

FORMAL AND OBJECTIVE CONCEPTS

DM II.1.1¹

Whether being insofar as it as being has in our minds one formal concept common to all beings.

Utrum ens in quantum ens habeat in mente nostri unum conceptum formalem omnibus entibus communem.

What formal and objective concepts are and in what way they differ.—First, the common distinction between formal and objective concepts should be supposed. The act itself or the word (which is the same thing) by which the intellect conceives some thing or common nature is called ‘formal concept’. It is called a ‘concept’ because it is as if it were an offspring of the mind, but it is named ‘formal’ either because it is the ultimate form of the mind or because it formally represents the known thing to the mind or because in fact it is the intrinsic and formal *terminus* of a mental concept, in which it differs from an objective concept, as therefore I will say.

Conceptis formalis, et obiectivus quid sint, et in quo differant.—Supponenda imprimis est vulgaris distinctio conceptus formalis et obiectivi; conceptus formalis dicitur actus ipse, seu (quod idem est) verbum quo intellectus rem aliquam seu communem rationem concipit; qui dicitur conceptus, quia est veluti proles mentis; formalis autem appellatur, vel quia est ultima forma mentis, vel quia formaliter repræsentat menti rem cognitam, vel quia revera est intrinsecus et formalis terminus conceptionis mentalis, in quo differt a conceptu obiectivo, ut ita dicam.

That thing or nature which properly and immediately is known or represented through the formal concept is called ‘objective concept’. For example, when we conceive of a human, that act which we effect in the mind in order to conceive of the human is called ‘formal concept’. But the human known and represented by that act is called ‘objective concept’, conceived indeed through extrinsic denomination by the formal concept (through which its object is said to be conceived) and therefore rightly called ‘objective’. For the concept is not conceived as a form intrinsically terminating, but as an object and matter to which the formal concept is directed and to which the eye of the mind directly extends. For this reason it is named ‘intellectual intention’ (*intentio intellecta*) by some, according to Averroes, and by others is called ‘objective concept’ (*ratio obiectiva*).

Conceptus obiectivus dicitur res illa, vel ratio, quæ proprie et immediate per conceptum formalem cognoscitur seu repræsentatur; ut, verbi gratia, cum hominem concipimus, ille actus, quem in mente efficimus ad concipiendum hominem, vocatur conceptus formalis; homo autem cognitus et repræsentatus illo actu dicitur conceptus obiectivus, conceptus quidem per denominationem extrinsecam a conceptu formali, per quem obiectum eius concipi dicitur, et ideo recte dicitur obiectivus, quia non est conceptus ut forma intrinsece terminans conceptionem, sed ut obiectum et materia circa quam versatur formalis conceptio, et ad quam mentis acies directe tendit, propter quod ab aliquibus, ex Averroee, *intentio intellecta* appellatur; et ab aliis dicitur *ratio obiectiva*.

Hence, one can infer the distinguishing characteristics between formal and objective concepts. An formal [concept] is always a true and positive thing and a quality inhering in the mind of creatures. But an objective [concept] is not always a true, positive thing. For sometimes we conceive privations and other things which are called ‘beings of reason’, because they only have objective being in the intellect. Likewise, a formal concept is always a singular and individual thing, because it is a thing produced through the intellect and inhering in it. But an objective concept can certainly sometimes be a singular and individual thing, insofar as it can be presented to the mind and be conceived through a formal act, but frequently it is a universal or spread about and common thing (for example, human, substance, and so on). Therefore, in this disputation we primarily intend to explain the objective concept of being as such, following its complete abstraction, the following of which we said is the object of metaphysics. But because this is surely most difficult and because many matters depend on our conception, we start at the beginning from a formal concept, which, as we said, can more easily be known.

¹Latin text from http://homepage.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/Michael.Renemann/suarez/suarez_dm2.html. Retrieved Oct. 6, 2007.

Unde colligitur differentia inter conceptum formalem et obiectivum, quod formalis semper est vera ac positiva res et in creaturis qualitas menti inhærens, obiectivus vero non semper est vera res positiva; concipimus enim interdum privationes et alia, quæ vocantur entia rationis, quia solum habent esse obiective in intellectu. Item conceptus formalis semper est res singularis et individua, quia est res producta per intellectum, eique inhærens; conceptus autem obiectivus interdum quidem esse potest res singularis et individua, quatenus menti obijci potest, et per actum formalem concipi, sæpe vero est res universalis vel confusa et communis, ut est homo, substantia, et similia. In hac ergo disputatione præcipue intendimus explicare conceptum obiectivum entis ut sic, secundum totam abstractionem suam, secundum quam diximus esse metaphysicæ obiectum; quia vero est valde difficilis, multumque pendens ex conceptione nostra, initium sumimus a conceptu formali, qui, ut nobis videtur, notior esse potest.