

William of Ockham
Summa Totius Logicae
Part I, Chapter 12

(1) Because it was said in the preceding chapter that some names are *of* first intention and some *of* second intention, and [because] ignorance of the significations of words is for many [people] an occasion for error, therefore we must see in passing what a first intention is and what a second [intention is], and how they are distinguished.

(2) Now first you have to know that [there is] a certain [something] in the soul, apt to signify [something] else, [and] called an “intention of the soul”. Thus, as was said earlier,¹³⁴ in the [same] way that an inscription is a secondary sign with respect to utterances (because among all the signs instituted by convention utterances stand in the first rank), so [too] utterances are secondary signs of the [things] of which intentions of the soul are the primary signs. Aristotle said as much, that utterances are “the marks of the passions that are in the soul.”¹³⁵

(3) Now what exists in the soul and is a sign of a thing, [and is such that] a mental proposition is put together out of it in the [same] way that a spoken proposition is put together out of utterances, is sometimes called an “intention of the soul”, sometimes a “concept of the soul”, sometimes a “passion of the soul”, sometimes a “likeness of a thing”. In his commentary on the *De interpretatione*, Boethius calls it an “understanding”.¹³⁶ Thus, he says that a mental proposition is put together out of “understandings” — not, of course, out of the “understandings” that are really intellective souls, but rather out of the “understandings” that are certain signs in the soul that signify other [things] and [are such that] a mental proposition is put together out of them.

(4) Hence, whenever someone utters a spoken proposition, he first forms within [his mind] a mental proposition that belongs to no [spoken] language. [This is so] to the extent that many [people] often form propositions within [their minds] that nevertheless they do not know how to express, because of a defect of [their] language. The parts of such mental propositions are called “concepts”, “intentions”, “likenesses [of things]” and “understandings”.

(5) But what is it in the soul that *is* such a sign?

¹³⁴ See Ch. 3, above.

¹³⁵ Aristotle, *De interpretatione* 1, 16a3–4.

¹³⁶ Boethius, *In librum De interpretatione*, ed. 1a, I, PL 64, cols. 297f., and ed. 2a, PL 64, col. 407. Note that ‘understanding’ in this sense does not mean the *faculty* or *power* of understanding, but rather an *act* of understanding, or the result of such an act. See the immediately following lines.

(6) It must be said that on this point there are different opinions. Some [people] say that it is nothing but a certain [something] contrived¹³⁷ by the soul. Others [hold] that it is a certain quality subjectively existing in the soul [and] distinct from the act of understanding. [Still] others say that is the act of understanding. On the side of these last [people], there is the argument that “it is idle to bring about through several means what can be brought about through fewer”. Now all that can be preserved by maintaining [that the concept is] something distinct from the act of understanding can be preserved without [any] such distinct [thing], insofar as suppositing for [something] else and signifying [something] else can belong just as much to the act of understanding as [it can] to another sign. Therefore, one does not have to posit anything else besides the act of understanding.

(7) We will investigate these opinions below.¹³⁸ Therefore, let it suffice for now that an “intention” is something in the soul that is a sign naturally signifying something for which it can supposit or that can be part of a mental proposition.

(8) Now such a sign is of two kinds. One kind is a sign of some thing that is *not* such a sign, whether it signifies such a sign along with this or not. This is called a “first intention”. The intention of the soul that is predicable of all men is like this, and similarly the intention [that is] predicable of all whitenesses and [the one predicable of all] blacknesses, and so on.

(9) Nevertheless, you have to know that ‘first intention’ is taken in two senses. In the broad sense, every intentional sign existing in the soul that does not signify intentions or signs precisely is called a “first intention”, whether it is a “sign” taking ‘sign’ strictly for what signifies in such a way that it is apt to supposit in a proposition for its significate, or whether it is a “sign” taking ‘sign’ broadly in the sense in which we say syncategoremata signify. In this sense, mental verbs and mental syncategoremata and conjunctions and the like can be called “first intentions”. But, strictly, [it is] the mental name that is apt to supposit for its significate [that] is called a “first intention”.

(10) Now a “second intention” is one that is a sign of such first intentions. For example, such intentions as ‘genus’, ‘species’, and the like. For just as one intention common to all men is predicated of all men by saying ‘This man is a man’, ‘That man is a man’, and so on, so [too] one intention common to all intentions that signify and supposit for things is predicated of them by saying ‘This species is a species’, ‘That species is a

¹³⁷ ‘contrived’ = *fictum*. This is the famous “*fictum*”-theory of concepts.

¹³⁸ See Chs. 14–15 & 40.

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species', and so on. Likewise, by saying 'Stone is a genus', 'Animal is a genus', 'Color is a genus', and so on, one intention is predicated of intentions in the way in which in 'Man is a name', 'Ass is a name' 'Whiteness is a name', one name is predicated of different names.

(11) Therefore, just as names *of* second imposition signify by convention names *of* first imposition, so [too] a second intention naturally signifies a first [intention]. And just as a name *of* first imposition signifies other [things] besides names, so [too] a first intention signifies other things than intentions.

(12) It can also be said that 'second intention' can be taken strictly for an intention that signifies precisely first intentions, or broadly for an intention that signifies intentions and [also] signs instituted by convention, if there is any such [intention].

CAP. 12. QUID EST INTENTIO PRIMA ET QUID SECUNDA ET QUOMODO DISTINGUUNTUR AB INVICEM

Et quia dictum est in praecedenti capitulo quod quaedam sunt nomina primae intentionis et quaedam secundae intentionis, et ignorantia significationum vocabulorum multis est errandi occasio, ideo incidenter videndum est quid sit intentio prima et quid secunda, et quomodo distinguuntur.

Est autem primo sciendum quod intentio animae vocatur quiddam in anima, natum significare aliud. Unde, sicut dictum est prius, ad inodum quo scriptura est secundarium signum respectu vocum, quia inter omnia signa ad placitum instituta voces obtinent principatum, ita voces secundaria signa sunt illorum quorum intentiones animae sunt signa primaria. Et pro tanto dicit Aristoteles quod voces sunt "earum quae sunt in anima passionum notae". Illud autem existens in anima quod est signum rei, ex quo propositio mentalis componitur ad modum quo propositio vocalis componitur ex vocibus, aliquando vocatur intentio animae, aliquando conceptus animae, aliquando passio animae, aliquando similitudo rei, et Boetius in commento super Perihermenias vocat intellectum. Unde vult quod propositio mentalis

componitur ex intellectibus: non quidem ex intellectibus qui sunt realiter animae intellectivae, sed ex intellectibus qui sunt quaedam signa in anima significantia alia et ex quibus propositio mentalis componitur. Unde quaecumque aliquis profert propositionem vocalem, prius format interius unam propositionem mentalem, quae nullius idiomatis est, in tantum quod multi frequenter formant interius propositiones quas tamen propter defectum idiomatis exprimere nesciunt. Partes talium propositionum mentalium vocantur conceptus, intentiones, similitudines et intellectus.

Sed quid est illud in anima quod est tale signum?

Dicendum quod circa istum articulum diversae sunt opiniones.

Aliqui dicunt quod non est nisi quoddam fictum per animam.

Alii, quod est quaedam qualitas subiective existens in anima, distincta ab actu intelligendi. Alii dicunt quod est actus intelligendi. Et pro istis est ratio ista quia 'frustra fit per plura quod potest fieri per pauciora'. Omnia autem quae salvantur ponendo aliquid distinctum ab actu intelligendi possunt salvari sine tali distincto, eo quod supponere pro alio et significare aliud ita potest competere actui intelligendi sicut alii signo. Igitur praeter actum intelligendi non oportet aliquid aliud ponere.

De istis autem opinionibus inferius perscrutabitur, ideo pro

nunc sufficiat quod intentio est quiddam in anima, quod est signum naturaliter significans aliquid pro quo potest supponere vel quod potest esse pars propositionis mentalis.

Tale autem signum duplex est. Unum, quod est signum alicuius rei quae non est tale signum, sive significet tale signum simul cum hoc sive non, et illud vocatur intentio prima; qualis est illa intentio animae quae est praedicabilis de omnibus hominibus et similiter intentio praedicabilis de omnibus albedinibus et nigredinibus et sic de aliis.

Verumtamen sciendum est quod 'intentio prima' dupliciter accipitur: stricte et large. Large dicitur intentio prima omne signum intentionale existens in anima quod non significat intentiones vel signa praecise, sive sit signum stricte accipiendo 'signum' pro illo quod sic significat quod natum est supponere in propositione pro suo significato sive sit signum large accipiendo 'signum', illo modo quo dicimus syncategorema significare. Et isto modo verba mentalia et syncategoremata mentalia et coniunctiones et huiusmodi possunt dici intentiones primae. Stricte autem vocatur intentio prima nomen mentale, natum pro suo significato supponere.

Intentio autem secunda est illa quae est signum talium intentionum primarum, cuiusmodi sunt tales intentiones 'genus', 'species' et huiusmodi. Sicut enim de omnibus hominibus praedicatur una intentio

communis omnibus hominibus, sic dicendo iste homo est homo',
'ille homo est homo', et sic de singulis, ita de illis intentionibus quae
significant et supponunt pro rebus praedicatur una intentio communis
eis, sic dicendo 'haec species est species', 'illa species est species', et
sic de aliis. Similiter sic dicendo 'lapis est genus', 'animal est genus',
'color est genus', et sic de aliis, praedicatur una intentio de intentioni-
bus, ad modum quo in talibus 'homo est nomen', 'asinus est nomen',
'albedo est nomen' praedicatur unum nomen de diversis nominibus.

Et ideo sicut nomina secundae impositionis significant ad placitum no-
mina primae impositionis, ita secunda intentio naturaliter significat
primam. Et sicut nomen primae impositionis significat alia quam no-
mina, ita prima intentio significat alias res quam intentiones.

Potest etiam dici quod intentio secunda potest accipi stricte pro
intentione quae significat praecise primas intentiones, vel large pro inten-
tione quae significat intentiones et signa ad placitum instituta, si tamen
sit aliqua talis.