and further arguments refuting them.

C 134va, O 92ra

From the preceding we see that the intellect, the knower and the thing known are the same. Against this somebody ignorant of philosophy usually raises objections, which we will present in order to be able to refute them. They therefore say, as if it were entirely impossible, that it follows from this that one and the same thing will be sign and signified in the same respect both before and after by itself and such similar things.

<Initial objections>

1.1 <Argument: An instrument cannot affect itself, the intellect is analogous to an instrument, hence the intellect cannot affect (and hence know) itself.>

1.2 Further, they want to argue the point by reducing it to a false or impossible point in this way: If a part cannot establish a knowledge about its whole, then it is so much more impossible for the same thing to establish a knowledge of itself. They want to prove the antecedent premise by using insoluble terms such as 'what I say is false', for if this statement results in a false understanding about me speaking a falsehood then, when I say 'what I say is false', that is the same as if I said 'I say that what I say is false', but so far the statement 'what I say is false' gives the same meaning as before, hence it is the same as if I said 'I say that I say that what I say is false', and so forth in infinity. But it is impossible for anything to proceed in infinity, ergo the first is impossible, i.e. that the statement establishes a false understanding of that to which it belongs, for that from which something impossible follows is impossible.

Further, if that were the case, there would be a procedure in infinity, but it is not possible to follow infinite procedures in thought, ergo it is impossible to understand that which is signified by the proposition ‘what I say is false’, ergo it does not signify anything. This is why some say to this statement that
5 “you are saying nothing”, and when it is said that ‘what I state is false’, they say “you are not stating anything”, and that is the argument of annulment and the reason for that. But whoever thinks of the statement realizes that there is some meaning to the sounds ‘what I say is false’, hence the term ‘false’ does not establish a knowledge of that to which it belongs, ergo it is
10 not a sign of itself, and so it is for all other things.

1.3 <Argument: There must be a difference between the knower and the known in the process of knowing; if the intellect knows itself there is no difference between knower and known; hence, the intellect cannot know itself.>

1.4 <Argument: The process of understanding combines an accidental and an essential element in the soul; self-knowledge is an identity between knower and known; the differences between the two elements makes an identity and hence self-knowledge impossible.>

1.5 <Argument: If the intellect knows itself by being present to itself,
20 it would always know itself; the intellect can only know one thing at the time; hence, if the intellect knew itself it could not know anything else; the intellect cannot therefore know itself by itself.>

<Determination>

2 We now prove by arguments and through authority that this is not the
25 case, but that the intellect is a sign and judge of itself by itself.

2.1 <Doctrinal arguments supporting the idea of essential self-knowledge.>

2.2 <Arguments based on authorities.>

2.3 <Qualifications and closing reflections.>

<On the initial objections>

30 *Ad 1.1* <Refutation: The impossibility of self-affection only applies to material objects and senses.>

Ad 1.3 <Refutation: There is a difference between the knower and known in their definition, but not in existence.>

35 *Ad 1.4* <Refutation: As above, there is a difference between knower and known in their definition, but not in existence.>

Ad 1.5 <Refutation: Although the intellect is always present to itself it need not always know itself, and it can therefore also know other things. Self-knowledge implies process of consideration.>

Ad 1.2 From these discussions it is clear that when I say ‘What I say is false’, that statement can easily establish a false understanding about that which it is a part and about something untrue, to which (to make it more clear) it could be objected as follows: When I say ‘What I say is false’, it is either true or false that I say something false; if it is true, then that statement does not constitute a false understanding about it, but still about other things which are false, although I do not say anything else, ergo it is false that I say something false, and the previous statement is true; if it is false that I say something false, and I say this, then I say something false, ergo it is true that I say something false, and something false has been said. In this way and in many ways counter-arguments can be made. 5 10

Let us say to this that there is nothing in the way of one and the same thing to be true and false at the same time, because ⟨the statement⟩ ‘man is white’ is true with respect to one and false with respect to another. But it is impossible for the same thing to be true and false in the same way and with respect to the same at the same time. For speakable truth is an equal relation between composite pieces of understanding and the disposition of signified things in a perfect composition or division (with ‘perfect composition’ I mean affirmative statements, with ‘perfect division’ I mean negations). But if there is not an equal relation between the elements of understanding and the things, we have a falsity. Thus truth is some kind of equality, falsity some kind of inequality, just as also Augustine testifies to. But the concept ‘human’ is common to any particular human, regardless of whether it refers to Socrates, Plato, or anybody else, it still refers to the same concept. Thus when I say ‘Socrates is a human’ then I could have that shared term, ‘human’, refer to whichever human that I want, and if it refers to Socrates, then there is a truth in the composition. For the thing is the same as what the concept holds, and thus there is an equality between concept and thing. But if it refers to somebody else than Socrates, then there is an inequality in that same composition between the concept and the thing, for the thing is not the same as what the concept holds. Thus one and the same composition of concepts can be true and false at the same time, but on account of different things. 15 20 25 30

Aristotle gives evidence to this in *Topics*, in the book about definitions, towards the end where he says: “If someone has to define something in relation to something else, and he does not relate it to that which it is said in relation to in the definition, but to something that contains more things, then he has given a bad definition. Suppose for example that somebody said that medicine is the science of all things that exist. For if medicine is not a science about anything that exists, then it is clear that the statement is completely false, but if it is a science of some things, and not of some other things, then it is false in some sense and true in another sense.” Similarly, when I say 35 40

‘Socrates is a human’, when Socrates is a certain human and not another, then it is true in one sense and in another sense false.

And so in the same way we say that this composition, ‘What I say is false’, is at the same time true and false, but on account of different things.

5 For when the statement ‘false’ signifies the common concept of any false thing, and nothing else that is false is said by me, it is clear that on account of other false things it is false that ‘what I say is false’. But when that itself is false, and the part can establish an understanding of the whole, as it has been outlined, then because of that falseness that I say, it is true that ‘what I
10 say is false’. Ergo ‘what I say is false’ is false on account of other false things, but it is true on account of that falsehood that I am saying, and thus the same composition is true and false.

⟨Discussion of the liar paradox continues with many further refinements.⟩

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