

Two *Summulae*, Two Ways of Doing Logic:

Peter of Spain's 'realism' and John Buridan's 'nominalism'

The two *Summulae* and the 'nominalism/realism' distinction

Gyula Klima, Fordham University

The two *Summulae* mentioned in the title are Peter of Spain's *Summulae Logicales*, written by the realist master sometime in the first half of the 13th century, and the monumental *Summulae de Dialectica* of John Buridan, written by the nominalist master about a century later. Although the latter work is ostensibly written as a commentary on the former, the doctrine expounded in the latter is sometimes diametrically opposed to the doctrine of the former. As Buridan noted in his preface:

I have chosen to deal in particular with that short treatise of logic which the venerable professor master Peter of Spain composed a while ago, by commenting on and supplementing it; indeed, occasionally I am going to have to say and write things that differ from what he has said and written, whenever it appears to me suitable to do so.¹

In what follows, I will examine in some detail exactly how the doctrines expounded in the two *Summulae* differ from one another, thereby hoping to shed some light on the general issue of what *the real difference* between medieval realism and nominalism consists in. Indeed, since that *real difference* will turn out to be not so much a difference in ontology, as in two paradigmatically different ways of constructing semantic theory, this discussion will also provide an opportunity for some abstract speculation on the nominalism/realism distinction in general. But in order to engage in this sort of speculation, it will be useful to introduce some general terminology.

If by 'the adverbialization of semantics' we mean the transition from a semantic theory that relates different syntactical categories to different ontological categories to one that relates

¹ John Buridan 2001, 4.

different syntactical categories to the *same* ontological categories but *differently* (here is the adverb), then, as we shall see, we can plausibly claim the following:

(1) Buridan's nominalism is obtainable by the adverbialization of Peter of Spain's semantics.

Indeed, this comparison will easily prompt the obvious generalization of this claim:

(2) Nominalism is obtainable by the adverbialization of realist semantics.

Furthermore, since the adverbialization of realist semantics as understood here can cover a broader or narrower range of syntactical and ontological categories, I will also consider some instances of the following obvious corollary:

(3) Nominalism comes in various degrees.

If, in accordance with this possible 'gradation' of nominalism, we understand the terms 'nominalism' and 'realism' as designating two extremes of a range of theoretical possibilities with all sorts of intermediaries in between, then we can immediately see what motivated the introduction of the qualifiers 'extreme' and 'moderate' by historians of medieval philosophy, as they were trying to compare and classify medieval theories, which upon closer look always prove to differ in such subtle detail that cannot possibly be captured by the crude classifications of 'nominalism', 'realism' and 'conceptualism'.

As the precise 'gauging' of Peter of Spain's realism and Buridan's nominalism within this theoretical framework will reveal, their theories are in fact better characterized as fundamentally different versions of *conceptualism*. These considerations will finally give rise to the following, tentative generalization:

(4) Medieval realism and nominalism are just different versions of conceptualism, differing especially in how they handle the problems of describing and identifying *mental content*.

But instead of wasting more time on issues of terminology, let us just get down to what would count in this framework as one extreme of this range of theoretical possibilities, the one that we might even call 'extremely extreme realism', and see where Peter of Spain's actual semantics and ontology would be on the scale relative to this theoretical extreme.

'Extremely extreme realism'

In accordance with the foregoing, ‘extremely extreme realism’ would be the kind of semantic theory in which different syntactical categories distinguished in terms of their different semantic functions would be taken to be in a one-to-one correspondence with different ontological categories, given that the different semantic functions of the different syntactical categories would be explained precisely in terms of being related to entities in those different ontological categories. Thus, if in this framework we would take singular and common terms to belong to different syntactical categories on account of the different semantic functions they have, then we would take this difference to consist in the fact that terms in these different syntactical categories signify entities in different ontological categories: to put it simply, singular terms are singular because they signify singular entities, whereas universal terms are universal because they signify universal entities. Thus, by the lights of this theory, the singular name ‘Socrates’ would be singular because it signifies the singular man Socrates, whereas the universal term ‘man’ would be universal because it would signify a universal entity, the universal man or human nature, or in modern times the so-called ‘abstract entity’, the ‘property’ of being human, perhaps, properly referred to by the name ‘humanity’. By contrast, a ‘not so extremely extreme’ realist theory would say, for instance, that the difference in the semantic functions of singular and universal terms would not consist in the difference of the type of entities they signify, but rather in the *different ways* of signifying the *same* type of entities.

Again, if an ‘extremely extreme realist’ theory distinguishes between the semantic functions of different kinds of categorematic terms, then the distinction would be made in terms of the different types of entities these terms are supposed to signify, along the lines of an extremely realist interpretation of the Aristotelian doctrine of the categories, exemplified, perhaps uniquely, by Pseudo-Campsall, the extremely realist author of the aptly titled *Logica realis et valde utilis contra Ockham*.² Thus, for an ‘extremely extreme realist’, *simple* terms in the categories of substance, quantity, quality, relation, action, passion, time, place, position and habit would be sorted into these different categories precisely because they signify substance-, quantity-, quality-, relation-, action-, passion-, time-, place-, position- and habit-things, respectively. By contrast, a ‘not so extremely realist’ theory would allow overlaps between the ontological categories corresponding to distinct linguistic categories; thus, for instance, they

² Pseudo-Campsall 1982, see, e.g., 351-365.

would allow terms in the distinct categories of action and passion to signify the same motion, or they would allow some quantity, namely, the inner surface of the containing body to be the place of the located body (as for example Aquinas does).³

But similar considerations would apply to either explicitly or implicitly *complex* terms and propositions. For the ‘extremely extreme realist’, if a positive common term signifies a positive common nature, then a negative term signifies the negation of that nature. Likewise, if a positive term signifies some positive, accidental form in a subject of a determinate nature, then a privative term signifies a *privation*, namely, the lack of that positive form in a subject of that determinate nature. For instance, since the term ‘sighted’ signifies the power of sight in a subject of sensitive nature, the corresponding privative term, ‘blind’, signifies a privation, namely, blindness, the lack of this power in a subject of that nature. By contrast, a nominalist would insist that the term ‘blind’ signifies nothing other than what the term ‘sighted’ signifies: it does not signify a negative or privative entity or a privation; rather, it signifies the same positive entities, but *differently*, namely, negatively. Finally, for the realist, propositions signify another type of entity, namely, some propositional complex, variously called an *enuntiabile* (nearly all 12th and 13th century authors), a *dictum* (Peter Abelard and others), a *complexe significabile* (most famously Gregory of Rimini and Adam Wodeham) a *real proposition* (Walter Burley), or even in modern times a *fact* or more commonly a *state of affairs*. For the nominalist, by contrast,

³ Aquinas, Commentary on Metaphysics 11, l. 9 n. 24: ‘Quinto ibi, quemadmodum eadem manifestat hoc per exempla: et dicit quod una est distantia duorum ad unum et unius ad duo. Sed differt ratione. Propter quod diversimode significatur: scilicet per duplum et dimidium. Similiter una est via ad ascendendum et descendendum, sed differt ratione. Et propter hoc dicuntur hi ascendentes et illi descendentes. Et ita est de movente et moto. Nam unus motus secundum substantiam est actus utriusque, sed differt ratione. Est enim actus moventis ut a quo, mobilis autem ut in quo; et non actus mobilis ut a quo, neque moventis ut in quo. Et ideo actus moventis dicitur actio, mobilis vero passio.’ Commentary on Metaphysics 11, l. 9 n. 25 ‘Sed si actio et passio sunt idem secundum substantiam, videtur quod non sint diversa praedicamenta. Sed sciendum quod praedicamenta diversificantur secundum diversos modos praedicandi. Unde idem, secundum quod diversimode de diversis praedicatur, ad diversa praedicamenta pertinet. Locus enim, secundum quod praedicatur de locante, pertinet ad genus quantitatis. Secundum autem quod praedicatur denominative de locato, constituit praedicamentum ubi. Similiter motus, secundum quod praedicatur de subiecto in quo est, constituit praedicamentum passionis. Secundum autem quod praedicatur de eo a quo est, constituit praedicamentum actionis.’

propositions signify nothing other than what their terms signify, but *differently*: not simply, but in a complex manner.

Peter of Spain's realism

After this, no matter how sketchy, survey of 'extremely extreme realism', as a mere theoretical alternative, we may have a better chance of 'gauging' Peter of Spain's actual realism. As should be clear from this survey, one really does not have to be a nominalist to be relatively far removed from this 'extremely extreme realism'. For instance, an 'ordinary moderate realist' such as Aquinas, would certainly disagree with the extreme realist on the difference between the signification of singular and universal terms; in fact, Aquinas insists in many places that accounting for the universality of our universal terms on the basis of the universality of the things they signify is the Platonic error of confusing *modi significandi* and *modi essendi*. Thus, in his own account, Aquinas 'adverbializes' the relevant semantic relation, pretty much like a nominalist would, by saying that a universal term is universal not because it signifies a universal thing, for there is no such a thing, but because it signifies things in a *universal manner*.⁴

⁴ '... nunc sermo est de vocibus significativis ex institutione humana; et ideo oportet passiones animae hic intelligere intellectus conceptiones, quas nomina et verba et orationes significant immediate, secundum sententiam Aristotelis. Non enim potest esse quod significant immediate ipsas res, ut ex ipso *modo significandi* apparet: significat enim hoc nomen homo naturam humanam in abstractione a singularibus. Unde non potest esse quod significet immediate hominem singularem; unde Platonici posuerunt quod significaret ipsam ideam hominis separatam. Sed quia hoc secundum suam abstractionem non subsistit realiter secundum sententiam Aristotelis, sed est in solo intellectu; ideo necesse fuit Aristoteli dicere quod voces significant intellectus conceptiones immediate et eis mediantibus res.' Commentary on *De interpretatione* 1, l. 2, n. 5. Cf. '... dico quod ea quae pertinent ad rationem speciei cuiuslibet rei materialis, puta lapidis aut hominis aut equi, possunt considerari sine principiis individualibus, quae non sunt de ratione speciei. Et hoc est abstrahere universale a particulari, vel speciem intelligibilem a phantasmatibus, considerare scilicet naturam speciei absque consideratione individualium principiorum, quae per phantasmata repraesentantur. Cum ergo dicitur quod intellectus est falsus qui intelligit rem aliter quam sit, verum est si ly aliter referatur ad rem intellectam. Tunc enim intellectus est falsus, quando intelligit rem esse aliter quam sit. Unde falsus esset intellectus, si sic abstraheret speciem lapidis a materia, ut intelligeret eam non esse in materia, ut Plato posuit. Non est autem verum quod proponitur, si ly aliter accipiatur ex parte intelligentis. Est enim absque falsitate ut alius sit *modus intelligentis in intelligendo*, quam *modus rei in existendo*, quia intellectum est in

By contrast, Peter of Spain seems to be *really* close to the theoretical position of the ‘extremely extreme realist’. Indeed, in his description of signification, he just states flat-out that categorematic terms have to signify either singular or universal things.⁵

According to Peter, signification is the conventional representation of some thing by an utterance. Therefore, only those terms have signification that signify some thing, i.e., categorematic terms. Indeed, Peter goes on to argue that since every thing is either particular or universal, and syncategorematic terms, such as ‘every’, ‘some’, etc., do not signify either a universal or a particular thing, they do not signify any thing, and so they do not have signification in this strict sense.⁶ Nevertheless, as we shall see, this does not mean that these terms are absolutely meaningless. In fact, Peter will argue that although such terms do not signify things, they do signify certain modes of the things signified by categorematic terms. For now, however, we should just note Peter’s unabashed talk about universal things in this argument.

Peter divides signification into the signification of substantive things, performed by substantive nouns, and the signification of adjective things, performed by adjective nouns or verbs. Again, Peter insists that this distinction does not characterize *modes of signification*, but *modes of things*.⁷

intelligente immaterialiter, per modum intellectus; non autem materialiter, per modum rei materialis.’ *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 85 a. 1 ad 1.

⁵ The following summary of Peter of Spain’s semantics partly derives from Klima 2003, 526-31.

⁶ Peter of Spain 1972, 79: ‘Significatio termini, prout hic sumitur, est rei per vocem secundum placitum representatio. Quare cum omnis res aut sit universalis aut particularis, oportet dictiones non significantes universale vel particulare non significare aliquid. Et sic non erunt termini prout hic sumitur ‘terminus’; ut sunt signa universalialia et particularia.’

⁷ Peter of Spain 1972, 80: ‘Quare proprie non est signification substantive vel adiectiva, sed aliquid significatur substantive vel adiective quia adiectivatio vel substantivatio sunt modi rerum que significantur, et non significationis.’

Whatever these things and their modes are, Peter states that it is on account of the difference between these two types of signification that we have to distinguish between *supposition* and *copulation*.

Supposition is the taking of a substantive term for something, whereas copulation is the taking of an adjective term for something, i.e., its referring to something. This is why signification is prior to supposition. Since only a term can refer, supposition (i.e., reference) can only belong to a term, that is, an utterance that already has signification.

Peter next divides supposition into discrete and common. Discrete supposition belongs to discrete terms, i.e., terms that on account of their signification can apply only to one thing, such as proper nouns, or common terms determined by a demonstrative pronoun and an act of pointing. Common supposition belongs to common terms, i.e., terms that on account of their signification can apply to several things, although, as we could see, strictly speaking, they only signify one universal thing each.

Common supposition is further divided into natural and accidental supposition. Natural supposition is the taking of a common term for all those things that fall under it, be they past, present, or future. Although Peter does not say much about this type of supposition, its significance is clear in natural science, where we want to make universal claims of natural phenomena regardless of whether they actually exist at the time of making the claim or not. For example, 'Every lunar eclipse is the interposition of the earth between the sun and the moon' should be true, even when there is no lunar eclipse. Accidental supposition is the taking of a term in a proposition for something, as determined by the propositional context.

Peter next divides accidental supposition into *simple* and *personal supposition*; interestingly, he does not deal with the third usually distinguished kind of supposition, namely, *material supposition*, when a term is taken to stand for itself. According to Peter, in simple supposition a common term refers to the universal thing it signifies. For example, in the proposition 'Man is a species' the term 'man' stands for what it signifies, namely, man in general, and not any particular man, since obviously no particular man is a species. Furthermore, the predicate terms of universal affirmative propositions also seem to have simple supposition. For example, in 'Every man is an animal', the term 'animal' cannot be taken to stand for any particular animal, for obviously no particular animal is every man.

Personal supposition is defined by Peter as the taking of a common term for its inferiors. It is divided into *determinate* and *confused* supposition, the latter of which is further subdivided into *mobile* and *immobile supposition*. *Determinate supposition* is had, for example, by the subjects of particular propositions, such as ‘Some man is running’. It is called determinate, for although the term ‘man’ stands in it for all men, it is verified for just any one of them (i.e., it is true, if this man is running, or that man is running, etc.). *Confused supposition*, according to Peter’s definition, is the taking of a common term for many things, with the mediation of a universal sign. For example, the subject term of ‘Every man is an animal’ has *confused, mobile, and distributive* supposition, for the term is obviously held for all men, and, contrary to determinate supposition, the proposition is true only if the predicate is verified for all of them (i.e., it is true, if this man is an animal *and* that man is an animal, etc.).

Peter goes on to distinguish this type of confused supposition, which he calls *confused by the necessity of the sign*, from another type, which he calls *confused by the necessity of the thing*. That the subject term of ‘Every man is an animal’ is distributed for all men because of the universal sign ‘every’ is clear. But, Peter argues further, since each man has his own essence, and his own animality, the copula ‘is’ and the predicate term ‘animal’ should also be taken to stand for all those essences and all those animals, not *by the necessity of the sign*, but *by the necessity of the thing*.

The term confused by the necessity of the sign is taken *distributively*, for it is taken to stand for all men, but it has confused and *mobile* supposition, because one can ‘descend’ to any of its inferiors by a valid inference, such as this: ‘Every man is an animal; therefore, Plato is an animal’. By contrast, the term confused by the necessity of the thing has *confused, but immobile supposition*, for under this term no such descent is possible: the inference ‘Every man is an animal; therefore, every man is this animal’ is not valid.

However, in his discussion of simple supposition it was precisely this property of the predicate term of this sentence that allowed Peter to conclude that this term had *simple* supposition. In general, Peter’s criterion there to detect whether a term had simple supposition seemed to be whether under the term we could *descend* to one or another of its particulars, preserving the truth of the proposition. Apparently, the rule there was that if there is no descent under the term, then the term has simple supposition. Therefore, since there is no descent under

the predicate of a universal affirmative, that predicate must have simple supposition. But now Peter just argued that this term has to have *personal, confused*, although *immobile supposition*, given that it is confused by the necessity of the thing, and not by the necessity of the sign. So, which kind of supposition applies here?

Peter first addresses this problem by pointing out that attributing both simple and immobile personal supposition to the same term is not inconsistent, i.e., a term can have both, although in different respects. For it has simple supposition insofar as it stands for the nature of the genus signified by this term, but it has confused supposition insofar as the nature of the genus is multiplied in the *supposita* of the species. At least, Peter says, this is how one should answer the question, maintaining that this predicate term has confused personal supposition as well as simple supposition in this proposition.

But Peter is not satisfied with this solution, for he finds it simply impossible that a term should have confused personal supposition in the predicate position. He argues as follows. In ‘Every man is an animal’ a genus is predicated of one of its species. But the nature of the genus *multiplied* in the *supposita* of the species *is not* the genus (which is a universal, that is, something that is *one* over many, and thus *not multiplied* with the multiplicity of the many things participating in it). Therefore, it is not the nature of the genus multiplied in the *supposita* of the species that is predicated here. But then, since the predicate of this sentence stands for what is predicated, which is not the nature of the genus multiplied in the *supposita* of the species, the predicate cannot have confused supposition which would require this multiplication.

Peter’s consequent rejection of the aforementioned distinction between the two types of confusion (which he found in one of his sources, cf. de Rijk, 1972, lxxi) gives us a clearer insight into Peter’s semantic conception. Here he states that although from the point of view of logic the nature signified by ‘man’ in its *supposita* is one, in the nature of things each man has his own humanity, and these humanities are distinct on account of the matter they inform. Likewise, the nature signified by the term ‘animal’ in individual humans is one from the point of view of logic (*secundum viam logice*), but is multiplied in these individuals in the nature of things (*secundum viam nature*). So, the multiplication of animalities has nothing to do with the semantic function of the predicate of ‘Every man is an animal’; indeed, in the nature of things we find the same

multiplication of animalities even when we consider ‘Every man is white’ or ‘Every man is black’.

So, perhaps surprisingly, Peter’s apparently extremely realist talk about universal things need not be taken at face value. It is only the proper way of talking for the logician, who is discussing things insofar as they are conceived by us, and consequently signified by our terms. But since we are able to conceive of singular things in a universal manner, by abstracting from their differences, and consequently we are able to signify them in the same way, the logician is entitled to talk about what our common terms signify as a universal thing, while keeping in mind that the thing in question is not a thing of nature, but merely something universally conceived and signified.⁸

To summarize Peter’s conception by means of an example, the term ‘man’ signifies human nature in general, and this is what it stands for when it has simple supposition, as in ‘Man is a species’ or ‘Every philosopher is a man’. But the same term stands for the individuals having this nature (each one its own), when the term has personal supposition, whether determinate, as in ‘A man is an animal’ or confused, mobile and distributive, as in ‘Every man is an animal’. However, Peter rejects the suggestion that the predicate term of this sentence, besides having simple supposition would also have personal (confused and immobile) supposition, not because he thinks these two kinds of supposition would be incompatible, but because he argues that this predicate simply does not have the latter semantic function.

All this would squarely place Peter of Spain in the moderate realist position concerning the problem of universals. However, there is more to Peter’s realism. If, in accordance with the foregoing, we take an ‘extremely extreme realist’ to be someone who is willing to allow a one-to-one mapping of linguistic categories to ontological categories, then Peter will still appear to be at least a ‘really extreme realist’ in this sense. To be sure, his realism is certainly mitigated by his distinction between what one can talk about *secundum viam logice* and what there really is *secundum viam nature*. Nevertheless, the way he talks about substantive and adjective things, and especially about the signification of syncategorematic terms, is revealing. The things he is talking about may not be things of nature pure and simple, but things-as-conceived-and-signified.

⁸ Cf. also *Peter of Spain* 1992, 46-49 and 104-105.

But then, as far as Peter's semantics is concerned, there might be (almost) just as many such 'quasi-things' as there are different ways of signifying the things of nature.

This is quite clear not only in Peter's distinction between the adjective and substantive things referred to above (which after all reflects a genuine real distinction between substances and accidents), but especially in his treatment of the signification of syncategorematic terms and of propositions. As far as the latter are concerned, he does not hesitate to talk about what is signified by a proposition, and referred to by the corresponding sentential nominalization, as a thing, which may have its own accidents. For example, in the *Summulae* at one point he describes *Antichristum non fuisse*, i.e., 'that the Antichrist was not' as a thing that now has the accidental property of being true in the future, whence now it has the accidental property of being possible, and later, after the advent of the Antichrist, it will have the accidental property of being impossible, by the necessity of the past. So, his argument goes, even if the thing that is now possible (because it will be true) will be impossible; and so the thing that will be impossible is now possible, it does not follow that the impossible is possible, i.e., that the impossible can be true.⁹

As for syncategorematic terms, Peter both in the last tract of the *Summulae* and in the *Syncategoreumata* insists that although syncategorematic terms do not signify subjectible and predicable things, which are signified by categorematic terms, nevertheless, they do signify *certain modes of these things*. To be sure, he adds, these modes do not belong to these things as they are in themselves, but insofar as they are subjectible or predicable, which is why they need not stick with their things in syllogisms in different propositions. For example, consider

Every white man is running

Socrates is a white man

Socrates is running

In this syllogism, the disposition 'white' of the subject 'man' belongs to the thing in itself, so it has to be repeated in the other premise in order to get a valid inference. However, the further disposition 'every' need not be repeated (i.e., we do not have to assume 'Socrates is every white

⁹ Cf. Peter of Spain 1972, 195.

man' as the second premise) in order to obtain a valid inference. In Peter's view, this is because 'every' signifies a disposition that determines the subject insofar as it is the subject in relation to the predicate, for it signifies that the predicate applies to all supposita of the subject.¹⁰

Again, in the subtle discussion of exclusive particles, such as 'alone' and 'only', Peter raises the question whether these signify exclusion. However, exclusion also seems to be signified by the noun 'exclusion' and the verb 'exclude', which are clearly not exclusive particles, so what makes the difference? The important thing Peter notes is that this noun and this word *signify* exclusion, whereas the exclusive particles *exercise* it. So, in accordance with the doctrine of the *Summulae* noted earlier, these syncategorematic terms do not signify what the categorematic terms signify, i.e., they do not signify any particular or universal thing. However, in a broader sense they do signify something, namely, certain dispositions or modes of things as conceived by means of the complex expressions involving these syncategorematic terms. In particular, as Peter says:

... an exclusive word removes the connection a whole has with its part on account of its very meaning. Therefore it is said to signify a privation of the connection a whole has with a part. Now from this privation follows the exclusion of all others, just as a proper act follows from that by which it is carried out. Hence exclusion is brought about by an exclusive word not as conceived of, but as carried out.¹¹

So, these particles do signify something in the things conceived by the categorematic terms: in this case, a particular privation, namely, the privation of the association of the thing or things excepted with the rest of the things under the subject insofar as they fall under the subject, on account of which the rest are excluded, by means of an act of exclusion carried out, but not signified, by the exclusive particle.

To summarize, for Peter, even syncategorematic terms and the complex phrases they help to form, such as complex terms or propositions, have their distinct semantic values. To be sure, these semantic values are not to be identified with the mind-independent things making up the natural world; rather, they are to be regarded as the mind-dependent dispositions of these things

¹⁰ See Peter of Spain 1972, 212.

¹¹ Peter of Spain 1992, 106-109.

as-they-are-conceived. Viewed from this perspective, Peter's realism may appear to be *very* close to the theoretical position of 'extremely extreme realism', except, perhaps, somewhat *mitigated* by assigning an ontologically diminished status to the items signified by universal categorematic terms, by syncategorematic terms, and the complexes they make up.

Buridan's nominalism

In contrast to this picture, Buridan's nominalism would seem to be rather close to the other end of our theoretical scale. As is well-known, he allows individual entities only in three distinct ontological categories, namely, substance quantity, and quality. In his semantics, therefore, all linguistic items in semantically distinct syntactical categories are to be mapped onto these entities.

Thus, when he has to account for the semantic difference between singular and universal terms, Buridan at once appeals to the difference in the representative function of the corresponding concepts, which, in turn, he simply characterizes as the difference *in the ways* in which they represent individual things. Accordingly, when he considers the question 'whether the intellect understands the universal before the singular or vice versa', he clarifies the question in the following way:

.. since apart from our soul, that is to say, outside it, there is no universal horse distinct from a singular horse or singular horses, nor a universal stone apart from singular stones, and likewise for other things (as we suppose on the basis of *Metaphysics VII*), the proposed question must be properly worded: whether the intellect understands the same things or the same thing universally, that is, according to a common concept, before it understands singularly, that is, according to a singular concept, or vice versa.¹²

Thus, Peter's talk about signifying universal things is replaced by Buridan with talking about the representation of the universal concept to which a universal term is subordinated, and which, in

¹² Zupko 1989, 288, quoting from the translation given in his PhD dissertation (Cornell, 1989 – p. 64): Buridan, *Quaestiones de anima* 3, lb. 3, q. 8.

its turn, is universal because it represents *universally* the same singulars that are signified by singular terms *singularly*. Here we can clearly see Buridan's 'adverbialization' at work.

Again, for Buridan, and *contra* Peter of Spain, the difference between adjectives and substantives or even 'substantivated' adjectives is not to be found in the difference in the things they signify, but in *how* they signify the same things. For instance, the term 'albus' and the term 'albedo' both signify individual whitenesses only, but *differently*, because 'albus' signifies them as adjacent (i.e., pertaining) to a substance, whereas 'albedo' signifies them not as adjacent to a substance.

But the same can be observed in Buridan's treatment of negative or privative terms, where he insists that these do not signify negations or privations, indeed, they signify nothing other than what the corresponding positive terms signify. Thus, for instance, the term 'blind' signifies animals connoting their sight, just as the term 'sighted' does. However, since it connotes this sight *negatively*, in a propositional context 'blind' will obliquely refer to this sight as non-adjacent to the animal, and so it will *supposit* precisely for those animals that lack sight.

Likewise, when it comes to propositions, Buridan insists that these do not signify some *complexe significabilia* distinct from the things signified by their categorematic terms, but they signify the very same things, except in a *complex manner*. As Buridan remarks:

... [The proposition] 'God is God' externally signifies only God, for the word 'is', taken precisely as a copula, signifies nothing externally apart from the significations of the categorematic terms, given that it signifies only the complexive concept by which the intellect forms propositions from the terms 'God' and 'God'.

But now there is a difficult question: for it was said earlier that by every concept something is conceived. What then, is conceived by the complexive concept corresponding to the copula 'is', when I say 'God is God' or 'A man is a stone?'

I reply that ... since the intellect cannot form that complexive concept without the categorematic concepts that it combines, nothing is conceived by that concept alone. But we conceive the very same things in a complex manner by means of the categorematic concepts as those which were conceived in an incomplex manner by those categorematic terms *without* that complexive concept. Therefore, different things are not conceived by

the concepts corresponding to the various expressions ‘God is God’, ‘God is not God’, ‘Every God is God’, ‘No God is God’ and to the term ‘God’; rather, that thing is conceived in different ways, namely, in a complex or incomplex manner, and affirmatively or negatively. So, coming back to the solution of the sophism, I say that although the expression ‘God is God’ signifies more in the mind than the name ‘God’, nevertheless, it signifies nothing more outside [the mind], but entirely the same [thing], although in a different manner.¹³

There are two important points to note in this passage. First, what accounts for the adverbialization of semantic relations in semantically complex expressions is the explicit or implicit presence of syncategorematic terms, subordinated to syncategorematic concepts. Second, again, *contra* Peter, there is nothing ‘outside the mind’ conceived by these concepts, not even some mind-dependent *modes* of the things conceived by the categorematic terms. Syncategorematic concepts are nothing but the modes of conceiving and signifying themselves, *not representing* anything, but simply *exercising* the function of modifying the semantic relations of those concepts with which they are construed. Note here the difference from Peter, for whom the *exercise* of exclusion was the *result* of *signifying* a privation! As Buridan explicitly claims:

... the copulas ‘is’ and ‘is not’ signify different ways of combining mental terms in order to form mental propositions, and *these different ways [of combining] are in their turn complexive concepts* pertaining to the second operation of the intellect [...] And so also the words ‘and’, ‘or’, ‘if’, ‘therefore’ and the like designate complexive concepts that combine several propositions or terms at once in the mind, but signify nothing further outside the mind. These words are called purely syncategorematic, because they signify nothing outside the mind, except along with others, in the sense that the whole complex consisting of categorematic and syncategorematic words does signify the things conceived outside the mind, but this is on account of the categorematic words.¹⁴

¹³ *Sophismata*, c. 1, to the 3rd sophism (John Buridan 2004).

¹⁴ John Buridan 2001, § 4.2.3.

Conclusion: the conceptualisms of Peter of Spain and Buridan and some general methodological lessons

So, what is ‘the big difference’ between Peter’s and Buridan’s respective accounts? At first sight, it may indeed seem that it is primarily a big difference in the ontologies required by their respective semantics. Whereas Buridan’s semantics maps all distinct syntactical categories to three ontological categories of individuals, but in many different ways on account of the complexities of the mental language mediating between spoken language and reality, Peter’s semantics apparently posits different ontological categories for each semantically distinct syntactical category, accounting for their differences in terms of the ontological differences of the things to which they are related.

However, if we take a closer look at the ‘things’ in Peter’s ontology, we should realize that it would be quite unjustified to identify him as the sort of ‘extremely extreme realist’ described at the beginning of this paper. After all, even if Peter is willing to talk about what is represented by *syncategoremata* as being certain *modes of things*, nevertheless, these modes are *not* taken by him to be *things*, properly speaking, in the first place, and even the ‘things’ of which these are the modes, are only *things-as-conceived*. Therefore, these modes themselves, pertaining to these things-as-conceived, are rather *the ways* in which things-in-themselves are conceived, where, of course, we must not forget about Peter’s willingness to distinguish talking about things-as-conceived *secundum viam logicae* as opposed to talk about things-in-themselves, *secundum viam physicae*. Accordingly, as far as his semantics is concerned, Peter might as well have an ontology of things-in-themselves just as parsimonious as Buridan’s, as long as he is allowed keep talking about his things-as-conceived, *secundum viam logicae*.

To be sure, by this I do not mean to suggest that *as a matter of fact* there are no important differences between Peter’s and Buridan’s ontology of things-in-themselves *secundum viam physicae*; indeed, there certainly *are*. All I am saying is that it is not *that difference* that would make their semantics radically different. Rather, what makes the fundamental difference is Peter’s very strategy of inserting this intermediary layer of *things-as-conceived and their modes* into his account, or indeed, since he came later, Buridan’s efforts to do semantics *without* this inserted layer.

If, in conclusion, I may risk a bit of speculation about *this* difference, I would say the following. Peter's talk about things-as-conceived and their modes corresponding to syncategoremata is Peter's way of articulating an essentially *intensional*, or indeed *intentional*, logic, trying to characterize the semantic content of all our concepts that render our utterances meaningful in terms of their direct and immediate objects: whatever it is that we directly and immediately conceive by these concepts. But these direct *objects-of-our-thought* are not taken to be *objects simpliciter*: they rather just provide the representational content of our concepts, which variously determine the ways things-in-themselves are supposed to be if our concepts are to apply to them. So, Peter's things-as-conceived and their modes provide the objective (in the medieval sense of 'objective') information content of our acts of thought, specifying the conditions of veridicality of these acts of thought, expressed in our language. For instance, in the case of a privative term, expressing a privative concept, such as the concept of 'blind', this type of approach requires specifying first what it is that is immediately and directly conceived by this concept, which of course would be identified as a privation, a quasi-entity, the absence of sight, the presence of which, *secundum viam logicae*, of course, is conditioned on the missing of sight in an animal *secundum viam physicae*.

By contrast, Buridan's approach would represent an essentially *extensional* logic, which would simply abandon the idea that semantics needs to be done in terms of specifying the information content of our thoughts determining the conditions of their veridicality. Our categorematic concepts are directly mapped onto the things of nature, but variously, on account of the merely modifying, but non-representative function of syncategorematic concepts.

So far so good, if the foregoing is correct. But then, can Buridan really afford to do semantics without specifying the 'information content' of all our concepts? He certainly *can* account for the semantic differences between complex concepts in terms of their different compositional structure. And he can also distinguish extensionally between different simple concepts on account of the different extensions of their signification or their different connotations, if they are necessarily coextensive, as is the case with transcendental concepts (see the beautiful discussion of this in the *Sophismata*, where this is clearly Buridan's main concern). But what accounts for the different extensions of different simple absolute concepts? Since these extensions are potentially infinite, they cannot be specified by enumeration, and since they are not hodge-podge collections, but natural kinds, it is natural to think of them as different on

account of meeting some different *intensional criteria*. But those are precisely that Buridan cannot have, if he is to stick to his purely extensional, Ockhamist semantics, which, as I have argued elsewhere, leads to a fundamental conflict between his logical semantics and cognitive psychology.¹⁵ On the other hand, these intensional criteria are precisely the primary objects dealt with by Peter of Spain and his ilk, very much in accordance with their Aristotelian cognitive psychology, even if at the expense of *apparently*, but *not really*, endorsing a ‘weird’ ontology.

But however the case may be with the relative merits and demerits of Peter’s and Buridan’s approach, I think on the basis of the foregoing discussion we can quite safely draw the following methodological lessons for ourselves:

1. When a medieval (“realist”) logician talks about “universal things” we should not take this sort of talk at face value, as expressing a commitment to universal entities in the author’s “core ontology”, for the author may simply talk about universals *secundum viam logicae*.
2. In medieval logic, *pace* Quine, “ontological commitment”, is *not* a matter of “quantifying over”. For even medieval *nominalists* would quantify over mere *possibilia* without ever worrying about thereby “overpopulating” their ontology. In medieval logic, ontological commitment is rather the question of the true predicability of the notion of *real being*.
3. Accordingly, if various senses and/or modes of being are allowed, as in the ontologies of most medieval “realists”, then the issue of “ontological commitment” becomes far from unambiguous. For even an author with an “insanely” populous “universe of discourse” (as Peter of Spain) may have a very neat and tidy *universe* of real entities, which are the only *things* we are supposed to take seriously *secundum viam naturae*.
4. Finally, the metaphysically harmless burgeoning of quasi-entities in one’s “universe of discourse” may actually be just good semantic strategy for developing a fine-grained, distinctive, intensional semantics, unhindered by the somewhat “premature” ontological worries of the metaphysician.

¹⁵ Klima 2009, especially 99-103, 265-266.