**Mirecourt, Mental Modes, and Mental Motions**

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**ABSTRACT:**

What is an occurrent mental state? According to a common scholastic answer such a state is at least in part a quality of the mind. When I newly think about a machiatto, say, my mind acquires a new quality. However, according to a view discussed by John Buridan (who rejects it) and John of Mirecourt (who is condemned in 1347 for considering it “plausible”), an occurrent mental state is not even in part a quality. After sketching some of the history of this position, I will present two common arguments against it — the argument from change and the argument from agency. I will then turn to Mirecourt’s own position on the matter. Mirecourt, I show, in fact offers us two different theories about occurrent mental states. The first, which I call the conservation theory, accepts that mental states are in part qualities. However, a mental state is a quality together with an action on the side of the mind, namely, its conservation of a quality within it. The second position, which I will call the pure-action theory, holds that an occurrent mental state is not even in part a quality; instead, it is an action the mind performs which is neither the production nor the conservation of a quality within it. Mirecourt characterizes such pure actions as “modes” of the mind, and it is this position which is condemned in 1347. In the final section, I turn to an objection that both Buridan and Mirecourt raise against the pure-action theory: if accidental states of the mind are mere modes of the mind, then why not suppose that all accidents are mere modes of their substances?

**KEYWORDS: John of Mirecourt, Durand of St.-Pourçain, Richard Drayton, John Buridan, Nicole Oresme, Modes, Mental Acts**

What is an occurrent mental state? The usual answer during the High Middle Ages (1250–1350) was that such a state is at least in part a quality inherent in the mind.[[1]](#footnote-2) My thought about a rock, for instance, is a quality inherent in my mind thanks to which I am related to (thinking *about*) a rock. Call this *the quality theory*.[[2]](#footnote-3) In the eleventh question of his question-commentary on the third book of Aristotle’s *De anima* (*QDA* 3.11)[[3]](#footnote-4) John Buridan, who defends the quality theory,[[4]](#footnote-5) considers a curious view which rejects it.[[5]](#footnote-6) On this view, a mental act neither is nor requires a quality inherent in the mind. Buridan characterizes the view as a “very ancient opinion” which had been condemned by the bishop of Paris, and which “some people” have recently taken up again.[[6]](#footnote-7) He seems to be alluding to his contemporary John of Mirecourt[[7]](#footnote-8) who was condemned in 1347 for holding that the view is “plausible” (in the sense that it does not entail any contradiction).[[8]](#footnote-9) While scholars have already established that Mirecourt is Buridan’s target here — indeed, we have used 1347 as a *terminus a quo* in dating Buridan’s *QDA*[[9]](#footnote-10) — surprisingly little has been written on what Mirecourt’s view actually amounts to. This article aims to do just that.

I will first establish some of historical backdrop to the debate, identifying two early proponents of the view in question: Durand of St.-Pourçain and Richard Drayton. (The latter is, I will show, Mirecourt’s proximate source here.) I will then present two common objections to the view, before turning to Mirecourt’s texts. Mirecourt, in fact, puts forward two different theories about occurrent mental states: this more radical one in *Sent.* 1.19, and another less radical nearby theory in *Sent.* 1.2. After looking at these two theories in some detail, I will close with an objection that both Mirecourt and Buridan (among others) raise against the view.

**The historical backdrop.**

During the first decade of the fourteenth century, Durand rejected the quality theory. According to Durand, occurrent mental states neither are nor require qualities added to the mind. Instead, such states are mere relations between the mind and something outside the mind. A thought about a rock, for instance, is the mind’s relation to a suitably present rock. Call this *the relation theory*.[[10]](#footnote-11)

Durand’s position came to be censured by his order (the Dominicans) in 1314 and again in 1316,[[11]](#footnote-12) and he dropped it from his mature writings, sadly without explanation.[[12]](#footnote-13) However, his early view was frequently discussed by subsequent thinkers, including Thaddeus of Parma, Hervaeus Natalis, Peter of Palude, Prosper de Reggio Emilia, Peter Auriol (from Natalis), and, importantly, Gregory of Rimini (from Auriol).[[13]](#footnote-14) Rimini, after presenting Durand’s main arguments,[[14]](#footnote-15) provides us with some further arguments which cannot be found in Durand’s extant works.[[15]](#footnote-16) According to the marginalia in two manuscripts these additional arguments were “recited” by Adam Wodeham[[16]](#footnote-17) — and, indeed, we can find them (but not Durand’s arguments) verbatim in Wodeham’s discussion of the beatific vision.[[17]](#footnote-18) According to the marginalia in some of Wodeham’s manuscripts these additional arguments were made by Richard Drayton, a little known Franciscan master at Oxford around 1324, whose writings are lost.[[18]](#footnote-19) Wodeham notes that Drayton’s view seems to run up against certain propositions already condemned in Paris in 1277.[[19]](#footnote-20)

Some years later, John of Mirecourt, in *Sent.* 1.19, plagiarizes Wodeham’s presentation of Drayton’s position, and, deciding that the view is “plausible”, found himself condemned in 1347.[[20]](#footnote-21) So the view in one form or another came to be censured or condemned at least four times over the course of 70 years: 1277, 1314, 1316, and 1347.

It is not entirely clear what Drayton’s actual view amounted to. The arguments handed down to us are largely negative in character, maintaining at minimum that an occurrent *intellective* state neither is nor requires a quality inherent in the intellect. (The arguments are silent about other kinds of mental states.) Most of the arguments emphasize a kind of “nobility” thesis about the mind, or at least the intellect: it is not the sort of thing that can be causally affected by less noble objects outside it, and, indeed, it is so noble that it does not undergo any sort of “subjective” (e.g., qualitative) change at all, and so the mind does not even affect itself, as it were, and produce in itself a quality.[[21]](#footnote-22) Wodeham at one point interprets Drayton’s position as a version of the relation theory,[[22]](#footnote-23) which might explain why Rimini came to connect it with Durand’s position. Mirecourt, however, suggests an even more radical interpretation of Drayton’s position: an occurrent mental state neither is nor requires a quality, nor is it a relation, but instead it is a different sort of thing altogether, what he calls a mode (*modus*) of the mind. However, before we look at Mirecourt’s interpretation, it will be useful first to establish some of the argumentative context surrounding the view. What motivates the debate?

**The argument from change.**

One very common argument for the quality theory can be called *the argument from change*. We can find this argument in Buridan and Mirecourt (among many others).[[23]](#footnote-24) When I start to think about a rock, a new relation obtains between my mind and the rock — I am now thinking *about* the rock whereas before I was not. However, in order for this new relation to obtain there must be an antecedent non-relational change on the side of either my mind or the rock. This is because in general relational change presupposes non-relational change on the side of the relata of that relation.[[24]](#footnote-25) Call this *the narrow relational change principle.* In order for Socrates to become newly related to Plato (e.g., “similar” to Plato in color), either Socrates or Plato (or both) must first undergo a non-relational change (e.g., a qualitative change in color). However, clearly I can newly think about a rock (and so be newly related to a rock) even though there is no change (non-relational or otherwise) on the side of the rock. Hence, since there must be an antecedent non-relational change on the side of the relata, we should hold that it is the mind that undergoes such a non-relational change. Further, since there are only three kinds of non-relational changes (substantial, quantitative, and qualitative), and since an occurrent mental state is clearly not a quantity or a substance, we should hold that an occurrent mental state is quality upon which whatever relation or relations to the object are founded.

Durand rejects this argument on the grounds that the *narrow* relational change principle is false. While relational change does, it is true, presuppose non-relational change, it does not necessarily presuppose non-relational change *on the side of the relata*. A non-relational change *somewhere else* is sufficient. Call this the *broad relational change principle*.He offers a number of examples where this is the case.[[25]](#footnote-26) However, his chief example is the relation of (cognitive) presence: X can come to be (cognitively) present to Y even though neither X nor Y undergo a non-relational change beforehand. For instance, the man behind the curtain can come to be (cognitively) present to Toto even though neither the man nor Toto undergo a change (non-relational or otherwise), for a change to the curtain is sufficient. Hence, an occurrent mental state, conceived of as a relation of (cognitive) presence between the mind and its object, does not presuppose a non-relational change *on the side of the mind or the object* (its relata), although it *does* presuppose a non-relational change *somewhere*, namely, on the side of whatever impedes the (cognitive) presence of the object to the mind (e.g., the organs of the body, the lighting conditions, etc.)[[26]](#footnote-27) Like a lowered curtain, certain physiological and physical states impede the rock’s presence to my mind such that once these impediments have been removed (once the curtain has been lifted, so to speak) the rock comes to be present to the mind — and so when conditions are such and so (and this is an empirical question) a new mental state (a new relation) obtains, and when conditions are not such and so, it does not. Hence, an occurrent mental state is a mere relation between the mind and the object.

**The argument from agency.**

However, Durand’s relation theory faced an important objection, which I will call *the argument from agency*. Although Durand, like Drayton, was deeply motivated by the idea that the mind is more noble than objects outside the mind such that it cannot be causally affected by those objects,[[27]](#footnote-28) the relation theory would seem to entail a very strong dependence of the mind upon the world, for it would seem to entail that there can be no mental change without an antecedent non-mental change (i.e., a change outside the mind, somewhere in the world). Here’s why. According to the broad relational change principle, relational change presupposes non-relational change *somewhere*, according to Durand. But, according to Durand, the mind does not undergo a non-relational change at all prior to its newly thinking about a rock (i.e., to its being newly related to a rock).[[28]](#footnote-29) Hence, when the mind newly thinks about a rock, something *outside* the mind must undergo a non-relational change beforehand, and so it would seem that every *mental* change presupposes some *non-mental* change, which suggests a very strong dependence of the mind upon the world.

However, according to Adam Wodeham (among others), we should reject such a strong dependence of the mind upon the world, for there are at least some kinds of mental changes that can occur — both at the level of intellect and at the level of will — without any change whatsoever outside the mind beforehand. For instance, I can want to eat the pie and then *not* want to eat the pie *ceteris paribus* simply by changing my mind.[[29]](#footnote-30) But if mental change presupposes non-mental change, then such changes of mindwould be impossible. Hence, mental change must be a kind of non-relational change, and since, as we saw, the only suitable candidate here is qualitative change, an occurrent mental state must be a quality, one that the mind itself brings about in itself.

**The conservation theory.**

Let us now turn to Mirecourt. In *Sent.* 1.19, Mirecourt, as mentioned, presents Drayton’s position — lifting it verbatim from Wodeham — as “plausible.” He interprets Drayton, however, as holding that an occurrent mental state is not a mere relation (as Durand holds), nor is it even in part a quality (as the quality theory holds), but rather it is a mode, a peculiar sort of entity added to the mind.

Before I take up this interpretation, however, it will be helpful first to look at another theory of occurrent mental states that Mirecourt puts forward earlier in his *Sentences* (*Sent.* 1.2). This theory is a variant of the quality theory, which I will call *the conservation theory*. A guiding assumption behind the conservation theory is a principle I will call *the agency principle*: the mind is especially responsible for its occurrent mental states such that an occurrent mental state is at least in part something the mind *does*, an action it performs. He writes:

It is not possible by any power whatsoever [i.e., it is logically impossible] that the soul [i.e., mind] sense something or think about an object or will something or take pleasure in something or actually know something ... and that the soul not do something with respect to that.[[30]](#footnote-31)

Now the agency principle seems to be fully compatible with the quality theory, suitably qualified. When I think about a rock, a new quality comes about in my mind, a quality which *my mind itself produces* (either on its own or together with the rock). We might say that an occurrent mental state is a quality *plus* an action on the side of the mind, namely, its production of that quality.[[31]](#footnote-32) However, since a production, according to a standard medieval view, is not some further quality or thing added to the agent producing it but instead reducible to, or identical with, the effect the agent produces in the patient, we can hold that a mental state is, ontologically speaking, nothing more than the quality produced in the mind, as the quality theory holds.[[32]](#footnote-33)

However, as Mirecourt argues, brief reflection on divine omnipotence require us to qualify such a view even further. Mirecourt offers a somewhat complicated case to show this, which is best seen as proceeding in three stages.[[33]](#footnote-34)

(Stage One) Suppose I think about a rock and so my mind produces some quality in itself. According to the “active” form of the quality theory just sketched, I would then be in a mental state: my mind is doing something, namely, it is producing a quality in itself.

(Stage Two) Now, suppose God intervenes and conserves this quality in my mind.[[34]](#footnote-35) In such a situation, it would seem that a proponent of the active form of the quality theory would have to say that I would *no longer* be in a mental state (i.e., thinking about the rock) even though the same quality inheres in my mind (indeed, the same quality that my mind before produced). For now, while God alone is conserving that quality, my mind is not *doing* anything at all with respect to it. Hence, whereas at Stage One I am thinking about the rock, now at Stage Two I am not thinking about the rock.

(Stage Three) Let us further suppose that God stops intervening: God stops (totally) conserving this quality, and so allows my mind to conserve it. (God, of course, is a partial conserving cause of all things, and so, strictly speaking, God stops *totally* conserving it and starts *partially* conserving it along with my mind.) In such a case, my mind will begin to conserve that quality which before it was not conserving. Should I now be said to be in a mental state, to be thinking about the rock? It would seem that our answer should be ‘yes’, for my mind is now doing something, namely, it is now conserving a quality within it. However, notice that in the transition from Stage Two to Stage Three, when my mind changes from *not conserving* to *conserving*, no new quality comes into existence: the quality being conserved is the exact same quality as before.

Mirecourt writes (his example here is sensation but it applies *mutatis mutandis* to other occurrent mental states):[[35]](#footnote-36)

The sensitive power’s conservation of such a thing [i.e., a quality inherent in it] is, together with the object, sufficient for that power to sense… The power might conserve that which was not conserved by it before… Such a transition from contradiction to contradiction [i.e., the change from “X is not sensing” to “X is sensing”] will be explained by the fact that the sensitive power now conserves that thing [i.e., a quality] which was before conserved by something else [namely, God]. And this conservation will be a certain action performed by the sensitive power.[[36]](#footnote-37)

The mere change from not conserving a quality inherent in the mind to conserving it, then, is sufficient for mental change. Indeed, I submit, it is the mind’s conservation of a quality — and not its production of that quality — that matters, for when the mind initially produces a quality it also begins to conserve that quality, and, as the intervention case sketched above shows, the mind can transition from not thinking to thinking simply by transitioning from not conserving to conserving a quality in it (however that quality was produced). (For instance, God might directly produce the quality in the mind, which will be an occurrent mental state only if the mind at least in part conserves it.) An occurrent mental state, then, on this conservation theory, is the mind’s *conservation* of a quality inherent in it: it is a quality *plus* an action, namely, a conservation.

But what is this *conservation*? Can it be reduced to, or identified with, the quality conserved by the mind? Or is it a further quality inherent in the mind? For Mirecourt, I submit, there are five features that are important here (and which will be relevant when we turn to the more radical view).

(1) First, Mirecourt clearly thinks that the mind’s conservation of a quality within it is a kind of action, something the mind does.[[37]](#footnote-38)

(2) Second, such a conservation cannot be reduced to or identified with the quality conserved. With an ordinary action, such as a production, wherein there is some new effect brought about in a patient, we might accept the standard view that such an action can be reduced to or identified with the effect produced in the patient. The fire’s action of heating water up, for instance, is the heat (the effect) produced in the water. However, conservation is a special sort of action, for there is no *new* effect in a patient that results when one changes from not conserving an existing quality to conserving it. Hence, a conservation cannot be identified with or reduced to an effect in a patient.

(3) Third, a conservation cannot be identified with or reduced to the conserving agent itself. Conservation is episodic in character: the mind sometimes conserves something and sometimes does not (as the divine intervention case shows).[[38]](#footnote-39) Hence, a conservation must be an accidental condition of the agent *really distinct* somehowfrom that agent.

(4) Fourth, a conservation must be a *non-relational* accidental condition of the agent. Of course, conserving involves a relation between the conserving agent and the thing conserved. However, as we saw above when discussing the relational change principle, relational change presupposes non-relational change (either on the side of the relata or at least somewhere in the world). But the mind can change from not conserving something to conserving it (or vice versa) even though there is no antecedent non-relational change anywhere at all (as the intervention case shows). Hence, a conservation must be a *non-relational* accidental condition of the mind. But if a conservation is a non-relational accidental condition of the mind, then is it not simply a quality (or, less plausibly, a quantity)? A quality (Socrates’s color, for instance) is a non-relational accidental condition of a substance (Socrates), and so too we might think that the mind’s conservation of some quality within it is itself a further quality of the mind.

(5) The fifth feature establishes an important difference between conservations and other non-relational accidental conditions such as qualities and quantities. A conservation is such that it *ontologically depends* upon its subject whereas a quantity or quality does not. The wafer’s brownness (one of its qualities), for instance, although it *naturally* *depends* upon the wafer (its subject), can still exist without the wafer by divine power, as the Eucharist would seem to entail. However, a conservation cannot exist without its subject. The Sun’s yellowness can exist without the Sun thanks to divine power, but the Sun’s *conservation* (of, e.g., the light in the air) cannot exist without the Sun even by divine power. So too a quality inherent in the mind which the mind produced might exist without the mind by divine power, but the mind’s *conservation* of that quality cannot exist without the mind even by divine power. In other words, *other* non-relational accidental conditions (qualities and quantities) have what I will call *mere natural dependence* upon their subjects whereas conservations have what I will call *ontological dependence* upon their subjects.

Hence, a conservation is a very peculiar sort of thing: it is episodic and depends upon something else (the agent), and so it is an accident of some sort. However, it can come and go even if nothing else changes, and so it cannot be a *relational* accident (which require antecedent non-relational changes). It must, then, be a non-relational accident. Yet it *ontologically depends* upon its subject (the agent) unlike other non-relational accidents. At one point, Mirecourt characters it as a mode of a thing (*modus se habendi rei*).[[39]](#footnote-40)

To sum up, an occurrent mental state is, on the conservation theory, the mind’s conservation of a quality inherent in the mind. This is a variant on the quality theory: a mental state is a quality *plus* a conservation. However, this conservation is itself a non-relational accidental condition of the mind, but such that it ontological depends upon (i.e., cannot exist without) the mind — a “mode” of the mind. An occurrent mental state, then, is a quality inherent in the mind plus a mode of the mind.

**The pure-action theory.**

Mirecourt takes matters a step further some questions later in *Sent.* 1.19. There he considers as “plausible” Drayton’s position that an occurrent mental state is not even in part a quality inherent in the mind. As I will argue in what follows, Mirecourt’s interpretation of this view is that an occurrent mental state is simply a mode of the mind.

As Mirecourt makes clear the view accepts the agency principle, and so a occurrent mental state involves an action of some sort, something the mind does.[[40]](#footnote-41) However, this is a *very* peculiar sort of action: unlike an ordinary action (like production) there is no new effect in a patient that results, and unlike a conservation it does not consist in the conservation of an already produced effect in a patient. An occurrent mental state is simply a pure action performed by the mind, one that neither requires nor results in a quality inherent in the mind. Call this *the pure-action theory*.[[41]](#footnote-42)

However, this leaves much still obscure, and Mirecourt’s positive characterization of the view is woefully brief. His opponents, however, fill in some of its more important details. In his *QDA*, Mirecourt’s contemporary Nicole Oresme links the view here with the Platonist Macrobius. On Macrobius’s view (as interpreted by Oresme) an occurrent mental state is a “self-motion of the soul.”[[42]](#footnote-43) Likewise, Buridan, although he does not mention Macrobius by name, interprets the view as holding that an occurrent mental state might be like a motion. For instance, Buridan recites the following argument for the view as an opening argument in *QDA* 3.11:

(1) We maintain that this magnitude [e.g., a piece of wax] is the same as its shape and also that, because it is differently disposed [*aliter et aliter se habet*], it is sometimes a sphere, sometimes a cube, and sometimes a pyramid, without sphericity or cubicity [or pyramidicity] being a thing [*res*] added to it… (2) So too many people maintain, because this movable thing is differently disposed [*aliter et aliter se habet*], it is sometimes in motion and sometimes at rest, sometimes in motion downwards, and sometimes in motion upwards, without motion being a thing added to it.[[43]](#footnote-44)

Here, two analogies are put forward: the mind is to its occurrent mental states like (1) a piece of wax to its various shapes; like (2) a mobile thing to its various motions. In either case, a thing is in various states at various times (“differently disposed”), and yet those states are (purportedly) not *things* (much less qualities) added to it. Buridan quickly rejects the first analogy on the grounds that minds do not have quantitative parts, and shapes, for Buridan, are the (mere) arrangement of quantitative parts.[[44]](#footnote-45)

But what of the second analogy with motion? Perhaps occurrent mental states are “self-motions” of the mind: the mind puts itself into motion when it thinks about something and, when it stops thinking, it comes to be at rest. (Likewise, we might say that the mind is thinking *dogwards* or *catwards* and so on.)If we further hold, as some did during this period, that motions are not things (much less qualities) added to the thing in motion, then we will have the view that occurrent mental states — as self-motions of the mind — neither are nor require things (much less qualities) added to the mind.

But why should we think that motions are not things added to whatever is in motion? One way to cash out such a “reductionist” view about motion would be to hold that locomotive change is a kind of relational change, a change that results in a new relation to a location, and that relations, in general, can be reduced to or identified with their relata.[[45]](#footnote-46) However, this won’t do in the case at hand, for two reasons. First, a “motion” of the mind is a non-spatial or “spiritual” motion:[[46]](#footnote-47) the mind does not change relative to a location at all when it newly thinks about something. Second, and more importantly, even if we can make sense of the idea that an occurrent mental state is a motion of a mind, if we also hold that change of motion is a relational change, as the reductionist holds, then we will be once more committed to the relation theory, and so we will not be able to accommodate the agency principle, a principle that Mirecourt fully accepts — indeed, the principle seems to have guided him towards the view in the first place.

Once more, Mirecourt’s opponents offer us a way forward here. In their question-commentaries on Aristotle’s *Physics* both Oresme and Buridan reject such a reductionist view about motions. A motion is not a mere relation, but rather it isa *non-relational* accidental condition of the thing in motion.[[47]](#footnote-48) They put forward the following thought experiment. Suppose God sets the universe in motion and rotates it clockwise. The universe will acquire a new motion, but this motion cannot be a new relation, for the universe is exactly related to everything that exists in just the same way as it was before it started rotating (there is no location with respect to which it is differently related, and its relation to God is the same). Nor can its motion be identified with or reduced to the universe itself, since God might stop rotating the universe. Hence, the universe’s rotation must be a non-relational accidental condition of the universe. This will be true even if the universe sets itself into motion.[[48]](#footnote-49)

In short, Buridan and Oresme agree that a *self*-rotation of the universe has features (1) through (4) discussed above: it is (1) an action, something the universe *does*, which is a (4) non-relational (3) accidental condition (2) of the universe itself. (Motions that are not self-motions would lack the first feature, of course.) Oresme and Buridan disagree, however, about the fifth feature, that is, whether or not self-rotation is *ontologically* or *merely naturally* dependent upon the universe. According to Buridan, such a self-rotation is merely naturally dependent upon the universe just like any other non-relational accidental condition of a thing, e.g., a thing’s qualities. Indeed, he holds that it inheres in the universe and can exist without the universe by divine power.[[49]](#footnote-50) By contrast, Oresme, who characterizes a position like Buridan’s to be “the worst position to take” (*QP* 3.7, 341) on the matter, holds, instead, that such a self-rotation ontologically and not merely naturally depends upon the universe: it cannot exist without the universe even by divine power. He characterizes it as a *mode* of the universe.[[50]](#footnote-51) Hence, Oresme accepts (5) — self-rotations ontologically depend upon their subjects — whereas Buridan rejects (5).

Returning to Mirecourt, we might suppose that an occurrent mental state on the pure-action theory is sort of like Oresme’s conception of the self-rotation of the universe: a pure action of the mind is a non-relational accidental condition of the mind which is *ontologically dependent* upon the mind, that is, it is a *mode* of the mind. Hence, Mirecourt holds, I submit, that occurrent mental states, according to the pure-action theory, have the following five features:

(1) First, a pure action is an action. It is something the mind *does*. (The mind sets itself into motion when it thinks, so to speak.)

(2) Second, it cannot be identified with or reduced to an effect in a patient, for a pure action neither results in a new effect, nor does it conserve an already existing effect.

(3) Third, since it is episodic, it is an accidental condition of the agent (the mind) really distinct from the agent.

(4) Fourth, such an action must be a *non-relational* condition of the mind. It could be that certain new relations follow upon it, e.g., to the object, but the action itself is not merely a relation.

(5) Finally, it is *ontologically dependent* upon the mind such that it cannot exist without the mind even by divine power. It is, in short, a mode of the mind.

To sum up, the agency principle at minimum demands that occurrent mental states are actions, something the mind does. The relation theory seems to have no way to account for a robust enough form of mental agency to satisfy this principle, because relational change is dependent upon non-relational change, and so there can be no new mental change without some non-mental change beforehand. According to the conservation theory, such agency is a matter of the mind’s conserving a quality that already exists in it, and conservation is a mode of the mind, not a quality or relation. According to the pure-action theory, such agency is a matter merely of a pure action on the side of the mind, a self-motion of the mind conceived of as a mode of the mind: an accidental non-relational condition of the mind which ontologically depends upon the mind.

**The slippery slope objection.**

In close, I want to consider an objection that Buridan, Oresme, and Mirecourt each raise. It is more narrowly directed at the pure-action theory, but I think it applies equally well to the conservation theory. As a first approximation, the objection — which I will call *the slippery slope objection* — runs like this. If there is some such non-relational accidental condition of a thing which ontologically depends upon that thing such that it cannot exist without that thing even by divine power, then why not suppose that *every* non-relational accidental condition of a thing, such as its qualities and quantity, are likewise ontologically dependent? Is there any in principle reason to suppose that a conservation or a pure action is distinctive here? What prevents us, in other words, from supposing that every (non-relational) accident is a mere mode of its substance? But if we accept that every non-relational accident is a mode of its substance, then it would seem that we have made the miracle of the Eucharist, as standardly understood, impossible: during the Eucharist, God conserves at least some of the non-relational accidents of the wafer in existence without the wafer.

As it turns out, Mirecourt accepts the slippery slope objection. Mirecourt states the objection towards the end of *Sent.* 1.19 after presenting the pure-action position sketched above. He writes: “By the same token one will deny every accident in the world” (n. 73). That is, if one allows that occurrent mental states — accidental non-relational conditions of the mind — are modes, then one should also hold that *every* accidental non-relational condition of a thing is a mode. Hence, if we accept the pure-action theory (or, for that matter, if we accept the conservation theory or Oresme’s view about the universe’s self-rotation), then we should also hold that the Eucharist is *metaphysically* impossible, at least as standardly conceived. Mirecourt leaves the issue at that, confessing that he is merely maintaining that the pure-action theory, despite this unfortunate consequence, is “plausible” — although he is quick to add that it is certainly “false” granted the miracle of the Eucharist.[[51]](#footnote-52)

Oresme also raises the slippery slope objection.[[52]](#footnote-53) In his *QDA* 3.9, he notes that the pure-action theory entails an “ancient” view (“before Aristotle”) according to which no accident whatsoever is separable from its substance but instead a mere mode of its substance (*illa substantia se habens aliter et aliter*).[[53]](#footnote-54) He writes:

It would follow that any accident whatsoever would not be distinct [i.e., separable] from its subject. The consequent is contrary to Aristotle’s philosophy and the truth. The consequence is clear, for there does not seem to be any [relevant] difference between these accidents [i.e., occurrent mental states] and the other ones [e.g., qualities and quantities].[[54]](#footnote-55)

That is, what goes for one, goes for all, at least with respect to ontological dependence. (Notoriously, Oresme drops all talk of modes after Mirecourt’s censure in 1347. Perhaps this explains something of his misgivings on the topic.)[[55]](#footnote-56)

Buridan also raises the same sort of objection in *QDA* 3.11, associating the pure-action theory as well with the “ancients” (he names Parmenides, Melissus, and Democratus).[[56]](#footnote-57) As mentioned above, Buridan holds that all non-relational accidental conditions (with the exception of shapes and artificial forms) inhere in and naturally depend upon their subjects.[[57]](#footnote-58) Hence, even if one wanted to accept that an occurrent mental state is a self-motion of the mind or pure action, one would still be committed to the view that it is a thing inherent in the mind which can exist without the mind by divine power. Call them modes if you like, Buridan adds, but they are still merely naturally dependent upon their subjects.[[58]](#footnote-59) God can conserve the rotating motion of the universe without the universe, a thought without the thinker, a conservation without a conserving agent, and so on. This seems to be a hard bullet to bite.

But how is the inference from the narrow case (occurrent mental states) to the global case (all non-relational accidental conditions) supposed to work? Isn’t there a relevant difference between occurrent mental states and other non-relational accidental conditions? Can’t we suppose that what unslips the slope, so to say, is that conservations and pure actions are peculiar exceptions to the rule? Indeed, brief reflection on the agency principle suggests one relevant difference: conservations and pure actions are ontologically dependent upon their subjects *because* those subjects are in an important sense *necessarily responsible* for them insofar as such actions are *necessarily performed by* those subjects. The Sun, for instance, seems to be necessarily responsible for its *conservation* of the light in the air, and so its conservation is ontologically dependent upon it; but the Sun is not necessarily responsible for, say, its yellowness or whatever other non-relational accidental condition it might have, and so its yellowness is not ontologically dependent but rather merely naturally dependent upon it (and so can exist without it).

**Conclusion**.

Let’s take stock. According to Mirecourt, among others, an occurrent mental state is something the mind *does,* an action it performs. One consequence of this agency principle, I have suggested, is that such a mental state cannot exist without the mind even by divine power. On the conservation theory, a mental state is the mind’s conservation of a quality within it, whereas on the pure-action theory it is the mind’s self-motion, a pure action that does not involve the production or conservation of a quality. In either case, however, such states involve a non-relational accidental condition of the mind — a mode of the mind — which, unlike other non-relational conditions of a thing, is ontologically dependent upon its subject (the mind) and so cannot exist without the mind. Nor does such a view necessarily entail that *all* non-relational accidental conditions are ontologically dependent upon their subjects, for there is a difference which makes a difference between occurrent mental states and other (more mundane) accidents, namely, occurrent mental states are something their subjects are especially responsible for, that is, they are *necessarily* something their subjects *do*, whereas other non-relational conditions of a subject are not.[[59]](#footnote-60)

1. In what follows, I will speak loosely of the mind as the subject of (what has) such mental states, although most scholastics held that, strictly speaking, its proximate subject is a given mental power or faculty within the mind, e.g., the proximate subject of a vision of a nuthatch is the faculty for sight (the “visive” power). As well, scholastic philosophers tended to call such occurrent states “acts”(*actus*) on the grounds that such states are the actualization of the relevant power or potency (*potentia*) within the mind, e.g., vision is the actualization of the visive power. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. John Mirecourt characterizes this view as the “common” view in *Sentences* 1.2, 330.330 / n. 48. (On Mirecourt’s *Sentences*, and the editions I use, see footnote 7 below.)Indeed, the view was the mainstream view. We can find it in one form or another in Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus, William Ockham, Adam Wodeham, Walter Chatton, and, among Mirecourt’s contemporaries, in both Nicole Oresme and John Buridan. For Aquinas, see, e.g., Giorgio Pini, “Two Models of Thinking: Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scotus on Occurrent Thoughts,” in *Intentionality, Cognition, and Mental Representation in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. G. Klima (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 81–103; and Jeffrey Brower and Susan Brower-Toland, “Aquinas on Mental Representation: Concepts and Intentionality,” *Philosophical Review* 117, no. 2 (2008): 193–244, and the many references therein. For Scotus, see Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus’s Theory of Cognition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), ch. 5; and Pini, “Two Models of Thinking”. For Ockham, see Claude Panaccio, *Ockham on Concepts* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 21–23. For Buridan, see footnote 4 below. For Oresme (and others in that circle), see the texts in footnote 6 below. For Wodeham and Chatton, see the texts in footnote 17 below. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. For an analysis of *QDA* 3.11, see Jack Zupko, “Acts and Dispositions in John Buridan’s Faculty Psychology,” in *The Ontology, Psychology and Axiology of Habits* (Habitus) *in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. M. Roques and N. Faucher (Cham: Springer, 2018), 333–45; and “John Buridan’s Philosophy of Mind,” PhD diss. (Cornell University, 1989), 3.11 (PAGEREF). In what follows, I will quote from the forthcoming edition of Buridan’s *QDA*, ed. G. Klima, J. Zupko, P. Sobol, and P. Hartman (Cham: Springer, 2023) using its paragraph numbers (n. or nn.) when needed. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Buridan’s view is slightly more complicated. He distinguishes between *simple* mental states (roughly, non-propositional ones), on the one hand, and *complex* mentalstates (roughly, propositional ones), on the other, and holds that, while our simple states can be exhaustively explained by appeal to the “cogitative” power (roughly, the brain) and its qualitative states, our complex mental states cannot, and so these must be (at least in part) qualities inherent in the mind. See *QDA* 3.15. For discussion, see Peter Sobol, “John Buridan on External and Internal Sensation,” in *Questions on the Soul by John Buridan and Others*, ed. G. Klima (Cham: Springer, 2017), 95–106; Gyula Klima, “Buridan on Sense Perception and Sensory Awareness,” in ibid., 157–67; and Jack Zupko, “Intellect and Intellectual Activity in Buridan’s Psychology,” in ibid.*,* 183–92. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. While my focus here will be more narrowly on *occurrent* mental states (“acts”), the view Buridan considers here also rejects two other common theses, namely, that mental representations (or *species*) and mental dispositions (or *habitus*) are qualities inherent in the mind. For Buridan’s views about mental dispositions, see Zupko, “Acts and Dispositions.” For his views about mental representations, see Peter Hartman, “Durand of St.-Pourçain and John Buridan on *species*: Direct Realism with and without Representation,” in *Questions on the Soul*, 107–29. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. *QDA* 3.11, n. 1. On the claim that the view is “ancient”, see also ibid., nn. 13–14 and footnote 56 below. On the condemnation of the view at Paris, see footnote 8 below, as well as Buridan, *QDA*, 3.11, n. 23. The same view is discussed in the same terms among Buridan’s contemporaries. See Nicole Oresme, *QDA,* ed. B. Patar and C. Gagnon (Leuven: Peeters, 1995) 3.9, 381; Marsilius of Inghen, *QDA* (Vienna, *Österreichische Nationalbibliothek*, lat. 5437) 3.7, f. 406rb; John of Wesalia, *QDA* (Damstadt, *Hessische Landes- und Hochschulbibliothek*, 2197) 3.13, f. 158va; and an anonymous author (whom I call Lokert’s Buridan), *QDA* 3.8, 689, ed. G. Lokert (Paris, 1516). (All these questions share a family of resemblance with Buridan’s *QDA* 3.11 in the title, structure, and sometimes answers. I will simply refer to any question-commentary on Aristotle’s *De anima* as *QDA* in what follows.) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. *Sent.* 1.19, n. 73 (quoted below in footnote 51). I will focus here on the second and nineteenth questions from the first book of Mirecourt’s *Sentences*. *Sent.* 1.2 has been edited twice, first by Anna Franzinelli in “Questioni inedite di Giovanni di Mirecourt sulla conoscenza,” *Revista critica di storia della filosofia* 13, no. 3 (1958): 319–40, and then by Massimo Parodi (only available online at http://filosofia.dipafilo.unimi.it/~mparodi/mirecourt/home.htm [last updated 2004]). Neither edition uses Vatican, Pal. lat. 340 (V), against which I’ve checked the texts. I cite both Franzinelli’s page and line numbers, followed by a slash, and then Parodi’s paragraph numbers (n. or nn.). *Sent.* 1.19 has been edited in Parodi’s online edition; I cite his paragraph numbers. I note differences only when relevant. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. On Mirecourt’s condemnation, see Stefano Caroti, “*Modi rerum* and Materialism: A Note on a Quotation of a Condemned *Articulus* in Some Fourteenth-Century Parisian *De anima* Commentaries,” *Traditio* 55 (2000): 211–34; “Les *modi rerum*... encore une fois,” in *Quia inter doctores est magna dissensio.* (Florence: Olschki, 2004), 195–222; and Robert Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes 1274–1671* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 408–12. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. See the introduction to the edition of Buridan’s *QDA*, xiv. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. See especially *Scriptum super IV libros Sententiarum* (*Sent*. A)*,* ed. F. Retucci (Leuven: Peeters, 2012) 2.3.5; and *Quaestio* “Utrum intelligere sit aliquid additum intellectui cum eo faciens compositionem realem,” ed. J. Koch in *Durandi de S. Porciano O.P. Quaestio de natura cognitionis...* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1935), 33–42. For further references, and discussion, see Peter Hartman, “The Relation-Theory of Mental Acts: Durand of St.-Pourçain on the Ontological Status of Mental Acts,” *Oxford Studies in Medieval Philosophy* 7 (2019): 186–211. Durand also rejects the need for mental *species* and holds that mental dispositions (*habitus*) are not qualities inherent in the mind. On mental dispositions*,* see Peter Hartman, “Are Cognitive Habits in the Intellect? Durand of St.-Pourçain and Prosper de Reggio Emilia on Cognitive Habits,” in *The Ontology, Psychology and Axiology of Habits*, 229–44. On *species*, see footnote 12 below. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. For a transcription, see Josef Koch, “Die Magister-Jahre des Durandus de S. Porciano O.P. und der Konflikt mit seinem Ordinem,” in *Kleine Schriften*, ed. K. Bormann (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1973), 2:7–118. For the 1314 censure, see n. 18, 58; for the 1316 censure, see n. 58, 83–84. For discussion, see Isabel Iribarren, “L’antithomisme de Durand de Saint-Pourçain et ses précédents,” *Revue thomiste* 108 (2008): 39–56; and *Durandus of St. Pourçain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. For instance, in his second (“B”) redaction of Book 2, Distinction 3 (around 1311), he omits the entire *quaestio* associated with human cognition. In his third (“C”) redaction of Book 2, Distinction 3 (after 1317), he replaces the original discussion (*Sent*. A 2.3.5) with a new, reworked one (*Sent.* C [Venice, 1571] 2.3.6), wherein he remains decidedly neutral about the ontological status of occurrent mental states themselves, although he still rejects *species*. For discussion of Durand’s rejection of *species*, see Peter Hartman, “Durand of St.-Pourçain and Thomas Aquinas on Mental Representation,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (2013): 19–34; and “Durand of St.-Pourçain and John Buridan on *species*”. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. For references, see Hartman, “The Relation-Theory of Mental Acts.” [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. *Lectura super Sententias* (*Sent.*), ed. D. Trapp (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1979) 2.7.2, 86.1–17. According to marginalia in two manuscripts, these arguments are “held” by Durand and “recited” by Auriol. Auriol does, indeed, recite them in Book One, Distinction 35 of his *Scriptum super Sententias* (*Sent.*) (Rome, 1605) where they are presented as the “opinion of some people” (*opinio quorumdam*) on page 751aF-bC. Auriol himself relies either upon Hervaeus Natalis’s presentation of Durand’s position (found in Hervaeus’s *Quodlibet* 3.8*,* ed. J. Koch in *Durandi de S. Porciano O.P. Quaestio de natura cognitionis…*, 43–75), or upon the same (unknown) source Hervaeus used, since both include an additional argument that cannot be located in any extant version of Durand’s *Sent.* A 2.3.5. (The additional argument is: Hervaeus, *Quodlibet* 3.8, 46.14–47.2; Auriol, *Sent.*, 751bB [the fifth argument].) [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. Rimini, *Sent.* 2.7.2, 86.19–87.7. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. See the critical apparatus on page 86 of Rimini’s *Sent.* 2.7.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. *Lectura secunda super Sententias*, ed. R. Wood (St. Bonaventure: Franciscan Institute, 1990)1.1.4; and *Lectura Oxoniensis super Sententias* (Paris, *Bibliothèque de l’Université Sorbonne* 193) 1.1.2. Drayton’s arguments can also be found in Wodeham’s contemporary Walter Chatton (although Wodeham does not seem to have relied upon Chatton). See Chatton, *Reportatio et Lectura super Sententias*, ed. J. Wey (Toronto: Pontifical Institute, 1989) Prologus, q. 2; *Reportatio super Sententias*, ed. J. Wey and G. Etzkorn (Toronto: Pontifical Institute, 2004) 2.4.5; and *Lectura super Sententias*, ed. J. Wey and G. Etzkorn (Toronto: Pontifical Institute, 2008) 1.3.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. See the critical edition of Wodeham’s *Lectura secunda* 1.1.4 on page 251 at footnote 1. On Drayton, see William Courtenay, *Adam Wodeham* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 63; and Gedeon Gál, “Quaestio Ioannis de Reading de necessitate specierum intelligibilium,” *Franciscan Studies* 29 (1969): 66–156, who notes on page 71 that Reading’s immediate adversary on the issue of *species* is Drayton (who rejects them). It is unclear what the connection is (if any) between Drayton and Durand. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. In particular Articles 44, 46, 47, and 147 from Roland Hisette’s numbering in *Enquête sur les 219 articles condamnés à Paris le 7 mars 1277* (Louvain: Publications universitaires, 1977). Art. 44, 87: “Quod in substantiis separatis nulla est possibilis transmutatio; nec sunt in potentia ad aliquid, quia aeternae et immunes sunt a materia.” Art. 46, 91: “Quod substantiae separatae sunt sua essentia, quia in eis idem est quo est et quod est.” Art. 47, 95: “Quod scientia intelligentiae non differt a substantia eius; ubi enim non est diversitas intellecti ab intelligenti, nec diversitas intellectorum.” Art. 147, 227: “Quod inconveniens est ponere aliquos intellectus nobiliores aliis, quia, cum ista diversitas non possit esse a parte corporum, oportet quod sit a parte intelligentiarum; et sic animae nobiles et ignobiles essent necessario diversarum specierum, sicut intelligentiae.—Error, quia sic anima Christi non esset nobilior anima Iudae.” See Wodeham, *Lectura secunda* 1.1.4, 253–54; *Lectura Oxoniensis* 1.1.2, f. 16rb; Chatton, *Reportatio* 2.4.5, 223; Mirecourt, *Sent.* 1.19, nn. 33–34; and ibid., nn. 49–50. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. As far as I can tell, nobody has noticed that Mirecourt is simply plagiarizing Wodeham here. Compare especially Mirecourt, *Sent.* 1.19, nn. 53–57 with Wodeham, *Lectura secunda* 1.1.4, 258.6–259.35 (more or less verbatim the same as *Lectura Oxoniensis* 1.1.2, f. 16v). For other examples of Mirecourt’s plagiarism, see Paul Vignaux and Jean-François Genest, “La bibliothéque anglaise de Jean de Mirecourt: subtilitas ou plagiat?” in *Die Philosophie im 14. und 15. Jahrhundert*, ed. O. Pluta (Amsterdam: B. Grüner, 1988), 281–83. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. See Wodeham, *Lectura secunda* 1.1.4, 258–60 (more or less verbatim the same as *Lectura Oxoniensis* 1.1.2, f. 16v); Rimini, *Sent.* 2.7.2, 86–87; Mirecourt, *Sent.* 1.19, nn. 53–57. Mirecourt (ibid., n. 57) also includes a sixth argument found only in Wodeham, *Lectura Oxoniensis* 1.1.2, f. 17va, which suggests that he is plagiarizing the *Lectura Oxoniensis,* not the *Lectura secunda*. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. Wodeham, *Lectura secunda* 1.1.4, 256: “Unde non poneret protervus quod esset scientia absolute sed relative... Poneret quod ... ad actum cognoscendi vel amoris non transmutantur nisi relativa transmutatione.” [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. Buridan, *QDA* 3.11, nn. 28–31; Mirecourt, *Sent.* 1.2, 324.111–325.123 / n. 24 (quoted below in footnote 35). See also, among their contemporaries, Oresme, *QDA* 3.9, 380; Marsilius of Inghen, *QDA* 3.7, f. 406rb; John of Wesalia, *QDA* 3.13, f. 158va; Lokert’s Buridan, *QDA* 3.8, 689–90; and another anonymous author (whom I call Patar’s Buridan), *QDA*, ed. B. Patar, *Traité de l'âme de Jean Buridan: De prima lectura* (Leuven: Peeters,1991) 3.9, 453–54. For this argument among earlier authors, see Hartman, “The Relation-Theory of Mental Acts”. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. Strictly speaking, the claim was that relational change requires *either* a non-relational change on the side of the relata *or* a locomotion on the side of the relata *or* the passage of time. However, we can assume in the case at hand that I can newly think about something (a rock, say) even when there is no passage of time and no antecedent locomotion on the side of the rock or my mind. For further discussion, see Hartman, “The Relation-Theory of Mental Acts.” [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. Durand, *Quaestio* “Utrum intelligere...”, 34–35 (emphasis mine): “It seems that it is not true that something changes from not such-and-such to such-and-such only through its reception [e.g., of a quality in it] or through its production [e.g., of a quality in something else] or through its being applied [i.e., locally moved] to something else or something else to it. For something [can] change from *not being in motion* to *actually being in motion* (e.g., when a light object [begins to] move up), and this does not [have to] occur through applying [i.e., moving] something else to it [or by applying it to something else], *since all that is needed in this case is the removal of an impediment*. Nor does it occur through its producing something in something else, as is obvious; nor through its receiving something new which enters into composition [with it, i.e., a non-relational change]. And yet it really changes from not being in motion to being in motion. *Therefore, the intellect can change from not thinking to actually thinking without its reception of something that enters into composition with it*.*”* For other examples, see Hartman, “The Relation-Theory of Mental Acts.” [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. See especially *Sent.* A 2.3.5, 159 and 161–62. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. See Peter Hartman, “Causation and Cognition: Durand of St.-Pourçain and Godfrey of Fontaines on the Cause of a Cognitive Act,” in *Durand of Saint-Pourçain and His Sentences Commentary*, ed. A. Speer et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 2014), 229–56. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. Durand also rejects the idea that the mind might bring about a non-relational change in itself when in the presence of the object on the grounds that this would violate the act-potency axiom. See Hartman, “Causation and Cognition.” [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. Wodeham, *Lectura secunda* 1.14, 255: “With all other things involved being the same, experience teaches us that a human being can freely will and will against and not will the very same thing.” For discussion, and other examples, see Hartman “The Relation-Theory of Mental Acts”; and “Are Cognitive Habits in the Intellect?” [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. Mirecourt, *Sent.* 1.2, 322.12–22 / n. 7 (translated text in italics): “*Non est possibile per quamcumque potentiam quod anima sentiat obiectum vel intelligat vel velit vel delectetur vel sciat actualiter actu*, quod non sit Deus, *et ipsa non agat* [V, f. 2vb adds “et non conservat”] *illum*.” The qualification “quod non sit Deus” here seems to be a nod to the beatific vision, which is an exception to this rule. He defends the agency principle by appeal to the idea that an occurrent mental state is “living” or “vital”, as well as the grammar of sentences involving verbs of cognition. See ibid., 323.56–68 / nn. 15–16. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. We might call this *the* *active form* of the quality theory, to distinguish it from another form of the quality theory which would reject the agency principle (call this *the passive form*).For instance, one might maintain that an occurrent mental state is a quality together not with an action but a *passion* on the side of the mind, that is, that it is the passive reception of a quality produced in the mind thanks to something other than the mind. A prominent proponent of this position is Godfrey of Fontaines. For discussion, see Antoine Côté, “L’objet et la cause de la connaissance selon Godefroid de Fontaines,” *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 54, no. 3 (2007): 407–29; Hartman, “Causation and Cognition,” 229–56; and Jean-Luc Solère, “Sine Qua Non Causality and the Context of Durand’s Early Theory of Cognition,” in *Durand of Saint-Pourçain and His Sentences Commentary*, 185–227. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. Mirecourt considers this option in *Sent.* 1.2, 329.319–22 / n. 48 (where it is the first “opinion”). See also Mirecourt’s *1st Apology*, ed. F. Müller in *“*Die zwei Apologien des Jean de Mirecourt,*”* *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 5 (1933): 40–78, 193–204at n. 68 on p. 68 (where it is the second “opinion”). See also *Sent.* 1.2, 327.206–328.255 / nn. 35–37; *Sent.* 1.19, nn. 21–31. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. See *Sent.* 1.2, 324.103–325.137 / nn. 23–24. See also *Sent.* 1.19, n. 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. *Sent.* 1.2, 322.15–17 / n. 5; ibid., 322.29–323.40 / nn. 11–12. See also ibid., 324.103–325.137 / nn. 23–24; ibid., 327.206–328.255 / nn. 35–37; and *Sent.* 1.19, nn. 21–31. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. This passage is his response to a form of the argument from change discussed above (*Sent.* 1.2, 324.111–325.123 / n. 24): “Si sensatio potest non esse sensatio, eadem ratione e converso non sensatio potest fieri sensatio. Consequentia patet. Et falsitas consequentis probatur, quia quaero per quem fieret sensatio: vel aliquo addito vel nullo addito… Si nullo addito, contra: Non potest ibi poni transitus a contradictione in contradictione sine novitate alicuius rei vel destructione praecedentis vel praeexistentis in ipsa potentia sensitiva vel in extrinseco aliquo, nisi motus localis alicuius rei esset in casu, vel transitus temporis.” [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. *Sent.* 1.2, 328.256–63 / n. 38: “… sola conservatio talis rei a potentia sensitiva cum obiecto sine productione nova sufficiat ad hoc quod illa potentia sentiat… Possit conservare illud quod non conservabatur ab ipsa… Talis transitus a contradictorio in contradictorium salvaretur per hoc quod potentia sensitiva conservaret illam rem quae conservabatur ab alio. Et illa conservatio foret quaedam actio potentiae sensitivae.” On the necessity of the object, see *Sent.* 1.2, 323.41–55 / nn. 13–14. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
37. See, e.g., Mirecourt, *Sent.* 1.2, 323.56–68 / nn. 15–16. Hence, Mirecourt clearly distinguishes the conservation theory from another form of the quality theory which maintains that the mere inherence of a quality in the mind is sufficient. See Mirecourt, *Sent.* 1.2, 329.329–330.339 / n. 48 (where the “mere inherence” theory is the third “opinion”) and *1st Apology*, n. 45, 68 (where it is the first “opinion”). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
38. See also *Sent.* 1.19, n. 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
39. *Sent.* 1.2, 329.323–25 / n. 48: “Alia opinio posset esse et forte *si liceret eam ponerem multum probabilis* quod actio nihil est, nec motus, *nec intellectio*, sed sunt modi se habendi rerum.” (Emphasized text is omitted in V, f. 4rb.) See also *1st Apology*, n. 45, 68: “Alia est via quae poneret intellectionem esse qualitatem absolutam; et poneret cum hoc quod quandocumque anima intelligit est in anima quaedam actio de genere actionis; tamen illa actio non est illa qualitas nec est anima nec est aliqua res; et diceret etiam quod nulla actio creaturae est aliqua res absoluta nec res agens, immo quod nihil est. Et istam viam de actione quatenus est actio, quod ipsa non sit aliqua res, si esset assueta, libentius dixissem quam dixissem quod esset res acta vel res agens.” Although he tells us that an action (e.g., conservation) is not a thing (*res*) and nothing (*nihil*) in these texts, what he means by this, as the context makes clear — he’s contrasting the view with the reductionist view that actions are identical with the agent (*res agens*) or the effect in the patient (*res acta*) — is that such an action is not a thing in the way that a separable accident or a substance is a thing, but rather it is a peculiar sort of entity, namely, a mode: a non-relational accidental condition which *ontologically depends* upon its subject such that even God cannot separately conserve it in existence. See, e.g., the continuation of *Sent.* 1.2, 330.326–29: “… et diceret quod nullam actionem causae secundae posset Deus agere se solo, quantumcumque tamen rem creatam vel creabilem ab agente creato posset Deus se solo producere.” Mirecourt’s view that modes are ontologically dependent, then, would be close to the “anti-reductionist” theory of modes defended earlier by Durand and later by Suárez, although Durand is happy to call modes *things*. See Peter Hartman, “Durand of St.-Pourçain’s Theory of Modes,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 60, no. 2 (2022): 203–26. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
40. Mirecourt, in fact, considers at least three different interpretations of the view, the first three “opinions” sketched at *Sent.* 1.19, n. 67: “(1) Primo potest dici quod quaedam cognitio animae est ipsamet anima et etiam volitio. Dicetur tamen quod non semper esset cuiuslibet cognitio, sed quandoque unius esset scientia, quandoque alterius error, quandoque esset istius dilectio et istius odium, sed non per receptionem alicuius entitatis, sed seipsa, sicut Deus quandoque diligit istum quandoque odit eumdem. (2) Secundo, potest dici, sed minus probabile est quia et magis voluntarie, quod anima, quando primo cognoscit, causat unum accidens in se, quod est sibi postmodum cognitio et volitio omnium quae cognoscit et vult, sicut albedine creata in isto corpore illud corpus per illam simile est uni et dissimile alteri. (3) Tertio posset dici, si foret consuetum, quod cognitio nihil est et similiter volitio nihil est, nec est anima nec cognitum nec volitum nec aliqua res mundi; distinguitur tamen ab anima et est actio anime.” According to the first opinion, occurrent *human* mental states might be like occurrent *divine* mental states. While the agency principle clearly holds, the analogy itself seems to be a non-starter, or at any rate explains the obscure by way of the more obscure. The second opinion seems to be a form of the relation theory, which, as mentioned, fails to accommodate the agency principle. The third opinion explicitly commits itself to the agency principle, and it is this view which I am calling the pure-action theory. Note that in *Sent.* 1.2, 329.325 / n. 48 (quoted and discussed above in footnote 39) he uses the same negative language to characterize conservations (i.e., they are not the mind and not the object) but he explicitly adds “*sed sunt modi se habendi.*” I submit the pure-action theory also holds that they are modes, as I will argue below. For a good analysis of *Sent.* 1.19, n. 67, see Edith Sylla’s “Guide to the Text” in Buridan, *Quaestiones super octo libros Physicorum Aristotelis (secundum ultimam lecturam). Libri III-IV* (*QP*)*,* ed. M. Streijger and P. Bakker (Leiden: Brill, 2016), lxvii–lxxiii. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
41. Already in *Sent.* 1.2, Mirecourt had hinted at such a view. There he had considered the following objection (325.155–56 / n. 28): If an occurrent mental state necessarily involves an action, then it must involve the production of something, and so God would have had to produce (create) something before creating the world, since God thought about (had a mental state) the world before creating the world. (A similar objection can be found in Albert of Saxony; see Caroti, “Oresme on Motion.”) Mirecourt’s answer here is narrowly focused on carving out space for conservations as peculiar kinds of non-productive actions but he leaves it open as to whether there might be some further kind of (pure) action that is neither a production nor a conservation *even in the case of creatures*. See *Sent.* 1.2, 328.283–85 / n. 42 (emphasis mine): “Negatur consequentiam *et in creaturis*, quia agens creatum frequenter agit et tamen nihil agit. Sed bene sequitur: ‘Agit; ergo aliqualiter agit.’” [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
42. *QDA* 3.9, 377 (emphasis mine): “Arguitur ratione Macrobii: *anima intellectiva movet se primo. Igitur motus eius non est res distincta ab ipsa*. Antecedens patet, quia aliter anima non esset libera ex quo est indivisibilis, et moveretur ab alio. Et tenet consequentia, quia res superaddita non causatur de novo in aliquo indivisibili nisi causatur ab alio.” See also ibid., 379 (emphasis mine): “Secundo, fuit alia opinio specialiter de anima intellectiva quod quamvis in aliis sint accidentia distincta tamen non in ipsa. Et haec fuit opinio Platonicorum et Macrobii. Unde dicit sic, ‘*Motus animae est essentia animae*.’ Et iterum post aliquas rationes concludit, ‘*Motus animae est sua essentia*.’” See also Patar’s Buridan, *QDA* 3.9, 452 (who says almost verbatim the same thing on the matter as Oresme). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
43. *QDA* 3.11, n. 5. Buridan highlights this argument as the main argument for the view at nn. 14–15. A similar argument can be found in Oresme, *QDA* 3.9, 376–77; Marsilius of Inghen, *QDA* 3.7, ff. 405vb-406ra; Patar’s Buridan, *QDA* 3.9, 450–52; and Lokert’s Buridan, *QDA* 3.8, 688–89. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
44. *QDA* 3.11, nn. 28–30. On his views about shapes, see *Quaestiones super octo libros Physicorum Aristotelis (secundum ultimam lecturam). Libri I-II* (*QP*)*,* ed. M. Streijger and P. Bakker (Leiden: Brill, 2015)2.3, 262. As Buridan’s contemporary Marsilius of Inghen puts it responding to the same argument (*QDA* 3.7, f. 406rb): “The intellect does not have parts.” See also Lokert’s Buridan, *QDA* 3.8, 689; Patar’s Buridan, *QDA* 3.9, 453; Oresme, *QDA* 3.9, 382; Marsilius of Inghen, *QDA* 3.7, f. 406rb. Further, even if the mind did have parts that could be arranged variously, these parts would have to be either innate (and so we would be committed to some kind of nativism, which was taken as absurd) or acquired; but if they are acquired, then we should suppose that the mind does, after all, *acquire* things added to it, and so it requires things added to it before we can speak of it as in this or that state. On the charge of nativism, see Patar’s Buridan, *QDA* 3.9, 450–51; John of Wesalia, *QDA* 3.13, f. 185va; Oresme, *QDA* 3.9, 377; Buridan, *QDA* 3.11, n. 8; Marsilius of Inghen, *QDA* 3.7, ff. 405vb-406ra. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
45. On the view that motion is a relation, see Oresme, *Quaestiones super Physicam. Books I-VII* (*QP*)*,* ed. S. Caroti et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2013) 3.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
46. On this point, see Oresme, *QDA* 3.9, 376. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
47. Buridan, *QP* 3.7 and 3.12; Oresme, *QP* 3.2 and 3.7.For discussion of Buridan and Oresme’s views about motion, see Johannes Thijssen, “The Debate over the Nature of Motion,” *Early Science and Medicine* 14, no. 1/3 (2009): 186–210; Stefano Caroti, “Oresme on Motion,” *Vivarium* 31, no. 1 (1993): 8–36; and Stephan Kirschner, “Oresme on Intension and Remission of Qualities in His Commentary on Aristotle’s Physics,” *Vivarium* 38, no. 2 (2000): 255–74. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
48. In Oresme, see *QP* 3.2, 307: “… unum corpus per continuationem, sicut totus mundus, posset imaginari moveri, et tamen ad nihil aliud se haberet aliter. Ergo tunc motus non esset plura [i.e., a relation]… Si dicatur quod se haberet aliter ad motorem [i.e., God], et sic motus esset plura [i.e., a relation], scilicet motor et mobile, hoc non valet, quia posset imaginari quod moveretur a se… Et si motor sit separatus, sicut Deus et intelligentia, tunc motum non se haberet ad illum aliter quam prius.” (See also ibid*.,* 3.7, 337: “… si esset unum solum corpus, non videtur quin posset moveri circulariter, et sic non se haberet aliter quam prius nisi respectu suiipsius”; and ibid., 338–39.) In Buridan, see *QP* 3.7, 206: “Prima est quod possibile est ultimam sphaeram moveri motu quo movetur sine loco. Probatur sic: quia, si ultima sphaera et alia fierent unum continuum per potentiam divinam ita quod totus mundus esset unum corpus continuum, tunc nullus esset locus secundum Aristotelem, quia nulla esset superficies corporis continentis divisi et tangentis… Unde, si Deus omnia corpora annihilaret praeter istum lapidem, ipse lapis non amplius esset in loco. Et tamen illo casu posito adhuc esset possibile quod Deus moveret simul circulariter totum mundum.” (See also ibid., 207: “Tertia conclusio est quod ultimam sphaeram moveri est eam intrinsece aliter et aliter se habere prius et posterius. Probo, quia per quid nominis ‘moveri’ est aliter et aliter se habere prius et posterius; et tamen moveretur, licet non se haberet aliter et aliter prius et posterius ad aliquod extrinsecum, ut apparuit per conclusiones praecedentes; ergo etc.”) [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
49. Buridan, *QP* 3.7, 209–10. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
50. Oresme, *QP* 3.6. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
51. *Sent.* 1.19, n. 73 (emphasis mine): “Si dicatur contra omnes solutiones istas quod ista essent voluntarie dicta, dico quod immo essent aliqualiter probabilia et satis communiter dicta. *Si dicatur ulterius quod eadem ratione negarentur omnia accidentia mundi, concedo. Immo credo quod, nisi fides esset, iam multi dixissent forsan quamlibet rem esse substantiam. Si dicatur, ‘Fides est ad oppositum; igitur hoc non est probabile,’ dico, ‘Illa consequentia non est bona’. Licet enim sequatur, ‘Fides est ad oppositum; igitur hoc non est verum,’ tamen non sequitur quin oppositum sit probabile. Immo aliquorum articulorum opposita sunt probabilia magis nobis quam ipsimet articuli.*” See also *1st Apology*, n. 42, 64–65; *2nd Apology*, n. 26, 200–201. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
52. As do Patar’s Buridan (*QDA* 3.9, 451–52); Lokert’s Buridan (*QDA* 3.8, 689–90); and Marsilius of Inghen (*QDA* 3.7, f. 406rb). Curiously, neither Chatton nor Wodeham suggest that the same view had anything to do with the “ancient” doctrine of modes, much less that it entailed that there would be no separable accidents. Interestingly, Hervaeus Natalis, almost 50 years earlier, responding to one of Henry of Ghent’s arguments in a different context, registers the worry. *Quodlibet* (Paris, 1513) 10.1, f. 169rb (emphasis mine): “Distinguunt inter modum realem et rem simpliciter dictam. Nam per ‘rem simpliciter dictam’ aut intelligunt solum ens simpliciter modo quo substantia dicitur esse ens simpliciter, et si sic, *tunc omnia accidentia essent tantum modi reales*, nec facerent compositionem cum substantia, quod est falsum.” On the connection between Ghent’s theory of modes and Oresme’s, see Caroti, “Oresme on Motion,” 16n31. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
53. *QDA* 3.9, 378: “Primo fuit antiqua opinio ante Aristotelem quod universaliter nullum accidens erat res distincta a substantia, sed erat illa substantia se habens aliter et aliter…” [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
54. *QDA* 3.9, 380: “… quia nisi ita esset, sequeretur quod ita posset dici de quolibet accidente quod non distingueretur a subiecto. Consequens est contra philosophiam Aristotelis et contra veritatem. Et probatur consequentia, quia non videtur aliqua ratio nec aliqua differentia magis de istis accidentibus quam de aliis.” (Note that the edition has ‘obiecto’ instead of ‘subiecto’.) He makes much the same point, although in the other direction, in *QP* 1.5, 36. More surprising, in this (early) question he argues that it is “plausible” to maintain precisely what Mirecourt maintains is plausible, namely, that all accidents are modes (ibid., 34–35). For the most recent discussion of Oresme’s views on accidents and modes, see Kirschner, “Oresme on Intension and Remission,” 263–70 and the references at 263n39. See also Stefano Caroti, “Nicole Oresme et les *modi rerum*,” *Oriens Occidens* 3 (2000): 115–44; “Time and *modi rerum* in Nicole Oresme’s *Physics* Commentary,” in *The Medieval Concept of Time*, ed. P. Porro (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 319–49; “Les *modi rerum*... encore une fois”; Stefano Kirschner, *Nicolaus Oresmes Kommentar Zur Physik Des Aristoteles* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1997), 29–30, 38–41; Jean Celeyrette and Edmond Mazet, “La hiérarchie des degrés d’être chez Nicole Oresme,” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 8, no. 1 (1998): 45–65; and Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes*, 408–18. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
55. See the introduction to the critical edition of Oresme, *QP*, xxv, where the fact that Oresme avoids talking about modes in certain works is used to date Oresme’s question-commentary on the *Physics* (where, as mentioned, he defends the theory of modes) to before 1347. See also Sylla, “Guide to the Text”, lxviii. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
56. *QDA* 3.11, n. 15: “Thus, some of the most ancient philosophers, using arguments like these, assumed that accidents are not entities distinct from their subjects, but that one should speak instead of ‘modes of substances’, such that the same thing, differently disposed, is not only now hot and later cold, but also now heat and later coldness, differently disposed, just as the same thing is now sphericity and later cubicity. And I think they held this opinion, and those others now hold it, not because they believe it to be true, but because it is difficult to refute them demonstratively.” See also ibid., nn. 24–26. Buridan attributes the view to Melissus and Democritus at n. 25, and Melissus and Parmenides at n. 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
57. *QDA* 3.11, nn. 28–30. For Buridan’s views on artifacts, see *QP* 2.2, 254. On his views about shapes, see above footnote 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
58. See *QDA* 3.11, n. 26: “Again, ‘being differently disposed’ [*aliter et aliter se habere*] signifies the same as ‘being disposed in different modes’ [*alio et alio modo se habere*]. If, therefore, the intellect is now one opinion and tomorrow will be the contrary opinion, being disposed in different modes, then the first mode will not be the second, because these modes are assumed to be different. If, therefore, there is more than one mode, and they differ from each other, and the intellect is not and will not be other than it is but always the same, then the intellect must differ both from those modes and from each one of them in turn. And then all of the difficulties that arose in connection with the difference or identity of those opinions, and more, return in connection with those modes. Thus, it is better to take a stand at once on the side of the difference of those opinions [from the intellect]. For it is true that the intellect would be opining in contrary ways, being disposed in different modes, even if those modes are those opinions, just as Socrates, first white and later black, is also disposed in different ways, and those modes are whiteness and blackness. For accidents are modes and dispositions of substances according to the variation of which their underlying substance is differently disposed. And in general, being differently disposed requires some difference, and it must be that it is present also in the case we are considering, and it can correctly be assigned only as the difference of those habits in relation to each other or to the intellect.” [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
59. I would like to thank Jordan Lavender and the audience at the 25th SIEPM Congress in Paris for valuable feedback. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)