Gyula Klima (Fordham University, New York, NY):

Three Myths of Intentionality vs. Some Medieval Philosophers

After Brentano, intentionality is often characterized as “the mark of the mental”. In his view, intentionality “is characteristic exclusively of mental phenomena. No physical phenomenon manifests anything like it”. After Meinong, it is also generally believed, that intentionality, as this characteristic mental phenomenon, concerns a specific type of objects, namely, intentional objects, as opposed to ordinary physical objects. Thus, intentional objects are supposed to constitute a mysterious ontological realm, the dwelling place of the objects of dreams and fiction, and other “weird entities”, even inconsistent objects, such as round squares. Finally, it is also generally held that intentionality somehow defies logic, as the well-known phenomena of the breakdown of the substitutivity of identicals, the failure of existential generalization, and generally, quantifying in intentional contexts testify. In this paper, I will refer to these positions as the psychological, ontological, and logical “myths of intentionality”, respectively. The reason is that although this all-important modern notion of intentionality and the positions described above are supposed to have come from medieval philosophy, medieval philosophers would be starkly opposed to them. On the basis of the relevant doctrines of some medieval philosophers, especially, Aquinas and Buridan, this paper is going to argue that the three positions on intentionality described above are in fact just three modern myths.