

Second Intentions in the Late Middle Ages

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Summary: Not until the end of the 14th century did anyone claim extra-mental reality for second intentions – not even the ultra-realist Walter Burley. According to him second intentions are concepts which have a foundation *in re*, but are not things in the strongest sense of the term. This account implies that the principle of one-to-one correspondence between language and the world (the keystone of medieval realism) has to suffer an exception, since no common nature matches second intention terms. It is just in order to do away with this blemish that Alyngton, Penbygull, Whelpdale, and Tarteys hypostatize second intentions and speak of them in terms of real determinations joined to the *res extra animam* and inhering in them. This procedure leads to a paradox when applied to those terms of second intention by which we speak of singulars considered as such, e.g. *'individuum'*: one would have to admit the existence of an individual common nature, i.e. an auto-contradictory entity present in all individuals as the cause of their being individuals. In order to avoid this paradox, Alyngton et al. classified the *'individuum'*-like terms among those terms, like *'Socrates'*, which refer to individuals and not to classes of individuals. The rule that terms can be listed as common ones only if they signify a common nature was safe, but at the expense of a counter-intuitive categorization of their semantic power. For this reason Sharpe criticized Alyngton's theory and proposed i) that all terms of second intention are common, even *'individuum'*-like expressions, and ii) that a sufficient condition for being a common term is signifying universally, i.e. signifying a unitary concept which, in its turn, refers to a multiplicity of things displaying at least a similar mode of being. In this way Sharpe restored the semantic rank that intuitively would be assigned to the *'individuum'*-like terms, but invalidated his defense of realism by accepting the nominalistic principle of the autonomy of thought in relation to the world. Aware of these inconsistencies, Paul of Venice maintained that a unique universal concept corresponds to terms of second intention, even to those which signify singulars as such, but no common nature. This conceptual unity suffices to ground a univocal definition of the things such terms refer to, so that all the second intention terms have to be considered as common expressions. These universal concepts are, however, caused by some peculiar aspects of the things that he calls *'intentiones in re'*. In this way, Paul reconciled the two different demands supported by Alyngton and Sharpe respectively, but avoided the difficulties of their approaches. Paul could keep the principle of the one-to-one correspondence between language and the world, while still being able to explain the semantic power of the terms of second intention in accordance with an intuitive conception of them.

1.

A branch of that ‘family of meanings’ named *intentio* plays a major role in the medieval discussions of logical and epistemological questions. The two main senses of the term occur already in the writings of Avicenna: the name ‘*intentio*’ can signify the content of a concept of the first level, like man, and then it is an *intentio prima*, or of a metalinguistic concept, like species, and then it is an *intentio secunda*. In fact, first intentions arise by abstraction from a group of individuals really existing in the world, and give expression to one of their shared properties, but second intentions are found only when our intellect reflects on the first intentions considered in their relationships to individual things themselves.¹ Unfortunately, what is kept vague in such a description is the ontological status of the *intentio*, which is ambiguous, since the intention seems to be at the same time a mental concept and its extramental foundation. This ambiguity provoked, among medieval authors, a sharp discussion, which over the course of time became more and more intriguing and intricate.

My purpose in this paper is to focus on some aspects of that discussion during the second half of the 14th and the beginning of the 15th centuries, among those authors, influenced by Burley’s logical system and by Wyclif’s metaphysics, we can call ‘Oxford realists’ – that is: Robert Alyngton, Johannes Sharpe, William Penbygull, Roger Whelpdale, John Tarteys, and Paul of Venice,² the last of whom, although Italian, spent at least three years at the Augustinian *studium* in Oxford starting in August 1390.

Since first and second intentions are entities of different levels, the question of the status of the *intentiones* has to be split up into two (sub)problems, each concerning one of the two distinct kinds of intentions. I shall leave out the one related to first intentions, as I do not want to deal with the problem of the ontological status of universals, and I shall concentrate my attention on the status of second intentions.

¹ Cf. Avicenna, *De anima*, 1.5.86.

² For a first introduction to these authors’ logical and metaphysical theories see A.D. Conti (ed.), Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalia*, pars ii: studio storico-critico: 295-336. On their lives and works see Emden 1957-59: I, 30-31 (Alyngton); III, 1680 (Sharpe); III, 1455 (Penbygull); III, 2031 (Whelpdale); III, 1849 (Tarteys); III, 1994-95 (Paul of Venice); and Lohr 1973: 96-97 (Alyngton); Lohr 1971: 279-80 (Sharpe); Lohr 1968: 207 (Penbygull); Lohr 1973: 122-23 (Whelpdale); Lohr 1971: 285 (Tarteys); Lohr 1972: 314-20 (Paul of Venice).

2.

Until the end of the 14th century nobody claimed the extra-mental reality of second intentions, not even an 'ultra-realist' such as Walter Burley.³

Thomas Aquinas' theory of intentions⁴ is marked by an epistemological approach according to which second intentions arise out of the various modes of cognition of our intellect, when it considers the (threefold) correspondence between the first intention (the *intentio intellecta* or *verbum mentis*), the nature potentially (*in potentia*) existing in extra-mental reality, and the individual things which instantiate it.⁵ Thus, second intentions fully exist in the mind only, not in the things themselves, but they have a *fundamentum in re*, as different types of common natures correspond to them:⁶

In omnibus autem intentionibus hoc communiter verum est, quod intentiones ipsae non sunt in rebus, sed in anima tantum; sed habent aliquid in re respondens, scilicet naturam, cui intellectus huiusmodi intentiones attribuit; sicut intentio generis non est in asino, sed natura animalis, cui per intellectum haec intentio attribuitur.

Duns Scotus⁷ conceives of second intentions as relations of reason (*relationes rationis*) generated by an act of comparing two objects apprehended previously, considered just as being known. Therefore second intentions have a diminished being in comparison with the *res extra animam* (both individual ones and common ones), since their own being is a simple *esse cognitum*.⁸

Walter Burley's doctrine shows the same kind of approach to the matter as the two foregoing theories. Although in his last commentary on the *Ars vetus* (A.D. 1337) the *Doctor Planus et Perspicuus* maintains that common natures fully exist *in re*, as entities really distinct from the individuals they are in and are predicated of, nevertheless he explicitly states that second intentions are con-

3 On his particular kind of realism see Conti 1990: 121-76.

4 On Thomas' theory of intentions see Schmidt 1966: 94-127.

5 Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *ScG.* 4.11.

6 Thomas Aquinas, In I *Sent.* 33.1.1, ad 3m.

7 On Duns Scotus' theory of intentions see Swiezawski 1934: 205-60.

8 Cf. Duns Scotus, *Lectura* I, d. 23, q. unica, ed. Vaticana, XVII: 305-07; *Ordinatio* I, d. 23, q. unica, ed. Vaticana, V: 352-353; *Reportata Parisiensis* II, d. 13, q. 1, ed. Vivès, XXIII: 440-42.

cepts – those *conceptus rei* that arise when we look on a common nature in relation to the *res* that share it:

Et est dicendum, secundum Avicennam in *Logica* sua, quod logica est de intentionibus secundis adiunctis primis. Ad cuius evidentiam sciendum est quod intentio, secundum quod nunc loquimur, est idem quod conceptus rei. Et conceptus duplex est, scilicet primus et secundus. Possum enim de homine habere unum conceptum quo concipio humanam naturam absolute, scilicet intelligendo vel concipiendo ipsum esse substantiam animatam sensibilem rationalem – et sic habeo unum conceptum solum primum – et possum conceptum de homine habere quo concipio naturam humanam in ordine ad illa quae participant eandem naturam, scilicet ad Sortem et Platonem – et sic habeo alium conceptum, scilicet conceptum comparatum, qui dicitur secundarius conceptus. Et iste abstrahitur a conceptu primo. Conceptus primus dicitur prima intentio; conceptus secundus dicitur secunda intentio Et ex his patet eandem rem esse primae intentionis et secundae intentionis, quia eadem res potest apprehendi sub primario conceptu intellectus et secundario, cum tamen prima et secunda intentio non sint eadem.⁹

Therefore, according to him, logic, which deals with second intentions, is a *scientia rationalis* and not *realis*:

Dico tunc quod subiectum primum <logicae> primate adaequationis, sive subiectum contentivum circa quod, est res secundae intentionis, sive ens rationis. Et non est aliud intelligendum per ens rationis quam res secundae intentionis. Nam res secundae intentionis, vel ens rationis, est commune ad omnia per se considerata in logica secundum quod in logica considerantur.¹⁰

Second intentions, although mental concepts, are nevertheless closely connected with things, as they are caused in our minds by the common natures existing outside. Thus it is correct to affirm that they somehow inhere in the *res extra animam*: “Dico ergo quod liber *Praedicamentorum* est de rebus secundum quod eis insunt intentiones secundae, scilicet intentio generis generalissimi et generis subalterni, et intentio speciei, et sic de aliis.”¹¹

9 Burley, *Expositio super Universalia Porphyrii*, Prol., in *Expositio super Artem Veterem Porphyrii et Aristotelis*, 2rB-vA.

10 Ibid. 2vA. These passages show that Knudsen’s interpretation (cf. Knudsen 1982: 494-95) of Burley’s theory of intentions is misleading, as he attributes to Burley the belief that logic deals with reality itself and that second intentions are something real: “Since according to Burley the intentions are features of reality, logic, which deals with the intentions, is indeed a ‘real science’” – p. 495.

11 Burley, *Expositio super Praedicamenta Aristotelis*, Prol., in *Expositio super Artem Veterem Porphyrii et Aristotelis*, 17vB.

Burley adapts to second intentions the same interpretative scheme that moderate realists, such as Albert the Great or Thomas Aquinas, used for explaining the different modes of being that essences have in and outside our intellect: just like a stone is said to be seen not by virtue of an act of seeing inhering in it, but by virtue of an act of seeing inhering in an animal or in a man, so a common nature is a genus or a species by virtue of a concept our minds abstract when considering it in relation to its individuals:

Secundo est notandum quod denominativum dicitur dupliciter, scilicet communiter <et> proprie. Primo modo omne concretum quod significat rem quae non est de essentia illius de quo praedicatur, cui correspondet aliquid abstractum, dicitur denominativum, sive sit intentionale sive reale, et hoc sive sit substantia sive accidens, et hoc sive significet accidens inhaerens illi de quo accidentaliter praedicatur sive significet accidens inhaerens alteri. Unde, communiter loquendo de praedicatione denominativa, haec est praedicatio denominativa: 'homo est species', 'animal est genus', quia praedicatum vere significat aliquid quod non est de essentia subiecti et praedicato correspondet aliquid abstractum, scilicet hoc nomen 'specialitas' vel 'generalitas'. ... Nam quoddam est concretum denominativum denominatione intrinseca et quoddam denominativum denominatione extrinseca. Exemplum primi ut 'homo est albus' et 'homo est grammaticus' ... Exemplum secundi sic dicendo: 'lapis videtur' vel 'petra est visa a me'; hae denominationes extrinsecae sunt, quia videre non inhaeret petrae, sed animali videnti.¹²

In sum, according to this account, second intentions have a *fundamentum in re*, but are not things in the strongest sense of the term. This implies that the principle of the strict correspondence between language (and/or thought) and the world – which every medieval realist recognized – had to suffer an exception.

3.

It is just in order to do away with this 'blemish' that Robert Alyngton,¹³ a fellow of Queen's College (Oxford) from 1379 (the same college where Wyclif started his theological studies in 1363 and Johannes Sharpe taught in the nineties), heavily modified the standard theory of the status of second intentions. In fact, in his com-

¹² Burley, *Expositio super Praedicamenta Aristotelis*, cap. *de denominativis*, 19vA. Cf. also *Expositio super Universalia Porphyrii*, cap. *de genere*, 8vA.

¹³ On Robert Alyngton's logical theories see De Rijk 1977: 125, 131, 135-36, 139-41, 145, 150, 154-55; Spade 1985: ix-x, and n. 8; Spade & Wilson 1986: xxii-xxiii, xxxiii-xxxv, xlii and xlvi-xlvii; Ashworth & Spade 1992: 50, 55-56 and 61-62. On his metaphysical doctrine see Conti 1993: 179-241.

mentary on the *Categories* (his major extant work) he not only considers second intentions as objective, but clearly hypostatizes them, speaking of them in terms of real determinations joined to the modes of being of the *res extra animam* and directly inhering in them:

Pro quo notandum quod res aliquando concipitur absolute, sine connotatione universalitatis aut particularitatis, et vocatur, ut sic, res primae intentionis; et terminus illam sine connotatione tali significans vocatur terminus primae intentionis (id est: primo mentis conceptui correspondens), ut 'homo', 'lignum', 'lapis' et huiusmodi. Sed secundo possunt res sumi aliquando, vel concipi, cum connotatione universalitatis aut particularitatis, ut sub ratione qua sunt individua, species, sive differentiae, vel accidentia communia vel accidentia propria; et vocatur, ut sic, terminus significans talem rem cum huiusmodi connotatione terminus secundae intentionis, eo quod post intellectum absolutum de re concipitur res quasi secundo sub ratione qua est individuum aut commune. Et vocatur universalitas aut particularitas res secundae intentionis, quae se habent per modum accidentis respectu naturae absolute conceptae, eo quod sunt extra essentiam naturae sic conceptae – quamvis de facto non sint accidentia, sed proprietates analogae circumeuntes omnia genera, competentes tam substantiae quam accidenti.¹⁴

As a consequence, Alyngton conceives of logic as an analysis of the general framework of reality, since according to him logic turns on structural forms (aimed at building up semantic contents), which are, as forms, independent of both such contents and the mental acts by which they are learned. It is through these forms that the network connecting the basic constituents of the world (individuals and universals, substances and accidents) is disclosed to us:

Sed circa istam partem istius libri occurrunt plura dubia. Primum utrum Aristoteles principaliter hic tractat de rebus significatis vel signis Quantum ad primum videtur mihi quod Aristoteles hic mixtim tractat de signis et rebus significatis; sed principaliter de rebus significatis Et haec videtur sententia Avicennae in prima parte *Logicae* suae, dicentis quod ad considerationem dictionum ducit nos necessitas. Logicus enim, ut huiusmodi, non habet primo occupari circa verba, nisi in quantum sunt sibi instrumenta ad communicandum Notandum secundo quod aliter determinat hic de substantia, qualitate, quantitate etc. et aliter in V *Metaphysicae*. Nam secundum Avicennam, in principio *Metaphysicae* suae, metaphysicus procedit scientifice circa singula quae conveniunt in ente analogo, logicus autem probabiliter. Et secundum sanctum Thomam, in IV *Metaphysicae*, logica potest considerari uno modo ut est scientia docens modum probabiliter procedendi, aut modum sciendi; et tunc considerat de rebus sub ratione qua eis insunt intentiones secundae, ut sub ratione qua est commune vel singulare, genus etc. Et tunc pro-

14 Alyngton, *Litteralis sententia super Praedicamenta Aristotelis*, cap. de substantia, 88r.

cedit scientificæ. Et tunc habet pro subiecto, ut dicit Avicenna, et Lincolniensis, I *Posteriorum*, intentiones secundas prout opponuntur primis. Sed secundo modo potest logica considerari ut utens. Et tunc considerat circa subiectum aequè universale sicut metaphysicus, sed non scientificæ. Et sic, secundum Lincolniensem, logica est instrumentum metaphysicæ. Et sic ex dictis potest elici quod subiectum huius libri hic divisum in decem partes est ens in prædicamento reali significabile per signum incomplexum. Nec contendo etsi alii exponant hic de vocibus principaliter quæ supra exposita sunt de rebus; nihil enim ad me de his quæ foris sunt, sed satis mihi videtur dicere et explanare sententiam antiquorum.¹⁵

The strategy which calls for this choice is evident: as in the case of relations of reason,¹⁶ Alyngton is trying to substitute references to mental activity by references to external reality. In other words, he seeks to reduce epistemology to ontology. From a logical point of view, this means that the same interpretative pattern is employed in order to account for both the semantic power of proper names and common terms (i.e. those expressions that refer to a class of individuals), and of first and second intentions. Like proper names, common terms also primarily signify and label a unique object, that is a common nature; but unlike the object signified by a proper name, the reality of the common nature is 'distributed' among many individuals as their main metaphysical constituent, since it determines the typical features of the individuals themselves. By associating common terms with such an object as their main *significatum*, Alyngton thinks he can explain the fact that a common term can stand for and label many singular things at once.¹⁷

Only in this way does he believe we can successfully ground our knowledge; otherwise it would lack an adequate foundation.

15 Cf. *ibid.*, cap. *de numero prædicamentorum*, 78r-v.

16 Cf. *ibid.*, cap. *de relatione*: 119r-v, 121r and 122r. According to Alyngton what characterizes relations of reason is the fulfilment of at least one of these conditions: i) the subject of inherence of the relation, or its object (i.e. the *terminus ad quem*), is not a substance; ii) the object is not an actual entity; iii) the *fundamentum relationis* is not an absolute being (i.e. a substance, or a quality, or a quantity). In this way Alyngton eliminates from the definition of relations of reason any reference to our mind, and utilizes objective criteria only, based on the framework of reality itself. Cf. Conti 1993: 222-29 and 290-96.

17 Cf. Alyngton, *Litteralis sententia super Prædicamenta Aristotelis*, cap. *de substantia*, 87v-88r, 93r-v, 94v-95r, 96r-v, 101v-102v.

4.

Still, this procedure, so effective, leads to a paradox when applied to those terms of second intention by which we speak of the singular objects considered as such, i.e. expressions like '*substantia prima*', '*individuum*', '*persona*' and so on. In fact, according to Alynngton (and many other "realists" of the period) a common term is always matched by a common nature existing *in re* (by which it can refer to a multiplicity of singular things – as we have seen); therefore, as the term '*individuum*' appears to be common, since it can stand for a multiplicity of things, it should signify an extramental common nature shared by them. As a consequence, we would have to admit the existence of an individual common nature, that is an (auto-contradictory) entity present in all the individuals as the cause of their being individuals.

Alynngton, who would not give up the principle of the one-to-one relation between philosophical language and the world, could remove the paradox only by classifying terms of this kind among the atomic (*discreti*) terms, i.e. those terms or nominal syntagms, like '*Socrates*' or '*aliquis homo*', which refer to individuals and not to classes of individuals. According to the English philosopher there are three main types of atomic terms: i) personal pronouns, which identify a singular definite referent by means of an ostensive definition (*a demonstratione*); ii) proper names; and iii) 'range-narrowed' expressions (*a limitatione intellectus*), i.e. those expressions which identify a singular referent as a member of a certain set. Expressions like '*substantia prima*' and '*individuum*' belong to this third category, as they presuppose a general concept (those of substance and being, in the example), the range of which is narrowed just to a unique object by an act of our intellect (among substances and beings, to one which is not common):

Ideo quantum ad motiva in contrarium respondendum est primo quantum ad illud quod tangitur de primario significato istius termini '*substantia prima*'. Ubi notandum quod iste terminus '*substantia prima*' est terminus discretus a limitatione intellectus. Est enim aliquis terminus discretus a demonstratione, ut pronomina demonstrativa; aliquis est discretus ex impositione, ut nomen proprium, quod uni soli appropriate imponitur; et tertio modo est aliquis terminus discretus ab intellectu limitatione, ut tales termini '*individuum*', '*singulare*', '*persona*' et termini aggregati ex signis particularibus et nominibus appellativis, ut '*aliquis homo*', '*quoddam animal*', et ita de aliis. Termini enim particulares ad hoc adduntur nominibus ut limitent ipsa nomina ad res particulares, quia aliter superfluerent. Et in isto tertio gradu est iste terminus '*substantia prima*' terminus discretus. Et tunc

dicitur ulterius quod sicut pronomen sine demonstratione nihil significat praeter quod significat naturaliter, et tamen sine demonstratione modum habet significandi discrete et ex demonstratione habet significatum quod discrete significat, ita iste terminus 'substantia prima' sine limitatione intellectus nihil primarie significat, quamvis sine omni tali limitatione significet discrete; et ex ipsa limitatione intellectus nunc significat principaliter hanc substantiam et nunc illam principaliter. Sed differunt a pronomine, cum pronomen ex demonstratione significat sine connotatione rationis in genere, et ideo dicitur significare substantiam meram; isti autem termini significant rem connotando proprietatem eius in genere et ordinabilitatem eius in specie vel in genere. Differunt etiam a nomine proprio, quoniam nomina propria fuerunt appropriate imposita ad significandum individua determinata et non quaecumque homo voluerit quodcumque et quotienscumque per intellectum limitare; sed haec nomina fuerunt imposita ad significandum discrete vel in particulari quodcumque homo voluerit sibi ipsi in tali genere vel specie limitare. Et propter hoc ad differentiam aliorum discretorum dicuntur termini particulares. Et sic non est dare substantiam primam in communi plus quam istum Robertum in communi.¹⁸

The rule that terms can be listed as common ones only if they signify a common nature is safe, but at the cost of a counter-intuitive categorization of their semantic power. In fact, according to Alyngton's account, saying that Socrates and Plato are *primae substantiae* simply means that i) each one is what he is, and that ii) what each one is is a non-universal substance. This solution, which entails that to be an individual is not a positive state of affairs, but a negative one, is consistent with the ontology worked out by Alyngton, where it is the absence of the property of being-common-to-many-things (*communicabilitas* or universality) that characterizes individuals as such. The following quotations may illuminate Alyngton's notion of communicability:

Pro quo notandum quod communicabile dicitur aliquid dupliciter, scilicet realiter, vel per identitatem, ita quod sit ipsum cui communicatur – et isto modo universale communicatur suo singulari. Secundo modo est aliquid communicabile per informationem, ita quod illud cui communicatur non sit ipsum, sed ipso informatum – et isto modo communicatur forma materiae et accidens suo subiecto. Secundo notandum quod 'subiectum' sumitur aliquando pro extremo propositionis ... Sed alias sumitur 'subiectum' realiter pro omni quod recipit aliud in se formaliter. Et isto modo materia prima dicitur subiectum et forma dicitur praedicatum. Isto modo etiam generaliter substantia est subiectum respectu sui accidentis. Sed tertio modo ad propositum dicitur subiectum esse quod per se supponitur alteri tamquam inferius; et sic species dicitur subiectum seu pars subiectiva sui generis, et praedicatum dicitur realiter et communius respectu minus communis. Et sic in-

¹⁸ Ibid., cap. *de substantia*, 89v-90r.

telligit Aristoteles quando dicit: “Quando alterum de altero dicitur ut de subiecto” etc.; et sic praedicari realiter est formam inesse formato realiter aut communius inesse essentialiter minus communi. Et isto modo dicuntur seu praedicantur species aut genera realia de suis per se contentis etc.

Universale formaliter intellectum dicit tria, scilicet naturam quae est primae intentionis, et communicabilitatem multis suppositis, quae est res secundae intentionis, et abstractionem vel intelligibilitatem excludentem propriam et formalem sensibilitatem – nullus enim sensus materialis sufficit comprehendere hominem sub ratione qua est quidditative communicabilis

Pro quo intelligendo imaginanda est latitudo universalium universalitate causationis et latitudo universalium universalitate praedicationis. Et tunc, sicut semper universalium in ordine causarum essentialium vel est minus subiectum vel aliter non est subiectum accidentibus vel transmutationibus in accidente quam suum inferius, sic imaginatur Aristoteles proportionaliter quod sicut universalia praedicatione sunt communiora sic sunt ipsa naturaliter priora, et, ut sic, magis remote accidentibus subiecta. Sed correspondenter sicut universalia sunt minus communia et proximiora individuis quae sunt simpliciter incommunicabilia, sic sunt posteriora in natura et magis propinqua accidentibus quoad rationem substandi. Non enim substantia quoad essentiam suam est intensibilis et remissibilis, nec ut sic dicitur suscipere magis et minus, sed quoad actum substandi, quia prima substantia principalius et immediatius pluribus speciebus accidentium substat quam secunda substantia.¹⁹

5.

Some other authors belonging to the same cultural milieu followed Alyngton, as we can read almost the same words on the status of second intentions in the works of William Penbygull,²⁰ Roger Whelpdale,²¹ and John Tarteys.²² They also considered intentions as extra-mental realities, and the ‘*individuum*’-like terms

¹⁹ First quotation from *ibid.*, cap. *de regulis praedicationis*, 76r; second quotation from cap. *de substantia*, 93v; final quotation from *ibid.* 98v. See also cap. *de subiecto et praedicatione*, 75r.

²⁰ Cf. Penbygull, *De universalibus*: 194-95. On Penbygull’s theory of universals, intentions, and predication see Conti 1982: 137-66.

²¹ Cf. Whelpdale, *Tractatus de universalibus*: 103rA-B: “Pro quo notandum est quod iste terminus ‘homo singularis’ est terminus discretus [est] ex limitatione intellectus. Tripliciter enim dicitur terminus discretus. Est enim aliquis terminus discretus a demonstratione, ut pronomina demonstrativa; et aliquis est terminus discretus ab impositione, ut nomen proprium, quod uni soli appropriate (a proprietati *ms*) imponitur; et tertio modo aliquis est terminus discretus ab intellectus limitatione, ut tales termini ‘individuum’, ‘singulare’ et ‘substantia prima’, et termini aggregati ex signis particularibus (suis partibus *ms*) et nominibus appellativis, ut

as a sort of definite descriptions which refer to a unique singular being.

Not every thinker of the next generation at Oxford agreed with Alyngton, however. As a matter of fact, in his *Quaestio super universalibus* Johannes Sharpe²³ criticizes this theory and proposes a different one.

Sharpe argues²⁴ that Alyngton's answer to the question about the status of those particular second intentions like *individuum* goes against linguistic usage (*communis modus loquendi*) as well as established facts (*ratio experimentalis*). If Alyngton were right, then the following argument (which everybody will admit) would be formally incorrect:

homo currit
et non homo communis
ergo homo singularis currit,

just like this other one:

homo currit
et non homo communis
ergo Sortes currit,

as the syntagm '*homo singularis*' would be an atomic term standing precisely for only one individual, just like '*Sortes*'. Furthermore, it

'aliquis homo', 'quoddam animal', et sic de ceteris. Termini enim particulares ad hoc adduntur nominibus, ut limitent ista nomina ad res particulares, quia aliter superfluerent. Et in <isto> tertio gradu est iste terminus 'homo singularis'."

²² Cf. Tarteys, *Problema correspondens libello Porphyrii*, 202r: "Tertio suppono quod tripliciter potest dici terminum esse discretum: ex demonstratione, ut pronomina demonstrativa; ex impositione, ut propria nomina; et ex limitatione intellectus, ut tales termini 'individuum', 'singulare', 'persona' et signa particularia. Suppono quod sicut nomina propria quandoque capiuntur proprie, quandoque appellative, et per consequens abusive, sic isti termini 'individuum', 'singulare' et ceteri qui sunt singulares ex limitatione intellectus quandoque capiuntur stricte, et hoc est quando capiuntur discrete seu limitate, et quandoque appellative, sive abusive."

²³ On Johannes Sharpe's logico-metaphysical theories see Conti (ed.), Johannes Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalibus*, pars ii: studio storico-critico: 211-38, and 323-36; de Libera 1992: 83-110. On his psychological and epistemological doctrines see Kennedy 1969: 249-70.

²⁴ Cf. Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalibus*: 132-33.

is a fact that anyone can understand this sentence '*homo singularis currit*' even without knowing who the man who is running is – which is, on the contrary, a necessary requisite (the *limitatio intellectus*) according to Alynghon's theory. Therefore, Sharpe had to regard second intentions of this kind as common ones, and had to modify the criteria for the universality of terms. In his opinion, to be matched by a common nature really existing in the world is no longer the necessary and sufficient condition for being a common term. According to him, signifying universally, that is to say signifying a unitary concept (*unitas intentionis*) which, in its turn, refers to a multiplicity of things displaying at least a similar mode of being, is an equally important condition for semantical universality as the foregoing. He thinks that not only those terms which signify a common nature existing *extra animam* have to be viewed as common, but also those ones which signify universally:

Unde dico quod est dare universalia in mente et extra mentem. Universalia in mente vel sunt intentionalia, et hoc rerum vel signorum, vel sunt habitualia, vel actualia, sicut universales intellectiones. Sed universalia extra mentem vel sunt signa subordinata illis universalibus in mente, cuiusmodi sunt termini universales scripti vel vocales, vel sunt res distinctae contra talia signa, de quibus iam locutum est Et in notitiam illorum universalium pervenimus ex notitia signorum universalium et e contra. Et ratione illius provenit multis deceptio, quod credunt nullum terminum esse communem nisi sibi correspondeat aliquid ex parte rei commune Et ratione illius ponunt aliqua communia extra genus et aliqua in genere Sed illa multiplicitas universalium videtur esse tracta a posteriori, scilicet a multitudine signorum communium; et ideo non reputo eam satis securam, cum prius naturaliter sit universalitas in rebus quam in signis, et etiam quia signa possunt esse communia aliis modis quam ab universalitate significatorum.

Multo maior varietas reperitur in communitate signorum quam rerum, sicut maior multiplicitas est effectuum quam suarum causarum. Dicitur ergo quod in quibusdam terminis solus modus significandi sufficit facere communitatem, ut videtur esse de istis terminis 'chimaera', etc., qui non sunt termini specifici ex hoc quod repraesentant aliquas species ex natura rei, sed quia habent quoddammodo similem modum significandi et praedicandi cum aliis terminis specificis quibus correspondent naturae specificae in re. Et similiter dicitur quod isti termini, licet aliquo modo sunt communes, scilicet 'singulare', 'individuum', 'persona', etc., propter modum indeterminate repraesentandi plura, licet hoc non sit pure aequivoce nec pure univoce, sed quoddammodo medio modo Pro quo ulterius sciendum quod unitas intentionis, qua plura immediate univoce repraesentantur, potest dupliciter causari. Uno modo ex unitate naturae in qua multa essentialiter vel accidentaliter conveniunt; alio modo potest causari talis unitas propter similitudinem vel proportionalem habitudinem multorum inter se, licet illa similitudo non sit in aliquo uno. Et ideo magis proportionalis vel consimilis habitudo posset vocari.²⁵

Thus according to Sharpe²⁶ there are six different kinds of common expressions (*signa extra mentem*), both spoken and written: i) those which universally signify a common nature existing *in re*, like the term '*humanitas*'; ii) those which universally connote (*important*) a common nature existing *in re*, without directly signifying it, like the term '*album*', that refers to white things and connotes the form of whiteness; iii) those which do not refer to anything existing *in re*, but which are somehow correlated with a universal concept, like the terms '*vacuum*' and '*chimaera*'; iv) those to which no common natures existing *in re* correspond, but a common trans-categorical negative concept, under which a multiplicity of things can be collected (*quarto modo dicitur terminus talis communis per habitudinem ad conceptum communem extrinsecum vel accidentalem, transcendentem vel negativum, cum hoc quod communiter multa significet pro quorum quolibet potest supponere*), like the term '*individuum*'; v) equivocal terms as such, since they are connected with a multiplicity of different notions; and vi) demonstrative pronouns, like '*hoc*', when used to supposit for a common nature, even if they can signify in an atomic manner (*discrete*) only.

Sharpe admits that the nominalistic explanation of the universality of signs holds in the particular case of second intentions, thus implicitly refusing Alyngton's reduction of epistemology to ontology – since, according to his account, epistemology has its own range and rules partially independent of those of ontology. He writes:

Et illum secundum modum solum acceptant negantes universalialia, credentes se per ipsum salvare naturam universalium – quod tamen non est verum. Et alii, ponentes universalialia, solum acceptant primum. Sed ego credo utrumque modum esse accipiendum. Primo ergo modo principaliter et secundo modo secundarie causatur unitas intentionis proprie specialis et generalis. Sed secundo modo specialiter causatur unitas quarundam intentionum quae non sunt proprie in genere, sed circumeunt multa genera.²⁷

In this way Sharpe restores the semantic rank that intuitively would be assigned to the '*individuum*'-like terms (something Alyngton was unable to do), but on the other hand his defense of realism is invalidated by the acceptance, albeit restricted, of the

25 Ibid.: 68-69; and 129-30.

26 Cf. *ibid.*: 69-71.

27 *Ibid.*: 130-31.

nominalistic principle of the autonomy of thought in relation to the world. In fact, it is evident that he can no longer justify from a semantic and/or epistemological point of view the extra-mental reality of universals.

6.

Aware of all these inconsistencies, Paul of Venice tried to solve the problem on a partially different ground.²⁸ In his last work, the commentary on the *Categories* (A.D. 1428), after analyzing the positions of Alyngton and Sharpe,²⁹ he proposes a new way of dealing with it, inspired by the interpretative model utilized by him for explaining the semantic scope of transcendental terms.

Paul criticizes Alyngton's solution, which he claims to be false (*"ista opinio non est vera"*), and accepts the general idea behind Sharpe's theory, which he tries to improve on in some particular aspects. According to the Italian philosopher, Alyngton does not take into consideration the fact that there are definitions associated with expressions like '*substantia prima*' – something impossible if they were atomic terms. On the other hand, Sharpe's explanation, based on the principle of the *unitas intentionis*, does not work when applied to all the terms of second intention, as it leads to positing the existence of a species common to all species, a genus common to all genera, and so on. This consequence is undesirable in Paul of Venice's view, as he, misunderstanding the sense of Sharpe's claims, reifies Sharpe's *unitas intentionis* and considers it an extra-mental common entity.

Paul maintains that a unique universal concept corresponds to terms of second intention, even to those which signify singulars as such, but no common nature. This 'conceptual' unity is sufficient to allow for univocally defining the things these terms refer to when considered just as the bearers of the signified property:

Aliqua communia important unam vocem, unum conceptum et unam naturam, ut genera et species; quaedam important unam vocem et unum conceptum, sed non unam naturam, ut transcendentia; quaedam vero important solum unam vocem, ut pure equivocata. Haec autem communia, videlicet substantia prima, individuum,

²⁸ On Paul of Venice's life, works, and thought see Conti 1996.

²⁹ Cf. Paul of Venice, *Expositio super Praedicamenta Aristotelis*, cap. *de substantia, dubitatio: utrum sit dare substantiam primam in communi*, 57rA-B.

singulare, particulare et huiusmodi, non important tantum unam vocem, quia definiuntur, neque important unam naturam, quia non est dare aliquam substantiam primam in qua unitive concurrunt omnes substantiae primae ... Relinquitur ergo quod talia dicunt unam vocem et unum conceptum, ex quo definiuntur. Non ergo est dare substantiam primam in communi communitate unius naturae, sed communitate unius conceptus; ita quod est dare unum conceptum communem omnibus primis substantiis, et iste conceptus est hoc commune, substantia prima. Hoc autem commune non est substantia prima nec secunda, sed est quidam conceptus communis praedicabilis de omni substantia prima, qui est extra omnia praedicamenta, sicut isti conceptus, genus et species, et alii consimiles secundae intentionis.³⁰

However, according to Paul, who in this matter agrees with Alyngton and disagrees with Sharpe, all concepts of second intention are correlated with and caused by some peculiar aspect of the things he calls ‘*intentiones in re*’ and which he describes³¹ as those modes of being and structural relations which are the objects of our last level of abstraction (*abstractio specificationis*). Thus, not only first intentions, but second intentions also, though in a slightly different manner, have a direct foundation in extra-mental reality:

³⁰ Ibid., cap. *de substantia*, 57rB.

³¹ Cf. Paul of Venice, *Summa philosophiae naturalis*, pars v, cap. 40, 90vB: “Quarta <abstractio> est specificationis. Et est illa qua intellectus elicit species secundae intentionis ex speciebus primae intentionis. Nam intellectus post formationem conceptus hominis percipit naturam humanam communicari multis individuis, et vocat illam speciem. Similiter post formationem conceptus animalis cognoscit naturam animalis inesse multis speciebus, et vocat illam genus. Et dicuntur esse conceptus specificationis quia specificant modum se habendi quidditatis extra animam”; *Scriptum super libros De anima* III, t.c. 11, 137vA: “Quartus ordo est modificativus. Nam, postquam intellectus pervenit ad primum conceptum specificum abstractum per viam divisionis, considerat modos illius naturae proprios et communes, quibus illi competunt accidentia propria vel communia per se vel per accidens, separando ea quae sunt per se ab his quae sunt per accidens – sicut communicari multis et praedicari de multis, qui sunt modi essentialia quidditatum universalium; esse disciplinabile, esse risibile, quae sunt proprietates naturae specificae, licet actus non reperiatur nisi in individuis. Et tunc facit intellectus demonstrationes, quibus demonstrat modos et proprias passiones de naturis illis. Considerans enim intellectus naturam humanam esse in multis, cognoscit illam esse communicabilem; et considerans illam solum communicari hominibus, cognoscit illam esse speciem specialissimam. Deinde, considerans solum illa in quibus est illa natura ridere et disciplinari, cognoscit omnem hominem esse risibilem. Consimiliter dicitur de natura generica. Nam, considerans intellectus istam communi-

Et sicut isti conceptus <scilicet secundae intentionis> non sunt termini mentales, sed intentiones extra animam potentes movere intellectum, ita isti conceptus, substantia prima, individuum, singulare, particulare et huiusmodi sunt extra animam. Si enim conceptus substantiae in communi est extra animam, et conceptus substantiae secundae est extra animam, necesse est quod conceptus substantiae primae sit extra animam. Si enim divisum est extra animam, oportet quodlibet dividendum esse extra animam.³²

In this way, he successfully reconciled the two different demands supported by Alyngton and Sharpe, but avoided their difficulties. Like the former, Paul could keep the principle of the one-to-one correspondence between language and the world (the keystone of medieval realism); like the latter, he could explain the semantic power of terms of second intention in accordance with an intuitive conception of them.

The basis of this theory is an extension of the notion of being (*ens*) – which he defines as *id quod est*, or *id quod habet esse*³³ – to cover even the *modi essendi* themselves,³⁴ which are entified to some extent, so that ‘*individuum*’-like terms can eventually have a foundation (*fundamentum*) which is almost as real as a *res praedicamentalis* without being a common nature. The realism was safe, and the logic was too.

cari pluribus speciebus, intelligit illam esse genus; et percipiens omnia illa in quibus est illa natura aliquando dormire, aliquando vitaliter operari, intelligit cuilibet animali inesse somnum et vigiliam tamquam proprias passiones etc.”

32 Paul of Venice, *Expositio super Praedicamenta Aristotelis*, cap. *de substantia*, 57rB.

33 Cf. Paul of Venice, *Lectura super libros Metaphysicorum* IV, 1, 1, 125vB: “Si enim quaeritur propter quid substantia aut accidens est ens, convenienter respondetur ‘quia habet esse’, aut ‘quia est id quod est’”; *Expositio super Universalia Porphyrii*, cap. *de specie*, 22rb: “Unde ‘ens’ significat omnia sub ista ratione, quae est: esse illud quod est.”

34 Cf. *Lectura super libros Metaphysicorum* V, 2, 2, 179vB: “Secunda distinctio est quod ens aut substantia, aut quantitas, aut qualitas, et sic de aliis praedicamentis. Ista distinctio demonstratur, quia sicut ens secundum accidens est illud quod importat praedicationem accidentalem, ita ens secundum se est illud quod importat praedicationem essentialem; sed modi praedicandi sumuntur a modis essendi, alioquin praedicationes non essent nisi figmenta; ergo tot sunt modi essendi quot sunt modi praedicandi; sed modi praedicandi sunt decem, secundum decem figurarum praedicamentorum; ergo modi essendi sunt decem; et per consequens ens dividitur in decem praedicamenta.” See also *Expositio super Praedicamenta Aristotelis*, cap. *de numero praedicamentorum*, 51rA.

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