

# *Species, Concept, and Thing: Theories of Signification in the Second Half of the Thirteenth Century*

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Students of later medieval semantics are familiar with the controversy that developed at the end of the thirteenth century over the signification of names. The debate focused on the signification of common nouns such as ‘man’ and ‘animal’: Do they signify an extramental thing or a mental representation of an extramental thing?<sup>1</sup> Duns Scotus is commonly recognized as having played an important role in this debate.<sup>2</sup> In his *Ordinatio*, he alludes to a *magna altercatio* among his contemporaries concerning signification.<sup>3</sup> What

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1. Some authors at the end of the thirteenth century also discussed another question concerning what names signify, that is, whether they signify the composite of matter and form or only the form of the composite. This second debate will not be considered in this article.

2. See Costantino Marmo, “Ontology and Semantics in the Logic of Duns Scotus,” in Umberto Eco and Costantino Marmo, ed., *On Medieval Theory of Signs*, (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1989), pp. 161–63; and esp. Dominik Perler, “Duns Scotus on Signification,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 3 (1993): 97–120. On the topic in general, see Paul Vincent Spade, “The Semantics of Terms,” in N. Kretzmann, A. Kenny, J. Pinborg, eds., *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1982), pp. 188–90; Jan Pinborg, “Bezeichnung in der Logik des XIII. Jahrhunderts,” in Albert Zimmermann, ed., *Der Begriff der Repraesentatio im Mittelalter, Miscellanea Mediaevalia* 8 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1971): 238–81; Elizabeth J. Ashworth, “Signification and Modes of Signifying in Thirteenth-Century Logic: A Preface to Aquinas on Analogy,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 1 (1991): 43–53; Claude Panaccio, “From Mental Word to Mental Language,” *Philosophical Topics* 20 (1992): 125–47.

3. John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* 1.27.1–3 n.83, in *Commissio Scotistica*, ed. *Opera omnia* 6 (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis, 1963), p. 97.

is more, he gives, in his two commentaries on Aristotle's *Peri hermeneias*, a detailed and fair analysis of the two contrasting positions on this issue.<sup>4</sup>

At the center of the debate is a famous passage from the first chapter of Aristotle's *Peri hermeneias*, according to which spoken sounds are signs of affections of the soul, and affections of the soul are likenesses of things.<sup>5</sup> The medieval debate on signification can be regarded as a commentary on these few lines.

The standard reconstruction of the medieval debate on signification goes as follows. Until the end of the thirteenth century, the discussion over signification is dominated by the Aristotelian theory as interpreted by Boethius. This theory, which can be labeled as the traditional theory of signification, distinguishes between primary and secondary signification. Names primarily signify concepts in the mind. Since concepts are representations of extramental things, extramental things are secondarily signified by the names that primarily signify concepts.<sup>6</sup> Around the end of the thirteenth century, however, the traditional theory of signification is challenged by a new theory. According to this new theory, names primarily signify extramental things. By contrast, concepts are not what names primarily signify but, at best, a necessary condition for their signification. The new theory of signification provides an interpretation of Aristotle different from that of Boethius, but it obviously has some difficulties in explaining Aristotle's text in a convincing way. In fact, the new theory of signification seems to be a real departure from the mentalistic theory of signification based on Aristotle.

The foregoing reconstruction of the debate on signification is particularly attractive because it claims to be based on the treatment of signification Duns Scotus gives in his two commentaries on *Peri hermeneias*, which were probably composed in Paris in the 1290s. There Scotus introduces the two competing theories and the arguments on which they are based, though he does not choose between them. By contrast, it is thought that in his later *Lectura* and *Ordinatio* he makes up his mind in favor of the new doctrine of the primary signification of extramental things. Accordingly,

4. John Duns Scotus, *Super Peri hermeneias* 1.2, and *Super Peri hermeneias* 2.1, in *Opera omnia* 1 (Paris: L. Vivès, 1891), pp. 540–44, 582–85. Scotus's logical commentaries are usually thought to have been composed before his theological writings, in the last decade of the thirteenth century.

5. *De Int.* 16a3–4. For a modern interpretation of this passage, see Norman Kretzmann, "Aristotle on Spoken Sounds Significant by Convention," in J. Corcoran, ed., *Ancient Logic and its Modern Interpretations* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1974), pp. 3–21. See also John Magee, *Boethius on Signification and Mind* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989), pp. 7–49, where Kretzmann's view is questioned. An excellent synthetic presentation of Aristotle's semantics is given by David Charles, "Aristotle on Names and their Signification," in Stephen Everson, ed., *Language: Companions to Ancient Thought* 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1994), 37–73.

6. On the role played by Boethius's commentaries in shaping medieval semantics, see Magee, *Boethius on Signification and Mind*.

Scotus is usually viewed as a key figure in shaping a new semantic view increasingly independent of the mentalistic Boethian interpretation of Aristotle. In this respect, he is said to be close to innovators such as Roger Bacon and Ockham, who oppose the traditional theory still endorsed by Thomas Aquinas.<sup>7</sup>

It is my contention that this reconstruction of the medieval debate is not accurate in at least three respects. First, the positions that Scotus reports in his commentaries on *Peri hermeneias* cannot be described as clearly favoring concepts or things. The debate, as presented by Scotus, centers around the technical notion of an intelligible species and the role it plays in signification. What is at issue is not so much whether a name primarily signifies a concept or a thing, for both positions Scotus reports concede that what a name primarily signifies can be legitimately described as a *passio animae* or concept. Rather, what is under discussion is whether the concept primarily signified by a name is to be identified with an intelligible species or with a thing as understood. In this context, the role of Aquinas must be redefined. Far from being a defender of a traditional doctrine of signification, he is among the first proponents of the separation between intelligible species and concept. This is why Scotus presents Aquinas as a supporter of the theory of the primary signification of the concept identified with the thing as understood.

Second, the roots of the controversy over signification, as it is described by Scotus, go back some twenty years before Scotus is writing, and by the end of the thirteenth century this debate cannot be regarded as particularly new.

Third, the role played by Scotus in the debate on signification has been largely overestimated. What has often been taken as Scotus's own position, that is, that names primarily signify the essences of things, is in fact presented by Scotus not as his personal position, but as the opinion of others (who turn out to be Thomas Aquinas and his followers.) Undoubtedly, Scotus's accurate account of the controversy will be very influential, but he cannot be regarded as making a totally original contribution to the debate.<sup>8</sup>

7. A clear presentation of the standard reconstruction of the dispute over signification is given by Armand Maurer, "William of Ockham on Language and Reality," in J. P. Beckmann et al., eds., *Sprache und Erkenntnis im Mittelalter*, II, *Miscellanea Mediaevalia* 13 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1981), pp. 795–802. Virtually anyone who has written on Scotus and signification at the end of the thirteenth century seems to adopt the same interpretation of the debate.

8. On further developments of the question of what a word signifies and on Scotus's influence see Elisabeth J. Ashworth, "Jacobus Naveros (fl. ca. 1533) on the Question: 'Do Spoken Words Signify Concepts or Things?'," in L. M. de Rijk and H. A. G. Braakhuis, eds., *Logos and Pragma. Essays in the Philosophy of Language in Honour of Professor Gabriel Nuchelmans* (Nijmegen: Ingenium Publishers, 1987), pp. 189–214; "'Do Words Signify Ideas or Things?' The Scholastic Sources of Locke's Theory of Language," *The Journal of the History of Philosophy* 19 (1981): 299–326.

Rather, Scotus's contribution seems to consist in his offering a useful comparison and assessment of two already existing views.

In what follows, I first show how Scotus understands the question concerning signification. Second, I briefly introduce the notion of intelligible species. Third, I analyze Scotus's account of a first opinion on signification. This opinion, usually regarded as the Aristotelian doctrine in its Boethian interpretation, states that the primary signification of a name is an intelligible species present in the soul. I also try to identify some of the authors who maintain that position. Fourth, I analyze Scotus's two accounts of the second opinion, according to which the primary signification of a name is a thing in the extramental world. I also attempt to identify the authors Scotus is referring to in his exposition, paying particular attention to Aquinas's semantic views.<sup>9</sup>

The conclusions I draw are that Scotus himself cannot be regarded as one of the first supporters of the theory of the primary signification of the extramental thing, and that he cannot be regarded as an original figure in the controversy over the signification of words, since he is merely expounding positions that are already old when he refers to them. I hope that this analysis of Scotus's treatment of signification in his two commentaries on *Peri hermeneias* will provide a clearer and more accurate understanding of two of the most influential semantic views held at the end of the thirteenth century, that is, the view that names primarily signify intelligible species and the view that they primarily signify things.

## SCOTUS'S QUESTIONS ON SIGNIFICATION

Scotus composed two commentaries on *Peri hermeneias*, each containing a question devoted to the issue of the signification of names.<sup>10</sup> The question in the first commentary asks whether a name signifies an intelligible species or a thing (*utrum nomen significet rem vel speciem in anima*). After some arguments *pro* and *contra*, Scotus presents two alternative solutions to the question. The first solution maintains that names primarily signify intelligible species and secondarily signify extramental things represented through intelligible species.<sup>11</sup> The second solution maintains that names primarily signify extramental things.<sup>12</sup> Then, Scotus says that one can choose the solution one regards

9. In order to avoid confusion, I here call the doctrine of the primary signification of the intelligible species 'first opinion', and the doctrine of the primary signification of the extramental thing 'second opinion'.

10. See n.4

11. *Super Peri herm.* 1.2, nn.3–7, pp. 541–43.

12. *Super Peri herm.* 1.2, nn.8–10, pp. 543–44.

as more probable. He goes on to point out some disadvantages proper to each solution. He concludes that the first solution is more probable if Aristotle's and Boethius's texts are taken into account, whereas the second solution is more probable if the arguments favoring it are considered.<sup>13</sup>

The question in the second commentary asks whether names signify things or affections (*utrum nomen significet rem an passionem*). After some arguments *pro* and *contra*, Scotus presents two alternative solutions to the question. Both solutions maintain that what a name primarily signifies is an affection of the soul, following Aristotle's *Peri hermeneias*. However, each solution gives a different interpretation of what is meant by an 'affection of the soul'. The first solution states that a name primarily signifies a 'conception of the intellect', which is something to be distinguished both from the intelligible species and the particular thing existing extramentally. This 'conception of the intellect' must be identified with the thing as it is conceived by the intellect, namely the essence of the extramental thing.<sup>14</sup> The second solution to the question states that names primarily signify intelligible species and secondarily things.<sup>15</sup> Scotus then remarks that neither solution seems to be necessary, even though the second one is more in agreement with Aristotle's and Boethius's texts. He adds that it cannot be said that names signify things absolutely, without specifying that things are signified insofar as they are understood.<sup>16</sup>

The two questions in the two commentaries are very similar. First, both of them focus on the signification of names of first intention, like 'man' or 'animal', which are imposed on things that exist in the extramental world independently of the fact that we know them. That means that the case of names imposed on psychological or logical notions, such as 'intelligible species' or 'genus', is not the main concern, since such names are not intended to represent an extramental thing.<sup>17</sup> Second, both questions examine two positions concerning signification, one of which maintains that names primarily signify intelligible species. Third, in both questions, Scotus does not favor one solution over the other. There are, however also some differences which are worth noting.

A first, minor difference regards the order in which the opinions are reported. The question in the first commentary presents the theory of the primary signification of the intelligible species as the first opinion while the question in the second commentary presents the same theory as the second opinion. Obviously, this difference does not affect the content of the questions. It must be mentioned here only in order to avoid confusion.

13. *Super Peri herm.* 1.2, nn.10–11, p. 544.

14. *Super Peri herm.* 2.1, nn.4–6, p. 583.

15. *Super Peri herm.* 2.1 nn.7–13, pp. 583–85.

16. *Super Peri herm.* 2.1, n.14, p. 585.

17. *Super Peri herm.* 1.2 n.1, p. 540.

A second, more important difference concerns what each question actually asks. Whereas the question in the first commentary posits an alternative between intelligible species and things, the question in the second commentary posits an alternative between affections in the soul and things. These two formulations are not equivalent. The term '*passio*' is directly derived from the Boethian translation of Aristotle's *Peri hermeneias*, since Boethius translates Aristotle's 'affections of the soul' as '*passiones animae*'.<sup>18</sup> By contrast, nothing corresponding to the term 'intelligible species' is present in Aristotle's text. That term derives from a complex theory of perception and intellectual knowledge that was fully elaborated only around the middle of the thirteenth century.<sup>19</sup> Equating the Aristotelian *passio* with the intelligible species requires a justification, and Scotus does not take the equivalence for granted. As will become clear, it is possible to maintain without contradiction that a name signifies an affection and at the same time that the primary signification of a name is a thing and not an intelligible species. It is true that some authors, including Roger Bacon and Ockham, tend to identify notions such as intelligible species, intention, and concept.<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to assume that this is true for all authors writing in the thirteenth or fourteenth century. For example, Aquinas draws a clear distinction between species and concepts, at least in the writings of his maturity. Many other authors recognize this sort of distinction, and Scotus himself is fully aware of it.

However, this difference between the two questions should not be overestimated. For Scotus considers the two accounts as two formulations of the same problem. The question in the first commentary directly inquires whether names primarily signify intelligible species. The question in the second commentary concedes that names primarily signify affections in the soul or concepts, but further asks whether such concepts are to be identified with intelligible species. Thus, the major concern in both questions is to establish whether names primarily signify intelligible species.

A third difference between the two questions is more disturbing. Both questions give an account of the theory of the primary signification of the intelligible species, but the contrasting opinions seem to be different in each question. In the first commentary, Scotus reports the opinion accord-

18. Aristoteles Latinus II.1, *De Interpretatione* 16a3–4, translatio Boethii, ed. L. Minio-Paluello (Bruges-Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1965), p. 5.

19. See Leen Spruit, *Species intelligibilis. From Perception to Knowledge* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), pp. 1–27, 139–74. A standard exposition of Aquinas's doctrine can be found in Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas on Mind* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 31–57. A provocative reconsideration of the species doctrine is given by Robert Pasnau, *Theories of Cognition in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1997).

20. On the relationship between 'species' and 'intention' see K. H. Tachau, *Vision and Certitude in the Age of Ockham. Optics, Epistemology and the Foundations of Semantics 1250–1345* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), pp. 11–16.

ing to which names primarily signify things. In the second commentary, Scotus presents the opinion according to which names primarily signify conceptions of the intellect, to be distinguished both from intelligible species and from particular existing things.

This difference, however can be easily explained. Scotus explicitly identifies the concept of the intellect (of which he speaks in the second commentary) with the thing as understood (of which he speaks in the first commentary). As will become clear, Scotus actually considers the two opinions as variants of the same theory.

## INTELLIGIBLE SPECIES IN KNOWLEDGE AND SIGNIFICATION

So, when Scotus considers whether names signify intelligible species, he has in mind a technical doctrine. What is meant by 'intelligible species'? Scotus gives an explicit answer: A species is the intelligible similitude of an extramental thing which is in the soul as in its subject.<sup>21</sup> An intelligible species is a mental similitude of the thing in the extramental world, different from that thing but representing it in the mind. Scotus often calls the species a 'similitude', without any further qualification.<sup>22</sup>

The doctrine of the intelligible species has its roots in the reception of Aristotle's *De anima*, but was developed through various influences ranging from the Arabic commentators on Aristotle to the optical treatises of the so-called Perspectivists.<sup>23</sup> There seems to be no 'species theory' in Aristotle, or at least nothing like the species theory Scotus assumes. What Scotus has in mind is the fully elaborated doctrine of the intelligible species found in the writings of Albert the Great and especially Thomas Aquinas, who presents the mature version of this epistemological theory.<sup>24</sup>

In this brief article, it is impossible to analyze in detail the doctrine of the intelligible species. I will summarize this doctrine as follows: A material

21. *Super Peri herm.* 1.2, n.1, p. 540: "Dico autem speciem intelligibilem similitudinem intelligibilem quae est in intellectu ut in subiecto."

22. It must be stressed, however, that the intelligible species, even if called "a mental similitude or image," is generally regarded not as a pictorial image of the external thing. Instead, it is the product of a process of abstraction through which the external thing comes to be present to the intellect. See Pasnau, *Theories of Cognition*, pp. 105–21. I wish to thank Dominik Perler for bringing to my attention the misunderstanding that a naïve use of 'similitude' or 'image' may originate in a modern reader.

23. On Scotus's endorsement of the species doctrine, see Tachau, *From Vision to Certitude*, pp. 55–79; Spruit, *Species intelligibilis*; pp. 257–66; Dominik Perler, "Things in the Mind: Fourteenth-Century Controversies over *Intelligible Species*," *Vivarium* 34 (1996): 231–53.

24. Spruit, *Species intelligibilis*, pp. 156–74.



thing can be known both by our sensitive faculty and by our intellectual faculty; when the thing is perceived by our senses, it produces in our sensitive faculty an impression; this sensitive impression is subsequently received by the imagination, and gives birth to another impression or phantasm; from this phantasm the agent intellect abstracts an intelligible species, which is a sort of immaterial image of the object or, more properly, of its essence. It is this intelligible species abstracted by the agent intellect that actualizes the possible intellect, that is, that causes its actual understanding of something.

In the question belonging to the first commentary on *Peri hermeneias*, Scotus reports an argument according to which the species is what is primarily signified because it is what is primarily understood.<sup>25</sup> However, this is the only case in which Scotus considers the intelligible species as the primary object of knowledge. In all other cases, both positions on signification presented by Scotus agree that the intelligible species plays a causal role in knowledge, but that the species is not the primary object of knowledge. The intelligible species plays a causal role in knowledge since it is that by which the intellect understands the extramental thing, or, more precisely, the essence of the extramental thing. However, the intelligible species is not the object of the ordinary knowledge directed towards extramental things. Consequently, the intelligible species is not what is primarily understood.<sup>26</sup>

Since the intelligible species plays only a causal role in knowledge, as that by which the extramental thing is known to the intellect, neither position analyzed by Scotus falls into a form of representationalism. In both positions, the intellect understands extramental things directly or immediately because there is nothing the intellect understands before understanding them. The species is a means by which the intellect can get access to the thing, but it is not what is primarily understood. Admittedly, the intelligible species can also be understood; however, the intelligible species is not understood by the same act of knowledge by which the extramental thing is understood. Instead, the intelligible species is understood by a subsequent act of knowledge. By that subsequent act, the intellect reflects on its own first act and focuses not on the extramental thing, but on the means by which the extramental thing is understood. In this way the intelligible species can be understood reflexively (*per reflexionem*). This knowledge of intelligible species, however, is subsequent to the ordinary knowledge directed towards extramental things, where species play a merely causal role.<sup>27</sup>

25. *Super Peri herm.* 1.2, n.1, pp. 540–41.

26. *Super Peri herm.* 1.2, nn.7 and 10, p. 543; 2.1, n.6, p. 583.

27. See *Super Peri herm.* 1.2, n.7, p. 543: “dicitur quod species intelligitur, licet non primo, sed per reflexionem (*ed: reflectionem*)”; n.10, p. 543: “dico quod res intelligitur primo, et non species, nisi per reflexione<m>.”



This conception of the intelligible species is the one Aquinas elaborates in the works of his maturity, from the *Summa contra gentiles* on. A clear and concise exposition of this position is found in *ST* 1.85.2, where the intelligible species is described as that by virtue of which the intellect understands something, as opposed to that which the intellect understands.<sup>28</sup> Aquinas also concedes that the intelligible species can become an object of knowledge. This happens when the intellect, by reflecting on itself, understands that it understands and understands the intelligible species by virtue of which it understands the extramental things. By this reflexive knowledge, the intelligible species is regarded as an object of knowledge in itself, but as a secondary one, if compared to the extramental thing.<sup>29</sup>

Up to this point, the two positions examined by Scotus agree. The controversy starts when we move from considering the role the intelligible species plays in knowledge to considering the role it plays in signification.

According to the first position Scotus presents, names primarily signify intelligible species. Extramental things, which are primarily understood, are only secondarily signified by a name.<sup>30</sup> The secondary signification of things takes place by the same act of signification through which intelligible species are signified.<sup>31</sup> So, while extramental things are understood primarily (immediately) by the intellect, they are signified secondarily (mediately.)

According to the second position Scotus presents, the thing is both what the intellect primarily understands and what a name primarily signifies. By the act of signifying an extramental thing, the intelligible species, considered as that by virtue of which something is understood, is not what is signified, either primarily or secondarily. Admittedly, an intelligible species can also be signified by a name. However, this happens when the species is considered not as that by virtue of which something is understood, but as something understood in its own right by an act of reflexive knowledge. The act of signification by which the species is signified as something in itself is different from and subsequent to the act by which

28. *ST* 1.85.2: "Et ideo dicendum est quod species intelligibilis se habet ad intellectum ut quo intelligit intellectus."

29. *ST* 1.85.2: "Sed quia intellectus supra seipsum reflectitur, secundum eandem reflexionem intelligit et suum intelligere, et speciem qua intelligit. Et sic species intellectiva secundario est id quod intelligitur. Sed id quod intelligitur primo, est res cuius species intelligibilis est similitudo." See Pasnau, *Theories of Cognition*, pp. 204–5.

30. Scotus refers to the signification of the species by the following formulas: *primo significare*, *immediate significare*, *primum significatum*, *magis significare*. On the other hand, the thing is said to be signified *posterius*, *mediate*, *non immediate*, and is said to be the *ultimum significatum*.

31. *Super Peri herm.* 1.2, n.3, p. 542.

the extramental thing is signified. Consequently, if a name signifies both a thing and an intelligible species, it is equivocal to the thing and to the intelligible species.<sup>32</sup>

## THE INTELLIGIBLE SPECIES AS THE PRIMARY SIGNIFICATION OF NAMES

Scotus remarks that the opinion according to which names primarily signify intelligible species seems to be supported by the most straightforward reading of the first chapter of Aristotle's *Peri hermeneias*. There Aristotle says that words signify the affections of the soul and equates these affections of the soul with the similitudes of the extramental things. Because Latin authors typically refer to the intelligible species as a 'similitude', Scotus thinks it natural to conclude that the intelligible species is what Aristotle indicates as what a name primarily signifies. The extramental thing is secondarily signified through the intelligible species, which is a representation of the mind-independent thing.

Among the arguments Scotus reports in favor of this position, one seems to be particularly interesting. This argument consists of two parts and is based on a parallelism between intellectual knowledge and signification. The first part of the argument runs as follows: What is understood intellectually is understood by virtue of an intelligible species; but signification follows upon intellectual knowledge; therefore, a name signifies the intelligible species more than it signifies the thing understood by virtue of it. The second part of the argument aims at identifying 'that by virtue of which' with 'that which', stating that that by virtue of which something is in a certain state is that which is more in that state. Duns Scotus provides no example of this statement, but we could think of cases such as heat: *a* gets hot by virtue of *b* if *b* is hotter than *a*. If we accept this premise, we can go on to assume, from the first part of the argument, that the intelligible species is that by virtue of which something is signified, and then conclude that the intelligible species is that which is signified more than the thing understood by virtue of it.<sup>33</sup>

This doctrine is far less naïve than it may first appear. In fact, Scotus is aware of a basic objection that can be moved against an unsophisticated version of it. If somebody states that a name signifies a species in the soul, it can easily be objected that words are normally used in statements to say

32. *Super Peri herm.* 2.1, n.6, p. 583.

33. *Super Peri herm.* 1.2, n.1, p. 541: "Item, nihil intelligitur nisi per species; ergo nihil significatur per aliquam vocem nisi per species; ergo species magis significatur, quia omne propter quod, et illud magis."

something about the world and not about our mental states; consequently, the constituents of statements must signify extramental things and not our affections.<sup>34</sup>

The doctrine reported by Scotus avoids this objection because it distinguishes two ways in which an intelligible species can be considered: an intelligible species can be viewed first as a thing and an accident inherent in the mind, and second as a sign of a thing outside the mind:

To the question it is responded that the intelligible species is immediately signified by a word, but it [that is, the intelligible species] is considered in two ways: either insofar as it is something that is an accident in itself, i.e. something that informs the soul; or insofar as it represents a thing. The species is not signified [by a word] in the first way, for the reasons moved against [this position], but is signified [by a word] in the second way. For, since every sign insofar as it is sign is a sign of what is signified by it, it follows that a word signifying a similitude insofar as it is a sign of a thing signifies [also] the thing itself, but in a mediate way. For immediately it signifies what is a sign of a thing insofar as it is a sign.<sup>35</sup>

In the first instance, the ontological status of a species is taken into account, whereas its role in intellectual knowledge is disregarded. So considered, an intelligible species is a thing in itself, a particular quality inherent in the mind. As such, it can be understood, but not as the first object of our knowledge. The first act of knowledge is naturally directed towards the extramental thing, not towards the intelligible species. The species is only that by virtue of which the extramental thing is understood; it is not itself an object of knowledge. An intelligible species can be an object of knowledge, and thereby be understood as an accident of the mind, only by an act of reflection on our first act of knowledge. The supporters of this doctrine maintain that only when we become aware that we understand something and only when we turn our attention to how we have come to know the extramental thing can we know the intelligible species as a proper object. So considered, the intelligible species is not that by virtue of which something is understood, but itself a thing understood. After the intelligible

34. *Super Peri herm.* 2.1, n.2, p. 582: "Item, illud significatur per nomen de quo intendit enuntians aliquid significare; sed cum dicit quis 'homo currit', intendit primo enuntiare currere non de intentione, sed de re."

35. *Super Peri herm.* 1.2, n.3, p. 541: "Ad quaestionem dicitur quod species intelligibilis immediate significatur per vocem, sed illa dupliciter consideratur: aut in quantum est quid in se, accidens scilicet informans animam; aut in quantum repraesentat rem. Primo modo non significatur per vocem propter rationes ad oppositum, sed secundo modo. Cum enim omne signum in quantum signum sit signum signati, sequitur quod vox significans similitudinem in quantum signum rei significat ipsam rem, sed mediate, quia scilicet immediate significat id quod est signum rei in quantum est signum." (Translation mine.)

species is understood as something in itself, it can also be named. According to the supporters of this doctrine, we can even decide to use the same name to signify the species and the extramental thing we know by virtue of the species. For example, the name 'dog' can be used to signify both the animal in the extramental world and the mental species by virtue of which we know that animal. However, the name 'dog' is merely equivocal to these two significations, since a dog and its mental species, each of them considered as a thing in itself, do not have anything in common—for the first is an extramental substance while the second is a quality inhering in the mind.

In the second instance, an intelligible species is considered as a mental sign for an extramental thing, that is, not insofar as it is something in itself, but insofar as it represents something else. It is in this way that the supporters of the theory of the signification of the species say that the primary signification of a word is an intelligible species: a word signifies an intelligible species because what is understood is understood by virtue of an intelligible species present in our intellect. Insofar as this species is considered as a sign of the extramental thing, the same name can signify both the extramental thing and the intelligible species without being equivocal, for the species and the extramental thing are not two unconnected entities, but the first is a sign of the second. Now, according to Scotus, the same name can signify both a sign and the thing of which the sign is a sign: it signifies the sign primarily and the thing secondarily.<sup>36</sup> So considered, the species is what is primarily signified by a word, while the extramental thing is what is secondarily signified, as the thing is signified by a word only through the mediation of the species which is a sign of the thing. The supporters of this position maintain that speaking of primary and secondary signification, as Boethius does, can make sense only if we consider the species as a sign, not as a thing in itself. When regarded as a sign, the species is not an opaque entity that impedes a direct knowledge and signification of the real things; instead, it is that by virtue of which the thing is understood and signified.

Such a twofold consideration of the species, as an accident or as a sign, allows Scotus to reply to many objections moved against the theory of the signification of the species. His general strategy consists in stating that the opponents of this theory fail to appreciate that the species considered as what is signified by a name must be regarded as a sign of an extramental thing, not as an accident of the mind.

I will consider three of the main objections raised by Scotus against the theory of the primary signification of the species. Furthermore, I will expound how Scotus answers these objections on the basis of the twofold consideration of the species.

According to a first objection, if names signify not extramental things but intelligible species, then they will signify accidents, as intelligible species

36. *Super Peri herm.* 1.2, n.3, p. 542.

are qualities of the mind.<sup>37</sup> To this it can be easily responded that there is no difficulty in the fact that names signify mental qualities, as long as these qualities are considered not in themselves, but as signs of extramental things.<sup>38</sup>

According to a second objection, if the primary signification of a name is a species, then every affirmative proposition in which something is predicated of something else will be false. For the species of the thing that is predicated and the species of the thing that acts as a subject are two different species, since the subject and the predicate are known by two different acts of knowledge. Now, what a predication states is that what is signified by the subject-term is identical with what is signified by the predicate-term. Therefore, if what is signified by a name is an intelligible species, then when we attribute a predicate to a subject we say that two different intelligible species (that is, the species signified by the subject-term and the species signified by the predicate-term) are identical with one another. However, this is simply false. For example, if we say 'man is an animal', we must admit that the intelligible species of man is different from the intelligible species of animal; but if the significations of 'man' and 'animal' are their respective intelligible species, then the statement 'man is an animal' amounts to saying that the intelligible species of man is identical with the intelligible species of animal, which is false.<sup>39</sup>

To this objection, the supporter of the theory of the primary signification of the species can reply that, when we talk about the truth and falsity of statements, we must take into account neither statements in themselves nor their constituents in themselves; what we must take into account is the relationship between statements and extramental things. This relationship is a relationship of correspondence or non-correspondence, depending on whether the statements are true or false. Consequently, the species signified by the terms constituting a statement must be considered not as qualities present in the mind, but as signs of extramental things. For example, when we say 'man is an animal' we are not saying that the two species, considered as mental qualities, are identical. We are saying that what the species of man is a sign of and what the species of animal is a sign of are identical.<sup>40</sup>

37. *Super Peri herm.* 1.2, n.2, p. 541: "Quod autem species non significetur, patet. Tum, quia tunc omne nomen significaret accidens, quia illa species est in anima ut in subiecto, sicut species visibilis in oculo."

38. *Super Peri herm.* 1.2, n.4, p. 542: "Ad primam respondetur quod non est inconveniens omne nomen significare accidens, sed immediate [vel in mente], non in quantum est quid in se, sed in quantum est signum rei."

39. *Super Peri herm.* 1.2, n.2, p. 541: "Tum, quia omnis propositio affirmativa esset falsa in qua subiectum et praedicatum cognoscuntur ab intellectu per diversas species, ut illa 'homo est animal', cum alia sit species hominis per quam intelligitur, et alia animalis."

40. *Super Peri herm.* 1.2, n.4, p. 542: "Ad secundam probationem, intelligendum quod veritas et falsitas non sunt in signo nisi per signatum; veritas enim signi est conformitas eius cum signato, et falsitas difformitas. Compositio ergo specierum ad

Still, it may be objected that this response is inadequate. It is true that the things of which these species are signs are identical, but this does not follow from saying that the primary signification of a word is a species. What the theory of the primary signification of the species implies is that the species of man and the species of animal, considered as signs, are identical. But this is still false, since what is identical is what the two species are signs of, not the signs themselves.<sup>41</sup>

Scotus admits that there is a real difficulty here, but he thinks that a proper understanding of the species considered as a sign can help us solve this difficulty. To show that this is so, he appeals to a parallel case. When we write 'man is an animal', we do not mean that the written word 'man' is identical to the written word 'animal'; instead, we consider these written words as signs of extramental things, a man and an animal, and we mean that these extramental things are identical. The stakes here are the truth and falsity of statements; now, truth and falsity, as Scotus understands these notions, imply a reference to the extramental world. Consequently, what is to be considered is not the species in itself nor the species as a sign, but that of which the species is a sign.<sup>42</sup>

A third objection moved against the theory of the signification of the species states that if the species is the primary signification of a name, then any existential proposition will be true, even when it concerns entities that exist no more, because what is stated is that what the subject-term signifies exists; but what the subject-term signifies is an intelligible species, which exists as a mental entity independently of the existence or non-existence of extramental things.<sup>43</sup>

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invicem ut illae sunt signa rerum non est iudicanda vera vel falsa nisi a signatis, id est a rebus. Omnis ergo veritas cuiuscumque propositionis referenda est ad res, quia illae sunt ultimo significatae et non sunt signa aliquorum aliorum."

41. *Super Peri herm.* 1.2, n.5, p. 542: "Contra, haec species in quantum similitudo rei non est illa species in quantum est similitudo rei, et tamen notantur esse eadem per hoc verbum 'est', per textum. Igitur per omnem affirmativam notantur primo esse eadem quae non sunt eadem, et omnis propositio, quoad primam compositionem, dicitur vera vel falsa esse, cum illa sit simpliciter compositio. Et non est vera, quia non est ita sicut illa compositio significat. Ergo est falsa."

42. *Super Peri herm.* 1.2, n.6, pp. 542–43: "Quamvis haec ratio sit difficilis ad solvendum, non tamen concludit necessarium, quia in aliis ubi est eadem forma arguendi non est difficile, quia in hac oratione scripta 'homo est animal' primo uniuntur voces, quia illae primo significantur, sed non propter hoc est illa oratio scripta falsa. Videtur ergo dicendum ad istud quod quantumcumque per idem multa significantur quorum unum significatur in quantum est signum alterius, si illud componatur in oratione cum alio non est compositio signorum sed signatorum ultimorum, quae non sunt signa. Et per orationem prolatam non significatur compositio specierum, sed rerum, sicut nec per enuntiationem scriptam significatur compositio vocum, sed rerum."

43. *Super Peri herm.* 1.2, n.2, p. 541: "Tum, quia omnis propositio esset vera in qua praedicatur 'esse' secundum adiacens, ut haec 'Socrates est' vel 'Antichristus est', quia species cuiuscumque subiecti de qua enunciamus 'esse' est."

Scotus's response to this objection is similar to his response to the second objection, since both objections fail to appreciate the consequences the distinction between the species considered as a quality and the species considered as a sign has for the theory of truth. In an existential statement, what is being affirmed is not that the species considered as a mental quality exists, but that what the species is a sign of exists in the extramental world. An existential statement understood in this way depends for its truth or falsity on its correspondence with the extramental world.<sup>44</sup>

## THE ADVOCATES OF THE PRIMARY SIGNIFICATION OF SPECIES

Who are the advocates of the theory of the primary signification of the intelligible species, the thesis and arguments of which Duns Scotus so carefully expounds? When Scotus composes his commentaries on *Peri hermeneias*, this position had already been in circulation for several years. Notoriously, it is this position that Roger Bacon violently opposes, both in his *De signis* of 1267 and in his *Compendium theologiae* of 1292.<sup>45</sup> We find this position assumed and briefly referred to by several authors as uncontroversial: Lambert of Auxerre, whose *Summa* dates from 1250–1255, for example, openly states that a word is a sign of an *intellectus*, which is a sign of a thing. What is crucial, Lambert explicitly identifies the *intellectus* with the species and the similitude in the soul.<sup>46</sup> Robert Kilwardby, in his com-

44. Scotus does not give an explicit answer to the third objection here reported, but his argument can be reconstructed from the reference he makes to the answer to the second objection, see *Super Peri herm.* 1.2, n.4, p. 542.

45. K. M. Fredborg, Lauge Nielsen, and Jan Pinborg, "An Unedited Part of Roger Bacon's *Opus maius: De signis*," *Traditio* 34 (1978): 132–35; Roger Bacon, *Compendium of the Study of Theology*, ed. and trans. Thomas S. Maloney (Leiden, New York, København, and Köln: E. J. Brill, 1988), pp. 68–73.

46. Lambert of Auxerre, *Logica*, ed. Franco Alessio (Florence: La Nuova Italia Editrice, 1971), pp. 205–6. For the date of this work see Lambert M. de Rijk, "A Note on the Date of Lambert of Auxerre's *Summulae*," *Vivarium* 7 (1969): 161. Some doubts have been raised on the identity of the author of the *Summa Lamberti*. Alain de Libera maintains that it is the work of Lambert of Lagny, a clerk of the Count of Champagne, and that this Lambert of Lagny may be the same person who becomes later on known as Lambert of Auxerre. See Alain de Libera, "Le traité *De appellations* de Lambert de Lagny (Lambert d'Auxerre)," *AHDLMA* 48 (1981): 230–31, 235. Incidentally, Gauthier's remark on de Libera's opinion is to be corrected. See René-Antoin Gauthier, *Introduction*, in Sancti Thomae de Aquino *Expositio libri Peryermenias*, editio altera retractata, in *Opera omnia* I\*.1 (Rome: Commissio Leonina; Paris: J. Vrin, 1989): 53\*.



mentaries on the *Ars Vetus* (ca. 1237–1245), is already aware of and possibly influenced by this position.<sup>47</sup>

A brief but complete presentation of this position can be found in Albert the Great's commentary on *Peri hermeneias*, written sometime between 1257 and 1264–1267.<sup>48</sup> According to Albert, an extramental thing acts on the soul and leaves an impression or species on it; this impression or species is what the word expresses.<sup>49</sup>

In the same period, Peter of Ireland maintains the same opinion in his commentary on *Peri hermeneias*.<sup>50</sup> This is probably also Thomas Aquinas's opinion in his commentary on the *Sentences*, even if he does not seem to take an explicit stance on this problem until later.<sup>51</sup> Actually, the theory of the primary signification of the species seems to be the dominant semantic theory around the middle of the thirteenth century, before Bacon's attacks and especially before Aquinas himself elaborates his doctrine of the *verbum mentis*, giving impulse to a renewed consideration of the nature of the concept.<sup>52</sup> Before the 1260s, though, Aquinas, like so many of his

47. See Osmund Lewry, "Robert Kilwardby on Meaning: A Parisian Course on the *Logica Vetus*," in J. P. Beckmann et al., eds., *Sprache und Erkenntnis im Mittelalter, Miscellanea Mediaevalia* 13.1 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1981), p. 381. On the supporters of this opinion, see also Sten Ebbesen, "Roger Bacon and the Fool of His Time," *CIMAGL* 3 (1970): 40–44; K. M. Fredborg, "Roger Bacon on *impositio vocis al significandum*," in *English Logic and Semantics. From the End of the Twelfth Century to the Time of Ockham and Burleigh* (Nijmegen: Ingenium Publishers, 1981), pp. 175, 381–82.

48. On the date of Albert's commentaries on the logic, see Gauthier, *Introduction*, in Sancti Thomae de Aquino *Expositio libri Peryermenias*, p. 69\*.

49. Albert the Great, *Super Peri herm.* 1.2, in *Opera omnia* 1, ed. A. Borgnet (Paris: L. Vivès, 1890), p. 380: "Et sic ea quae sunt in voce, a tali intellectu ad significandum constituta, sunt notae passionum earum quae a rebus conceptae sunt in anima: res autem speciem suam generat in anima, et intellectus specie illa informatus instituit vocem: unde passio animae species est rei, et vox significans ad institutionem intellectus sic formati dicit notam passionis quae est in anima."

50. Peter of Ireland, *Expositio et quaestiones in librum Aristotelis Peryermenias seu de Interpretatione*, ed. M. Dunne (Louvain-la-Neuve: Éditions de l'Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, 1996), pp. 15–16. Peter of Ireland's commentary on *Peri hermeneias* is dated by his editor between 1259 and 1265.

51. Aquinas's commentary on the *Sentences* is the result of his Parisian teaching in 1252–1254, and was not yet completed in 1256; see Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Initiation à saint Thomas d'Aquin. Sa personne et son oeuvre* (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires, 1993), pp. 58–69, 485.

52. The evolution of Aquinas's notion of *verbum mentis* is a well established but often neglected fact. See H. Paissac, *Théologie du Verbe. Saint Augustin et Saint Thomas* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1951), pp. 117–98; Jacques Chênevert, "Le verbum dans le Commentaire sur les *Sentences* de Saint Thomas d'Aquin," *Sciences ecclésiastiques* 13 (1961): 191–233, 359–90; René-Antoine Gauthier, *Saint Thomas d'Aquin. Somme contre les gentils. Introduction* (s.l.: Editions universitaires, 1993), pp. 105–7.

contemporaries, seems to identify concepts, intentions, and intelligible species.<sup>53</sup> This identification paves the way to an adoption of the doctrine of the primary signification of the species.

Aquinas's commitment to the doctrine of the signification of the species is apparent in his commentary on the *Sentences*, where he distinguishes three kinds of names according to their signification. First, there are names signifying concepts that are likenesses of extramental things, such as the names 'man' and 'animal'. Second, there are names that are dependent on our mode of understanding and have only a remote foundation in the extramental world, such as the names 'species' and 'genus'. Finally, there are names signifying things that have not even a remote correspondence to the extramental world, such as the name 'chimera'. Aquinas most likely means to identify the concepts or similitudes signified by the first kind of names with intelligible species.<sup>54</sup>

Nevertheless, it should be noted that such a contention does not prevent Aquinas from maintaining that a name such as 'man' or 'stone' also signifies something that is outside the soul according to the totality of its being.<sup>55</sup> This is said to differentiate names like 'man' from the two other classes of names, that is, names such as 'chimera', which do not have any correspondence to the extramental world, and names such as 'universal', which signify something in the extramental world, but under the peculiar way in which our mind knows it. Presumably, Aquinas can maintain that what a name of first intention signifies is both a similitude in the soul and

53. A thorough analysis of Aquinas's doctrine of concept or *verbum mentis* in his first writings is given by Chênevert, "Le *verbum*," pp. 191–233, 359–90. For a study of Aquinas's mature doctrine of the *verbum mentis* see William W. Meissner, "Some Aspects of the *Verbum* in the Texts of St. Thomas," *The Modern Schoolman* 36 (1958): 1–30; Panaccio, "From Mental Word," pp. 126–29; Pasnau, *Theories of Cognition*, pp. 256–71 (with the caution that Pasnau's account, otherwise excellent, ignores the evolution of Aquinas's theory of concept.)

54. Thomas Aquinas, *Sent.* 1.2.1.3, ed. Pierre Mandonnet (Paris: Lethielleux, 1929), p. 67: "Aliquando enim hoc quod intellectus concipit, est similitudo rei existentis extra animam, sicut hoc quod concipitur de hoc nomine 'homo' . . . Aliquando autem hoc quod significat nomen non est similitudo rei existentis extra animam, sed est aliquid quod consequitur ex modo intelligendi rem quae est extra animam; et huiusmodi sunt intentiones quas intellectus noster adinvenit . . . Aliquando vero id quod significatur per nomen, non habet fundamentum in re, neque proximum neque remotum, sicut conceptio chimaerae."

55. Thomas Aquinas, *Sent.* 1.19.5.1, p. 486: "Respondeo dicendum, quod eorum quae significantur nominibus, invenitur triplex diversitas; quaedam enim sunt quae secundum esse totum completum sunt extra animam; et huiusmodi sunt entia completa, sicut homo et lapis. Quaedam autem sunt quae nihil habent fundamentum in re extra animam, sicut somnia et imaginatio chimaerae. Quaedam autem sunt quae habent fundamentum in re extra animam, sed complementum rationis eorum quantum ad id quod est formale, est per operationem animae, ut patet in universali."

something existing in the extramental world because he adopts the widespread notion of primary and secondary signification familiar to Latin authors from Boethius's commentaries.<sup>56</sup>

Presumably, Duns Scotus is familiar with the version of the semantic theory of the signification of the species proposed by authors such as Albert and Aquinas. In fact, in his commentary on the *Sentences* Aquinas several times states that a species or mental similitude can be considered in two ways. First, a species can be considered insofar as it is a thing existing in the intellect. Second, it can be considered insofar as it is a similitude of a thing in the extramental world. When considered in the second way, the species is that by virtue of which the intellect understands the extramental thing.<sup>57</sup> It is to such a distinction that Scotus refers when he alludes to a distinction between the species as a quality of the mind and the species as a similitude of an extramental thing.

Moreover, Albert stresses the twofold character of the intelligible species. A species, he says, is in the soul in two ways: either as an accident and affection of the soul in which it is or as an intention of the extramental thing. Only in the second way is a species common to all the knowers.

Curiously, Albert quotes Aristotle's statement that words are signs of the affections of the soul as evidence of the first way of being of a species. This is to say, as existing in the soul as an accident, and not, as we would expect, as an example of the species as a sign of an extramental thing.<sup>58</sup>

Similarly, we must also notice that Aquinas himself is not completely consistent in his use of the distinction between the two considerations of a species. Sometimes he says that a species is universal insofar as it is something in the soul and not insofar as it is a similitude of an extramental thing.<sup>59</sup> However, he states at least once that a species is a singular thing insofar as it is something existing in the mind, whereas it is universal when it is considered insofar as it is a similitude of an extramental thing.<sup>60</sup> These

56. Boethius, *In librum Aristotelis ΠΕΡΙ ΕΡΜΗΝΕΙΑΣ* Secunda editio, ed. C. Meier (Leipzig: Teubner, 1880), p. 33.

57. Thomas Aquinas, *Sent.* 1.27.2.3, p. 663: "in speciem vel in imaginem contingit fieri conversionem dupliciter: vel secundum quod est species talis rei, et tunc est eadem conversio in rem et speciem rei; vel in speciem secundum quod est res quaedam; et sic non oportet quod eadem conversione convertatur quis per intellectum in speciem rei et in rem; sicut quando aliquis considerat imaginem in quantum est corpus lapideum, et in quantum est similitudo Socratis et Platonis." See also *Sent.* 2.12.1.3, *ad* 5, ed. Pierre Mandonnet (Paris: Lethielleux, 1929), p. 311. See Spruit, *Species intelligibilis*, pp. 169, 192; Pasnau, *Theories of Cognition*, pp. 206–8.

58. Albert the Great, *Sent.* 1.37.27, in *Opera omnia* 26, ed. S. C. A. Borgnet (Paris: L. Vivès, 1893), p. 273: "Est enim considerare speciem in anima duobus modis, scilicet in comparatione ad animam in qua est: et sic est accidens et passio existens in anima, secundum quod dicit Philosophus, quod voces sunt notae passionum quae sunt in anima. Est etiam considerare eam in quantum est intentio rei: et sic cum una sit res, est intentio una apud omnes."

59. Thomas Aquinas, *Sent.* 1.36.1.3, p. 837; *Sent.* 2.12.1.3, *ad* 5, p. 311.

60. Thomas Aquinas, *Sent.* 2.17.2.1, *ad* 3, p. 429.

two descriptions of the attributes of intelligible species seem to be in open contradiction with one another.

This is not the place to solve these difficulties in Albert's and Aquinas's texts. What should be stressed is that both Albert and Aquinas present virtually all the elements of the doctrine of the primary signification of the intelligible species as expounded by Scotus. But neither Albert's nor Aquinas's exposition is as complete as Scotus's. Albert uses the doctrine of the twofold consideration of the species to say that a word signifies a species as an accident, and this is the opposite of what Scotus says. Aquinas is not entirely consistent in using the same distinction, and in any case does not refer to it when discussing the semantics of names and never provides a full account of the theory of the signification of the species, in his commentary on the *Sentences* or elsewhere.

From this short historical review, we can draw some conclusions. First, when Scotus composes his commentaries on *Peri hermeneias*, the doctrine of the primary signification of the species is already some forty years old. Second, in the 1250s and 1260s this opinion enjoys a noteworthy diffusion and many elements of it are to be found in Albert and Aquinas. Third, a detailed account of this doctrine can be found only in Duns Scotus. I am inclined to conclude that Scotus presents an elaboration and a development of an old doctrine. This sophisticated and refined version may be typical of an age when that doctrine has begun to be questioned by an alternative semantic account, the doctrine of the primary signification of the extramental thing, which is not yet known when Aquinas writes his commentary on the *Sentences*. By now, it is not easy to decide whether there are among Scotus's contemporaries any supporters of this elaborated theory of the primary signification of the species or whether this version of that theory is presented by Scotus merely as a foil for the more recent theory of the signification of the extramental thing. We must note that we find an exposition of the same position and the same objections raised against it in other authors, notably in Simon of Faversham, who probably writes his commentaries in the 1280s.<sup>61</sup> In any case, the elaborated form of this position seems to leave no traces of itself other than those found in its adversaries' accounts. In the 1290s it is likely to be a minority view being replaced by the alternative theory that the primary signification of a name is a thing.

## THE SIGNIFICATION OF THE THING: SIGER OF BRABANT

Scotus gives two different accounts of the doctrine of the primary signification of the extramental thing, one in his first commentary on *Peri herme-*

61. Simon of Faversham, *Quaestiones super tertium De anima*, q. 10, ed. D. Sharp, *AHDLMA* 9 (1934): 333–34.

*neias*, the other in his second commentary.<sup>62</sup> Even if these two accounts sketch basically the same position, they differ from one another in several critical respects. In fact, Scotus seems to be referring to the opinions of two different authors. Consequently, after a brief presentation of the basic points of this position, I will give a separate exposition of the two versions Scotus reports.

This second position contends that a name primarily signifies an extramental thing. The intelligible species is necessary in acquiring an understanding of the extramental thing, but it is not what a name primarily signifies. However, here too Scotus adds some qualifications concerning the status of the thing signified. It is true that what is signified is an extramental entity; nonetheless, we must also take into account the mode of signifying. Since this mode is mind-dependent, the central contention of this position is that the thing signified, even if it is by itself something in the extramental world, is something that is understood by the mind and, considered as such, it presents a number of mental features. Moreover, it is precisely as understood by the mind that the extramental thing is signified.

Scotus remarks that the advocates of this position can easily exposit the passages of Aristotle and Boethius that seem to support the primary signification of the intelligible species. According to the adherents of the doctrine of the primary signification of the thing, what Aristotle and Boethius mean by 'affections of the soul' is nothing else than the things insofar as they are understood.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, those who adopt this position stress the importance of understanding the precise role of the species in both knowing and signifying. An intelligible species is not what is primarily understood, but it is that by virtue of which something is primarily understood. However, this does not imply that the intelligible species is that by virtue of which something is primarily signified. From the fact that we understand something by virtue of a species we cannot infer that we also signify something by virtue of a species, but only that the existence of a species is a prerequisite of signifying something, as nothing can be signified unless it is understood.<sup>64</sup>

Let us now turn to Duns Scotus's first presentation of this semantic theory. In his first commentary on *Peri hermeneias*, Scotus says that, if we maintain that what is primarily signified is a thing, we must say more precisely what a thing is. For we can consider a thing in two ways, insofar as it exists (*ut existit*) and insofar as it is understood (*ut intelligitur*). On the one hand, a thing considered insofar as it exists is neither understood nor signified. On the other hand, a thing considered insofar as it is understood is what a name primarily signifies. Scotus explains what is meant by "a thing insofar as it is understood." A thing considered insofar as it is understood is the essence of

62. *Super Peri herm.* 1.2, nn.8–10, pp. 543–44; *Super Peri herm.* 2.1, nn. 4–6, p. 583.

63. *Super Peri herm.* 1.2, n.9, p. 543; *Super Peri herm.* 2.1, n.6, p. 583.

64. *Super Peri herm.* 1.2, n.10, pp. 543–44.

a thing as signified by its definition, as opposed to the particular thing existing with all its accidents. For example, a man as he is understood is the essence of man, captured in the definition 'rational animal', which is true of all particular men. By contrast, a man as he exists is a particular and concrete man, with a particular eye-color, a particular shape of the nose, and so on. The essence or "thing as understood" is a universal notion, which does not exist as such in the world. It is what our intellect knows about a thing by abstracting the universal notion from a particular thing:

To the opposite part of the question it is said differently that a thing is what is primarily signified, but not insofar as it exists, for [in such a way] a thing is not understood *per se*, but insofar as it is perceived *per se* by the intellect, i.e. the essence itself of a thing which is signified by a definition. It is this essence that is the first object of the intellect.<sup>65</sup>

Is this an original or a new position? It seems not. In fact, Scotus is here merely summarizing an opinion that is already some twenty years old when he comments on *Peri hermeneias*. Siger of Brabant openly maintains that position in Paris in the 1270s.<sup>66</sup>

Siger, in his questions on the *Metaphysics* (dated to 1273), states that a word signifies a thing, not a thing as it exists but a thing as it is understood. According to Siger, this is exactly what Aristotle means when in *Peri hermeneias* he says that a word is the sign of an affection in the soul: 'affection in the soul' is to be understood as designating a thing insofar as it is understood by the soul, as opposed to a thing insofar as it exists.<sup>67</sup> Siger gives a more detailed account of the same doctrine in his *Quaestiones logicales*, dated to 1271. There he explains what he means by 'a thing insofar as it is understood.' There are two aspects involved in the signification of a word. First, a name signifies a nature or essence, which is what is understood. This essence is not a concept

65. *Super Peri herm.* I, q. 2, n.8, p. 543: "Ad partem oppositam quaestionis aliter dicitur quod res primo significatur, non tamen secundum quod existit, quia nec sic per se intelligitur, sed secundum quod per se percipitur ab intellectu, hoc est ipsa essentia rei quae significatur per definitionem, quae est primum obiectum intellectus."

66. On Siger of Brabant's theory of signification see B. C. Bazán "La signification des termes communs et la doctrine de la supposition chez Maître Siger de Brabant," *Revue philosophique de Louvain* 77 (1979): 348–59.

67. Siger of Brabant, *Quaestiones in Metaphysicam*, ed. A. Maurer (Louvain-la-Neuve: Éditions de l'Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, 1983), 4.18, p. 157 (Cambridge *reportatio*): "Ad aliud dico quod voces significant res, non secundum quod existunt, sed secundum quod intelliguntur: aliter enim, cum res non existant nisi singulariter, non significarentur nisi singulariter. Cum igitur dicit Aristoteles quod voces sunt notae, etc., solum intelligit quod voces sunt notae rerum secundum quod conceptae ab anima; quod quidem concipere sive intelligere pati quoddam est." See also 4.10: 420–21 (Paris *reportatio*); *Quaestiones in Metaphysicam*, ed. W. Dunphy (Louvain-la-Neuve: Éditions de l'Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, 1981), 4.16, pp. 197–98 (Munich *reportatio*).



of the mind, but something external to the mind. Second, we can take into account not only what a word signifies, but also the way or mode in which a word signifies. Taking into account this second consideration, we must add that a word signifies a nature as this nature is understood, since any word provides not only the understanding of an extramental thing, but also the understanding of the way the thing is understood.<sup>68</sup>

I have said that, on Siger's view, what a word signifies is the essence of an extramental thing. But what is meant by "the way in which an essence is understood?" Siger explains that we understand the extramental thing as a universal; consequently, this is the way in which things are signified: as universal and abstract concepts, existing as such only in our mind. Accordingly, if we consider what a word signifies, we have an extramental thing; if we consider the way in which a word signifies, we have a universal concept, which as such exists only in the mind.<sup>69</sup>

The same position is also held in Oxford by a contemporary of Siger, Peter of Cornwall. Around 1270, this Peter notes that a name primarily signifies a thing, not a species or a similitude of the thing.<sup>70</sup> If the same name signifies both a thing and a species, it does so equivocally. However, the thing is signified insofar as it is apprehended. And, as Peter adds, there is a difference between the thing insofar as it is apprehended and its species. For the species is in the soul by itself, whereas the thing is in the soul not by itself, but by virtue of the species. By itself, the thing signified is in the extramental world.<sup>71</sup>

Peter of Cornwall's position is very similar to Siger's. In fact, both of

68. Siger of Brabant, *Quaestiones logicales*, in Siger de Brabant, *Écrits de logique, de morale et de physique*, ed. B. Bazán (Louvain: Publications Universitaires, 1974), p. 63: "Ex praedictis sic ad quaestionem <dicendum> quod in significato termini communis sunt duo: *significare naturam* quae significatur et cuius intellectus constituitur, quae extra animam et non mentis conceptus est; est etiam *considerare modum intelligendi* illius rei, sub quo modo illa res significatur, seu eius intellectus constituitur. Voces enim significant res ut intelliguntur, ut non tantum constituent significando intellectum rerum, sed etiam constituent intellectum modorum intelligendi."

69. Siger of Brabant, *Quaestiones logicales*, p. 63: "Significatum autem per terminum commune, quantum ad modum intelligendi universalem et abstractum, qui per terminum commune circa ipsum designat, conceptus mentis tantum est."

70. Osmund Lewry, "Oxford Logic 1250–1275: Nicholas and Peter of Cornwall on Past and Future Realities," in O. Lewry, ed., *The Rise of British Logic* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1985), pp. 25–26.

71. Peter of Cornwall, *Sophisma 'Omnis homo est'*, in Lewry, "Oxford Logic 1250–1275," p. 48: "Dico quod si vocamus intellectum speciem uel similitudinem rei, [quod] vox non est primo modo signum illius intellectus; et si hoc significet alico modo, hoc est equiuoce, set primo et principaliter significat rem. Non tamen significat rem simpliciter set secundum quod apprehenditur. Et differt dicere rem secundum quod apprehenditur et speciem rei, quia species est in anima per se ipsam, et res est in anima per speciem et non est in anima ut in subiecto set in re extra. Hoc supposito, primo inponitur ad significandum quandam naturalem rem, et hoc secundum quod apprehenditur ab intellectu."



them seem to be merely reformulating Aquinas's mature doctrine of the concept or inner word, elaborated from the 1260s on and espoused in his *Summa theologiae*, *Summa contra gentiles*, and other works. The formulation under which Scotus reports this doctrine is strongly reminiscent of Siger's distinction between the thing insofar as it exists (*ut existit*) and insofar as it is understood (*ut intelligitur*). However, it is not easy to say whether Scotus is aware of Siger's position directly. Indeed, it is likely that a position of Siger's kind enjoys a certain diffusion in the last decades of the thirteenth century, both in Paris and in Oxford. Be that as it may, we can safely conclude that Duns Scotus, in his first commentary on *Peri hermeneias*, is not stating an original doctrine.

## THE SIGNIFICATION OF THE THING: THOMAS AQUINAS

We now turn to Scotus's second presentation of the doctrine of the primary signification of the extramental thing. Scotus seems to consider these as two presentations of the same position. But, as we shall see, this appears not to have been universally accepted by his contemporaries.

Scotus provides this second presentation in his second commentary on *Peri hermeneias*. There Scotus starts with an interpretation of what Aristotle says: names primarily signify the affections of the soul. He paraphrases 'affections of the soul' as 'conceptions' or 'concepts of the intellect' (*conceptiones intellectus*). Accordingly, in order to understand Aristotle's text correctly, it is necessary to examine what constitutes a concept and to avoid confusing concepts with other connected but different notions. For in the process of cognition, Scotus goes on, there are three distinct elements. First, there is the intelligible species, which is that by virtue of which the intellect is in act when it understands something. Second, there is the *ratio rei*, the essence of the extramental thing; this essence is the object of the intellect, namely what the intellect understands when it understands something in act. Third, there is the particular thing that exists in the extramental word as an individual. Now, if we want to see what is signified by a word, we must take into account the close connection between signifying and understanding: since signifying constitutes an understanding, what is primarily signified is primarily understood. Accordingly, if we want to answer the question of what a word signifies, we must consider what our intellect primarily understands.<sup>72</sup>

72. *Super Peri herm.* 2.1, n.4, p. 583: "Dicendum sicut dicit Aristoteles hic, cap. 1, quod nomen primo significat passiones animae, id est conceptiones intellectus. Ad cuius evidentiam sciendum quod tria se habent secundum ordinem. Primum est species intelligibilis secundum quam est in actu, sicut actus primus in sua propria natura . . . Secundum est quod ratio rei est, quod quid erat esse rei quod obicitur virtuti intellectivae, in quantum est actus qui est species intelligibilis, secundum quem actum fertur virtus cognoscens in ipsum quod quid est esse rei. Tertium est res particulariter existens sub condicionibus individuantiis."

What our intellect understands as its proper object is the essence of an extramental thing. This essence is understood by virtue of an intelligible species, but it is not the intelligible species that is primarily understood. Similarly, when we say, paraphrasing Aristotle, that a name signifies a concept of the intellect, we mean that what is signified is the essence of the thing understood or *ratio rei*, and not the intelligible species by virtue of which this essence is understood. This species is understood only by reflection; only after being understood by reflection can this species be signified.<sup>73</sup>

Thus, the concept signified by a word is not the intelligible species, but the essence of the extramental thing. Now, Scotus adds that this essence must be distinguished not only from the intelligible species but also from the thing existing as an individual in the extramental world. Things existing as individuals cannot be primarily signified, because they cannot be primarily understood, for what is primarily understood by the intellect is the extramental thing as stripped from its individual features. In other words, what is primarily understood is the essence of the thing. Only according to Plato's doctrine, Scotus adds, is the individual signified insofar as it is an individual, since Plato does not recognize a difference between a thing's mode of existing in the extramental world and the mind's mode of understanding the same thing. By contrast, Aristotle recognizes and emphasizes such a difference.<sup>74</sup>

Whose opinion is Scotus reporting? This formulation of the doctrine of the signification of the extramental thing also reflects a position that was elaborated some twenty years before Scotus's exposition of it. It is the position held by Aquinas in his mature writings, in particular in his commentary on *Peri hermeneias*. The peculiar explanation of Aristotle's text referred to—namely, that the affections of the soul are the conceptions of the intellect, and that these conceptions are to be identified with the essences of things as they are abstracted from particulars—comes from this work. Aquinas says that what is primarily signified by the name 'man' is not a singular man but human nature as abstracted from particular men. It is a

73. *Super Peri herm.* 2.1, n.5, p. 583: "Primum non significatur primo per vocem, quia quod quid est primo intelligitur quam species rei intelligatur, et quod primo intelligitur primo significatur. Assumptum patet, quia intellectus species intelligibiles non intelligit nisi per reflexionem, sicut suum actum."

74. *Super Peri herm.* 2.1, n.5, p. 583: "Tertium vero, scilicet res existentes individualiter per suam rationem propriam, non possunt primo significare, quia intellectus est in actu primo per suum obiectum proprium, quod est quod quid est rei. Intellectus non intelligit primo singulare; sed quod quid est sine condicionibus materialibus, cum non existit, potest tamen considerare sine istis; et sicut intelligitur, imponitur ei nomen rei. Unde nomen significat passionem intellectus, id est rem ut concipitur. Plato tamen, lib. *De recta nominum ratione*, posuit nomen significare rem, ut existit, quia dixit rem eo modo existere quo [*ed.*: qui] intelligitur. Aristoteles autem differenter ponit."

consequence of the difference between Aristotle's and Plato's doctrines that a word primarily signifies the essence or nature of the thing as abstracted from particulars and only secondarily an individual thing existing in the world. Platonists think that something exists in just the way it is signified; by contrast, Aristotle acknowledges a difference between the mode in which something exists and the mode in which it is understood by the intellect and signified by a word:

"affections in the soul" must be understood here as conceptions of the intellect, and according to the teaching of Aristotle names, verbs, and speech signify these conceptions of the intellect immediately. They cannot immediately signify things, as is clear from the mode of signifying, for the name "man" signifies human nature in abstraction from singulars; hence it is not possible that it immediately signify a singular man. For this reason the Platonists held that it signified the separated idea of man. But because in Aristotle's teaching man in the abstract does not really subsist, but is only in the mind, it was necessary for Aristotle to say that a vocal sound signifies the conceptions of the intellect immediately and things by means of them.<sup>75</sup>

Aquinas draws this contrast between Plato and Aristotle in several places in his writings. What he always stresses is that Plato's error is that he failed to realize that there is a difference between a thing's mode of existing and its mode of being understood by the human intellect. For this reason, Plato thought that extramental things exist in the same way as the way in which they are understood.<sup>76</sup>

In the *Summa theologiae* Aquinas explicitly says that the signification of a word is a concept as distinct from an intelligible species, thus illuminating his semantic opinions stated elsewhere. Responding to an argument that identi-

75. Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio libri Peryermenias*, 1.2, pp. 10–11: "et ideo oportet passiones anime hic intelligere intellectus conceptiones quas nomina et uerba et orationes significant, secundum sententiam Aristotilis: non enim potest esse quod significant immediate ipsas res, ut ex modo significandi apparet: significat enim hoc nomen «homo» naturam humanam in abstractione a singularibus, unde non potest esse quod significet immediate hominem singularem. Vnde Platonici posuerunt quod significaret ipsam ideam hominis separatam; set, quia hec secundum suam abstractionem non subsistit realiter secundum sententiam Aristotilis, set est in solo intellectu, ideo necesse fuit Aristotili dicere quod uoces significat intellectus conceptiones immediate, et eis mediantibus res." The English translation is based, with some modifications, on *Aristotle: On Interpretation. Commentary by St. Thomas and Cajetan*, trans. J. T. Oesterle (Milwaukee, Wisc.: Marquette U.P., 1962), p. 25.

76. For a list of passages where this view is stated and for Aquinas's sources, see R. J. Henle, *Saint Thomas and Platonism. A Study of the Plato and Platonici Texts in the Writings of Saint Thomas* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1956) pp. 273, 328–30. These passages are thoroughly analyzed by Pasnau, *Theories of Cognition*, pp. 266–71.

fies the thing understood (*res intellecta*), which is the signification of a word, with the intelligible species, Aquinas distinguishes two aspects of understanding. First, there is the passive aspect of the possible intellect informed by intelligible species. Second, the possible intellect so informed forms definitions and propositions, which are signified respectively by words and sentences. Thus, Aquinas concludes that words signify not the intelligible species by which the intellect is informed, but what the intellect itself forms to make judgments about extramental things.<sup>77</sup> These products of the intellect can be identified with the conceptions of the intellect mentioned in the commentary on *Peri hermeneias*.

The kernel of the position reported by Scotus is the difference between the concept of the intellect—the essence or thing insofar as it is understood—and two other notions: on the one hand, the intelligible species, which is that by virtue of which a thing is understood and, on the other hand, the extramental thing insofar as it exists independently of our understanding, which cannot be primarily understood or signified. This distinction derives directly from Aquinas: it is a condensed but substantially faithful version of his mature conception of the *verbum mentis*. Early in his career, Aquinas seems to identify the *verbum* or concept with the intelligible species, which he in turn views not only as a similitude of the essence of the extramental thing but also in a certain way as identical with the essence considered according to its *esse intelligibile*.<sup>78</sup> From the 1260s on, however, Aquinas begins to separate the notion of the concept from the notion of the intelligible species.<sup>79</sup> There are hints of this development in his *De veritate*, but Aquinas seems to take the decisive steps towards this new doctrine while composing his *Summa contra gentiles*.<sup>80</sup> It is in the last elaboration of this work as well as in his questions *De potentia* that we find a fully elaborated doctrine of the *verbum*. The conception of the mind is now the

77. *ST* 1.85.2, *ad* 2: "Nam primo quidem consideratur passio intellectus possibilis secundum quod informatur specie intelligibili. Qua quidem formatus, format secundo vel definitionem vel divisionem vel compositionem, quae per vocem significatur. Unde ratio quam significat nomen, est definitio . . . Non ergo voces significat ipsas species intelligibiles; sed ea quae intellectus sibi format ad iudicandum de rebus exterioribus."

78. Thomas Aquinas, *Quodl.* 8.2.2, in *Opera omnia* 25.1 (Rome: Commissio Leonina; Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1996), p. 59: "Set intellectus cognoscit ipsam naturam et substantiam rei, unde species intelligibilis est similitudo ipsius essencie rei et est quodam modo ipsa quidditas et natura rei secundum esse intelligibile, non secundum esse naturale, prout est in rebus." Aquinas disputed his eighth *quaestio de quodlibet* in 1257: see Sancti Thomae de Aquino *Opera omnia* 25.1: IX\*.

79. See n.41. On concept formation and knowledge in general, see Norman Kretzmann, "Aquinas's Philosophy of Mind," *Philosophical Topics* 20 (1992): 85–90; Kenny, *Aquinas on Mind*, pp. 89–110.

80. *SGC* 1.53; 2.75; 4.11. The first of these passages went through three different redactions, analyzed by L.-B. Geiger, "Les rédactions successives de *Contra Gentiles* I, 53 d'après l'autographe," in *Saint Thomas d'Aquin aujourd'hui* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1963), pp. 221–40.

end-product of the understanding, as opposed to both the extramental thing understood and the intelligible species, whose abstraction by the agent intellect and reception in the possible intellect marks only the beginning of understanding.

Scotus's exposition faithfully reflects Aquinas's mature distinctions. It is the concept of the intellect and nothing else (neither the intellect nor the existing thing nor the species) that is the signification of words. Consequently, Aquinas calls this concept 'the inner word'. A clear and concise exposition of this doctrine is found in the *De potentia*, 8, 1:

Now the one who understands may have a relation to four things in understanding: namely to the thing understood, to the intelligible species whereby his intelligence is made actual, to his act of understanding, and to his intellectual concept. This concept differs from the three others . . . This intellectual concept in us is called properly a word, because it is this that is signified by the uttered word. For the extramental utterance does not signify the intellect, but the concept of the intellect by means of which it relates to the thing.<sup>81</sup>

Admittedly, we now face a problem. It is clear that Aquinas holds that what a word signifies is not the intelligible species. Nevertheless, he is no less explicit in stating that the primary signification of a word is also different from the extramental thing. Since Aquinas explicitly says that the thing is signified only secondarily, through the conception of the mind, his position might better be regarded as an intermediate position, maintaining that the primary signification of a word is neither the intelligible species nor the extramental thing, but a concept of the intellect. Therefore, we might ask how Scotus can count Aquinas among the supporters of the direct signification of the extramental thing.

Or maybe it is not Aquinas that Scotus has in mind? I think that the literal parallelisms mentioned above between Scotus's account and Aquinas's works demonstrate that Scotus is in fact reporting Aquinas's opinion. Still, we must now ask whether Scotus's interpretation of Aquinas is correct.

## CONCEPT AND SIGNIFICATION IN AQUINAS

I think that Scotus's presentation of Aquinas's view is a defensible interpretation of his position, supported by many passages in Aquinas's writings. To see this, we must bear in mind that Aquinas, in his commentary on *Peri hermeneias*, identifies the conception of the intellect with the essence of the

81. *De pot.* 8.1. The English translation has been taken, with minor changes, from *On the Power of God by Saint Thomas Aquinas*, trans. the English Dominican Fathers (Westminster, Md.: The Newman Press, 1952), 3:70–71. See also *De pot.* 5.5.

extramental thing as it is abstracted by our intellect from particulars. Aquinas does not call this conception of the intellect 'thing as understood', and he does not call the particulars 'things as they exist.' Nonetheless, he draws a distinction between the essence of the thing, which is what is signified, and the particulars, from which the essence is abstracted, and this distinction is parallel to Siger's distinction between a thing insofar as it is understood and a thing insofar as it exists. In opposition to the Averroists, Aquinas stresses that what is understood is identical for everyone, but is not the intelligible species, which is something existing in the mind. On the contrary, what is understood is something independent of the mind. In opposition to Plato and the Platonists, Aquinas adds that a thing can be considered in two ways, insofar as it exists as a particular entity and insofar as it is understood as an essence by our mind. Even if these two different modes under which the thing can be considered differ, it is one and the same thing that is considered in these two ways. Therefore, the thing as the object of our intellect is the thing regarded as an essence abstracted from particulars.<sup>82</sup> Both Plato and Aristotle posit the thing understood as something external to our intellect. There is but one difference between the two. Plato thinks that a thing exists in the same way as that in which it is understood by the intellect, as something abstracted and universal. Aristotle, on the other hand, maintains that one and the same thing both exists and is understood, but according to two different ways or modes. Universality is the mode of a thing as it is understood, while particularity is the mode of a thing as it exists:

For there is no difference between Aristotle and Plato, except in this: that Plato asserted that the thing which is understood has actual being outside the soul in exactly the same way as the intellect understands it, that is, as something abstract and universal; but Aristotle asserted that the thing which is understood is outside the soul, but in another way, because it is understood in the abstract and has actual being in the concrete. And just as, according to Plato, the thing itself which is understood is outside the soul itself, so it is according to Aristotle . . . But [according to Aristotle] the character of universality, which consists in commonness and abstractness, is merely the result of the mode of understanding, inasmuch as we understand things abstractly and universally; but according to Plato it is also the result of the mode of existence of the abstract forms: and consequently Plato asserted that universals subsist, whereas Aristotle did not.<sup>83</sup>

82. See Thomas Aquinas, *De unitate intellectus contra Averroistas*, in *Opera omnia* 43 (Rome: Editori di san Tommaso, 1976), pp. 312, 164–242.

83. Thomas Aquinas, *De spiritualibus creaturis*, ed. M. Calcaterra and T. S. Centi in *Quaestiones disputatae* 2 (Rome and Turin: Marietti, 1965), 9 *ad* 6: "Non enim est differentia inter Aristotelem et Platonem, nisi in hoc quod Plato posuit quod res quae intelligitur eodem modo habet esse extra animam quo modo eam intellectus

Since we know that, in both the *Summa theologiae* and his commentary on *Peri hermeneias*, Aquinas identifies the essence of a thing with the signification of a word, we can conclude that the signification of a word is the thing itself insofar as it is conceived as an essence abstracted by the intellect, which is not a mental entity but a mind-independent thing considered insofar as it is understood. Therefore, Scotus is justified in regarding Aquinas as an advocate of the theory of the primary signification of the thing.

Something more should be said about this difficulty. I previously noted that Scotus identifies the concept of the mind, of which Aquinas speaks, with the thing as understood, of which Siger speaks. The result of this identification is a legitimate interpretation of what Aquinas says. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that this identification of Aquinas's 'concept of the mind' with Siger's 'thing as understood' is one of two possible interpretations of what Aquinas says, or at least it is one of the two interpretations that Aquinas's texts have received. According to the other interpretation, the concept of the mind is not to be identified with the extramental thing insofar as it is understood and insofar as it is in the mind; instead, the concept of the mind is a product of the intellect—a mere similitude of the extramental thing, completely distinct from the real thing.

In fact, there seem to be strong reasons in favor of this second interpretation, which is backed by the most straightforward reading of the passages where Aquinas stresses the mentalistic aspect of the concept as contrasted with the extramental thing.<sup>84</sup> If we adopt this second reading of Aquinas's mature doctrine of the *verbum mentis*, we cannot say that what a word signifies is the extramental thing and the object of the intellect; instead, we must say that the signification of a word is a concept in the mind, a mental similitude of the existing thing, to be distinguished both from the thing and from the intelligible species. Accordingly, if we follow this in-

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intelligit, idest ut abstracta et communis; Aristoteles vero posuit rem quae intelligitur esse extra animam, sed alio modo, quia intelligitur abstracte et habet esse concrete. Et sicut secundum Platonem ipsa res quae intelligitur est extra ipsam animam, ita secundum Aristotelem. . . . Sed ratio universalitatis, quae consistit in communitate et abstractione, sequitur solum modum intelligendi, in quantum intelligimus abstracte et communiter; secundum Platonem vero sequitur etiam modum existendi formarum abstractatum; et ideo Plato posuit universalia subsistere, Aristoteles vero non." English translation taken from *St. Thomas, On Spiritual Creatures*, trans. Mary C. Fitzpatrick and John J. Wellmuth (Milwaukee, Wisc.: Marquette U.P., 1949), pp. 107–8.

84. See, for example, the passages from *De potentia* quoted earlier. See also Panaccio, "From Mental Word," p. 129. Panaccio states that, according to Aquinas, the mental word is the primary object of the intellection, whereas the external thing is intellected only through the mental word, and remarks that this thesis will turn out to be problematic for Aquinas's followers. I prefer to say that in Aquinas there are elements favoring a mentalistic theory of knowledge as well as elements favoring a realist theory of knowledge. It will be the work of Aquinas's followers to make a choice between the two accounts.



terpretation, Aquinas's position is not equivalent to Siger's: while Siger endorses explicitly the primary signification of the extramental thing, Aquinas maintains that what is primarily signified is a mental similitude produced by the intellect, different from the intelligible species but no less mind-dependent than the intelligible species is.

Scotus himself may have been aware of this second interpretation of Aquinas's doctrine, though it is not clear whether he is referring to Aquinas when he alludes in his *Lectura* and *Ordinatio* to different interpretations of the *verbum mentis*. In these works, Scotus considers separately two conceptions of the *verbum mentis*. The first view considers the *verbum mentis* as the essence of something in itself external to the intellect.<sup>85</sup> The second view considers the *verbum mentis* merely as the end-product of the intellectual faculty's activities, different from the object of the intellect and completely internal to the intellect.<sup>86</sup> Both these interpretations seem to be rooted in Aquinas's mature works; the first is the interpretation Scotus adopts in his commentary on *Peri hermeneias*, the second is a mentalistic interpretation that is also widely diffused throughout his writings. It is remarkable that Scotus knows and reports both theories, even though we cannot be sure that he considers Aquinas as the author of both of them. Well before Ockham, the interpretation of the *verbum mentis* as a mental entity different from the extramental thing can be found in several authors. Walter Burley refers to this doctrine in two of his commentaries on *Peri hermeneias*, written in the first years of the fourteenth century, and he links this doctrine of the concept to a doctrine of signification.<sup>87</sup> Burley alludes to a theory that states that a word signifies something produced by the intellect. This theory is finally rejected in favor of the doctrine of the primary signification of the thing as understood, a doctrine regarded as different from and opposed to the one that Burley has just mentioned. It is highly plausible that the doctrine of the signification of a word as a concept produced by the intellect, to be distinguished from the thing understood, is nothing other than an idiosyncratic reading of Aquinas's mature semantics.

Both these interpretations of Aquinas's mature doctrine of the *verbum mentis* will enjoy a lasting success, and some authors will adopt the one, others the other interpretation.<sup>88</sup> Be that as it may, it is clear that Duns Scotus identifies Aquinas's 'concept of the mind' with Siger's 'thing as

85. John Duns Scotus, *Lectura* 1.27.1, n.36 in *Opera omnia* 17, ed. Commissio Scotistica (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis, 1966), p. 353; *Ordinatio* 1.27.1–3, n.54, p. 86.

86. Scotus, *Lectura* 1.27.1–3, n.37, p. 353; *Ordinatio* 1.27.1–3, n.55, p. 86.

87. Stephen F. Brown, "Walter Burley's Middle Commentary on Aristotle's *Peri hermeneias*," *Franciscan Studies* 33 (1973): 53–56; "Walter Burley's *Quaestiones in librum Peri hermeneias*," *Franciscan Studies* 34 (1974): 210–11. Burley's questions on *Peri hermeneias* are dated to 1301.

88. Ashworth, "Jacobus Naverus," pp. 204–5.

understood'. Consequently, Scotus can consider the opinions presented in his two commentaries on *Peri hermeneias* as different versions of the same doctrine of the primary signification of the thing.

## CONCLUSIONS

First, the intelligible species turns out to be a key notion in the debate on signification at the end of the thirteenth century. Second, it is clear that in his two commentaries on *Peri hermeneias*, Scotus does not expound a new position, but is carefully summarizing views elaborated by his predecessors. Third, Aquinas seems to have played a central role in the debate on the semantics of names at the end of the thirteenth century. Aquinas's views are soon adopted in both Paris and Oxford, as the cases of Siger of Brabant and Peter of Cornwall show. The interpretation of Aquinas as a defender of the traditional opinion of the primary signification of a concept turns out to be unacceptably imprecise and misleading, for it is from Aquinas's doctrine of the inner word or concept that a new semantics of common nouns develops.

Consequently, any account that takes Duns Scotus as an innovator in semantics can be regarded as incorrect, at least as far as his two commentaries on *Peri hermeneias* are concerned. Nonetheless, this does not necessarily imply that Scotus is a marginal figure in the debate on signification. Rather, he can still be considered as the first to give a comprehensive exposition of both theories of signification, each one taken in its most articulated version. He is also very likely to have been the first to draw a fair and thorough comparison between the two accounts, regarded as two developed and alternative theories. If this puts Scotus in a somewhat diminished light, it must be added that his treatment of signification exerted a lasting influence in the following centuries.

However, there is still one question that deserves careful consideration. It may be contended that even though Duns Scotus was not one of the first, he was surely one of the main defenders of the theory of the primary signification of the extramental thing. Someone willing to support such a view may turn to Scotus's commentaries on the *Sentences* where he seems explicitly to advocate the theory of the primary signification of the thing. If this is true, it might be the case also in his commentaries on *Peri hermeneias* that Scotus eventually preferred the doctrine of the primary signification of the thing, so that this doctrine, even if derived from Aquinas and his followers, may still be regarded as Scotus's opinion. I seriously doubt, however, that even this weak claim about Scotus's semantics is defensible. I think that Scotus's role in the debate over signification was that of a fair judge of two alternative positions, and that there is not enough evidence to say that he ever preferred one opinion over the other.

If we can still regard Scotus as an original figure in semantics, it is not because he endorsed one of the theories of signification proposed by his contemporaries. Rather, his main contribution to semantics seems to have passed largely unnoticed, even though it was openly maintained in his commentaries of the *Sentences*. That original insight was his denial of the general validity of the parallelism between modes of understanding and modes of signifying.<sup>89</sup> Such a parallelism was commonly accepted by his contemporaries. Indeed, it was on that parallelism that both the theory of the primary signification of the species and the theory of the primary signification of the extramental thing were based. Accordingly, Duns Scotus's contribution to semantics can still be regarded as original, not because he proposed or endorsed a new theory of signification, but because he raised some doubts about the general approach to semantics that was current at his time. But this is not the place to argue for these contentions, which I demonstrate elsewhere.<sup>90</sup>

89. Scotus, *Lectura* 1.22, q. u., nn.2–3, in *Opera omnia* 17: 301; *Ordinatio* 1.22, q. u., nn.4–8, in *Opera omnia* 5, ed. Commissio Scotistica (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis, 1959), p. 340–46, 385, 390–93.

90. Giorgio Pini, "Signification of Names in Duns Scotus and Some of His Contemporaries," (forthcoming).