

*Johannes Sharpe's Ontology and Semantics:
Oxford Realism Revisited**

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ABSTRACT

The German Johannes Sharpe is the most important and original author of the so called "Oxford Realists": his semantic and metaphysical theories are the end product of the two main medieval philosophical traditions, realism and nominalism, for he contributed to the new form of realism inaugurated by Wyclif, but was receptive to many nominalist criticisms. Starting from the main thesis of Wyclif's metaphysics, that the universal and individual are really identical but formally distinct, Oxford Realists introduced a new type of predication, based on a partial identity between the entities for which the subject and predicate stood, called predication by essence, and then redefined the traditional post-Aristotelian categories of essential and accidental predication in terms of this partial identity. Sharpe substantially shares the metaphysical view and principles of the other Oxford Realists, but he elaborates a completely different semantics, since he accepts the nominalist principle of the autonomy of thought in relation to the world, and Ockham's explanation for the universality of concepts. Unfortunately, this semantic approach partially undermines his defence of realism, since it deprives Sharpe of any compelling semantic and epistemological reasons to posit universalia in re. Therefore, Sharpe's main ontological theses certainly are sensible and reasonable, but, paradoxically, within his philosophical system they cannot in any way be considered as absolutely consistent.

The German Johannes Sharpe¹ is the most important and original author of the so called "Oxford Realists", a group of thinkers influenced by Wyclif's logic and ontology. These included, besides Sharpe himself, the

* I wish to express my gratitude to Stephen Dumont, who kindly reviewed the English of the article, clarifying its text on many points.

¹ Johannes Sharpe was of the diocese of Münster in Westphalia, where he was born presumably around 1360. He received his Bachelor of Arts from the University of Prague in 1379, but he spent the greatest part of his academic life in Oxford, where he was fellow at Queen's College from 1391 to 1403, and where he became a Master of Arts and a Doctor of Theology. In 1415 he was *lector ordinarius* in Lüneburg (Saxony). The date of his death is unknown. He established a reputation as a philosopher and a theologian. The

Englishmen Robert Alyngton († 1398), William Milverley, William Penbygull († 1420), Roger Whelpdale († 1423), and John Tarteys, as well as the Italian Paul of Venice (1369-1429).² Sharpe's semantic and metaphysical theories are the end product of the two, main medieval philosophical traditions, realism and nominalism, for he contributed to the new form of realism inaugurated by Wyclif, on the one hand, but was receptive to many nominalist criticisms, on the other.

Oxford Realists focussed in particular on two features of Wyclif's metaphysics: that the universal and individual were really (*realiter*) identical but formally (*formaliter*) distinct and the analysis of predication as a real relation between things. Modifying Wyclif's doctrine, they <1> introduced a new type of predication, based on a partial identity between the entities

number of the extant manuscripts of his works and their widespread distribution attest his importance and notoriety throughout the 15th century. The following writings are attributed to him: a treatise on universals (*Quaestio super universalia*—his only edited work); a commentary by questions on Aristotle's *De anima* (*Quaestio super libros De anima*); a commentary by questions on Aristotle's *Physics* (*Quaestio super libros Physicorum*); a treatise on the properties of being (*De passionibus entis*); a treatise on formalities (*De formalitatibus*); an abbreviation of Duns Scotus' *Quodlibeta*; a group of six short treatises on theological subjects. On his life and works see H.B. Workman, *John Wyclif: A Study of the English Medieval Church*, 2 vols., Oxford 1926, vol. 2, 124-5; A.B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to A.D. 1500*, 3 vols., Oxford 1957-59, vol. 3, p. 1680; Ch.H. Lohr, *Medieval Latin Aristotele Commentaries: Johannes de Kanthi—Mynogodus*, in: *Traditio*, 27 (1971), pp. 279-80; on his thought see L. Kennedy, *The De anima of John Sharpe*, in: *Franciscan Studies*, 29 (1969), 249-70; A.D. Conti, *Studio storico-critico*, in: Johannes Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalia*, ed. A.D. Conti, Florence 1990, 211-38, and 323-36; A. de Libera, *Questions de réalisme. Sur deux arguments antiockhamistes de John Sharpe*, in: *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, 97 (1992), 83-110; A. de Libera, *La querelle des universaux. De Platon à la fin du Moyen Age*, Paris 1996, 411-28; A.D. Conti, *Second Intentions in the Late Middle Ages*, in: S. Ebbesen – R.L. Friedman (eds), *Medieval Analyses in Language and Cognition*, Copenhagen 1999, 453-70.

² On their lives and works see Emden 1959 (above, n. 1), *sub nominibus*. All of them studied and taught in Oxford: Alyngton at Queen's College, Penbygull at Exeter College, Whelpdale at Balliol and Queen's Colleges, Tarteys at Balliol College; Paul of Venice at the Augustinian *studium* in Oxford from 1390 to 1393. *Excerpta* from Alyngton's main work, the *Litteralis sententia super Praedicamenta Aristotelis*, in A.D. Conti, *Linguaggio e realtà nel commento alle Categorie di Robert Alyngton*, in: *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale*, 4 (1993), 179-306, on 242-306; the critical edition of Penbygull's *De universalibus* in A.D. Conti, *Teoria degli universali e teoria della predicazione nel trattato De universalibus di William Penbygull: discussione e difesa della posizione di Wyclif*, in: *Medioevo*, 8 (1982), 137-203, on 178-203; *excerpta* from Milverley's *Compendium de quinque universalibus*, Tarteys' *Problema correspondens libello Porphyrii*, and Whelpdale's *Tractatus de universalibus* in Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalia*, ed. Conti 1990 (above, n. 1), Appendices II, III, and IV respectively, 159-64, 165-87, and 189-97; for analyses of their main works and doctrines and information on Wyclif's influence see Conti 1982 (above), 137-66; Conti 1990 (above, n. 1), 295-322; Conti 1993 (above), 179-241; A.D. Conti, *Esistenza e verità: Forme e strutture del reale in Paolo Veneto e nel pensiero filosofico del tardo medioevo*, Roma 1996.

for which the subject and predicate stood, called predication by essence (*secundum essentiam*), and then <2> redefined the traditional post-Aristotelian categories of essential and accidental predication in terms of this partial identity. As a result, the copula of propositions such as “Socrates *is* a man”, “man *is* animal”, “Socrates *is* white”, could not be extensionally interpreted, as it did not mean that a given object is a member of a certain set or that a given set is included in another, but it always signified degrees of identity between the two (compound) entities to which the subject and the predicate of a given proposition referred. Only in virtue of renouncing the traditional view of predication were these Oxford followers of Wyclif able to give a logically satisfactory account of the relationship between universals and individuals, which had always been the most difficult issue for any form of medieval realism.

Sharpe’s independence of thought and open-mindedness towards the nominalist tradition distinguish him from the other Oxford Realists. In fact, he relegates the common realist requirements for the generality (or universality in his terminology) of terms to a minor position within his semantics and substantially accepts the inner sense of nominalist criticisms, rejecting <1> the object-label scheme as *the* fundamental interpretative key of any semantic problem and <2> hypostatization as a philosophical strategy aimed at methodically replacing logical and epistemological rules with ontological standards and references. Consequently, he not only advanced the new form of realism begun by Wyclif, but he also revised it and constructed a sort of mixed system, where the main principles of realist ontology went alongside those of nominalist semantics.

In what follows I offer an overview of Sharpe’s system, together with an analysis of his theory of meaning. This will enable us to appreciate the novelty and vigour of his thought and to gauge his importance and peculiarity within the movement of the Oxford Realists. In the first section, I shall sketch Wyclif’s position on the problems of universals and predication and its development by some Oxford Realists in order to better understand the sources and doctrinal background of Sharpe’s own theses. In the second section, I shall treat Sharpe’s ontology and in the third his theory of meaning of terms. In a final section I shall draw some conclusions about the general significance of Sharpe’s semantic theory in the light of its ontological commitment.

Universals and Predication from Wyclif to Sharpe

1. As indicated, the starting point of Sharpe's philosophical speculation are the theories on universals and predication worked out by Wyclif himself and some of his Oxford followers of the generation leading up to Sharpe: Robert Alyngton, William Penbygull, and Roger Whelpdale.

Wyclif presents his opinion on universals as intermediate between those of St Thomas and Giles of Rome, on the one side, and Walter Burley, on the other.³ Like Giles, whom he quotes by name, Wyclif recognizes three main kinds of universals: <1> *ante rem*, or ideal universals, which are the ideas in God and archetypes of all that is; <2> *in re*, or formal universals, which are the common natures shared by individual things; and <3> *post rem*, or intentional universals, which are the mental signs by which we refer to the universals *in re*.⁴ The ideas in God are the causes of the formal universals, and the formal universals are the causes of the intentional universals.⁵ On the other hand, like Burley, Wyclif holds that formal universals exist outside our minds *in actu* and not *in potentia*, as moderate Realists thought, even if, unlike Burley, he maintains that they are really identical with their own individuals.⁶ So Wyclif accepts the traditional realist account of the relationship between universals and individuals, but he translates it into the terms of his own system. According to him, universals and individuals are *really* the same but *formally* distinct, since they share the same empirical reality, which is that of individuals. Considered, however, as universals and individuals they have opposite constituent principles: the generality or natural-tendency-to-be-common (*communicabilitas*) for universals, and the thisness or impossibility-of-being-common (*incommunicabilitas*) for individuals.⁷

³ Cf. Wyclif, *Tractatus de universalibus*, ch. 4., ed. I.J. Mueller, Oxford 1985, 86-7. On Wyclif's theory of universals see P.V. Spade, *Introduction*, in John Wyclif, *On Universals*, translated into English by A. Kenny, Oxford 1985, xviii-xx; A. Kenny, *Wyclif*, Oxford 1985, 7-17; A.D. Conti, *Analogy and Formal Distinction: on the Logical Basis of Wyclif's Metaphysics*, in: *Medieval Philosophy and Theology*, 6.2 (1997), 133-65, on 150-4; De Libera 1996 (above, n. 1), 407-11. On Burley's theory see A.D. Conti, *Ontology in Walter Burley's Last Commentary on the Ars Vetus*, in: *Franciscan Studies*, 50 (1990), 121-76, on 136-45, and 153-60.

⁴ Cf. Wyclif, *Tractatus de universalibus*, ch. 2, ed. Mueller 1985 (above, n. 3), 69.

⁵ Cf. Wyclif, *Tractatus de universalibus*, ch. 2, ed. Mueller 1985 (above, n. 3), 65.

⁶ Cf. Wyclif, *De ente in communi*, ch. 5, in: Johannes Wyclif, *Summa de ente, libri primi tractatus primus et secundus*, ed. S.H. Thomson, Oxford 1930, 58.

⁷ Cf. Wyclif, *De ente praedicamentali*, ch. 5, *appendix posterior*, ed. R. Beer., London 1891, 46; *Purgans errores circa universalia in communi*, ch. 4, in: Johannes Wyclif, *De ente librorum*

On the logical side, this means that notwithstanding their real identity not everything predicable of individuals can be *directly* predicated of universals and *vice versa*, although an indirect predication is always possible. Wyclif's description of the logical relationship between universals and individuals demanded the introduction of a new kind of predication to cover the cases admitted by the theory of indirect inherence of an accidental form in a substantial universal and of one second intention in another. Therefore Wyclif distinguished three main types of real predication.⁸ In the second chapter of the *Purgans errores circa universalia in communi* they are the following: formal predication (*praedicatio formalis*), predication by essence (*praedicatio secundum essentiam*), and causal predication (*praedicatio secundum causam*).⁹ In the *Tractatus de universalibus* causal predication has been replaced by habitual predication (*praedicatio secundum habitudinem*), which Wyclif had already recognized in the *Purgans errores circa universalia in communi*, but whose position within the main division of the types of predication was not clear.¹⁰ In the *Tractatus de universalibus*, formal predication, predication by essence, and habitual predication are described as three non-mutually exclusive ways of predicating, each more general than the preceding.¹¹ There is causal predication when the form designated by the predicate-term is not present in the entity signified by the subject-term, but the real subject is something caused by that entity.¹² No instances of this kind of predication are given by Wyclif.¹³ Formal predication, predication by essence, and habitual predication are defined similarly in the *Purgans errores circa universalia in communi* and in the *Tractatus*

duorum excerpta, ed. M.H. Dziewicki, London 1909, 37-8; and *Tractatus de universalibus*, ch. 2, ed. Mueller 1985 (above, n. 3), 62-3; ch. 4, 86-7; ch. 10, 208-13.

⁸ Cf. Wyclif, *Tractatus de universalibus*, ch. 1, ed. Mueller 1985 (above, n. 3), 35-6. On Wyclif's theory of predication see Spade 1985 (above, n. 3), xxxi-xli; Conti 1997 (above, n. 3), 155-8.

⁹ Cf. Wyclif, *Purgans errores circa universalia in communi*, ch. 2, in: S.H. Thomson, *A 'Lost' Chapter of Wyclif's Summa de ente*, in: *Speculum*, 4 (1929), 339-346, on 342. As a matter of fact the ms. Cambridge, Trinity College, B.16.2, used by Dziewicki for his edition of the work, lacks the second chapter and the first section of the third chapter. S.H. Thomson integrated the text on the basis of the ms. Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, 4307.

¹⁰ Cf. Wyclif, *Purgans errores*, ch. 3, ed. Dziewicki 1909 (above, n. 7), 34.

¹¹ Cf. Wyclif, *Tractatus de universalibus*, ch. 1, ed. Mueller 1985 (above, n. 3), 35.

¹² Cf. Wyclif, *Purgans errores*, ch. 2, ed. Thomson 1929 (above, n. 9), 343.

¹³ In the works of two of his Oxonian followers, however, we find this example: "Dies est latius super terram", and nothing prevents us from assuming it as appropriate for Wyclif as well—see Penbygull, *De universalibus*, ed. Conti 1982 (above, n. 2), 188; Whelpdale, *Tractatus de universalibus*, in: Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalia*, Appendix IV, ed. Conti 1990 (above, n. 1), 190.

de universalibus. Formal predication is that in which the form designated by the predicate-term is directly present in the entity signified by the subject-term. This happens whenever an item in the categorial line is predicated of its inferior or an accident of its subject of inherence.¹⁴ In both cases, the subject-term and the predicate-term refer to the same reality in virtue of the form connoted by the predicate-term itself. It is sufficient for predication by essence that the same empirical reality is both the real subject and predicate, even though the formal principle connoted by the predicate-term differs from that connoted by the subject-term. 'God is man' and 'The universal is particular' are instances of this kind of predication.¹⁵ In fact, the same empirical reality (or essence) which is a universal is also an individual, but the forms connoted by the subject and predicate terms differ from each other. Finally, there is habitual predication when the form connoted by the predicate-term does not inhere, directly or indirectly, in the essence designated by the subject but simply implies a relation to it, so that the same predicate may be at different times said truly or falsely of its subject without any change in the subject itself.¹⁶ According to Wyclif, we use such predication mainly to express theological truths, such as God is known and loved by many creatures or brings about, as efficient, exemplar, and final cause many good effects. It is evident that habitual predication does not require any kind of identity between the entities signified by the subject and predicate terms, but that formal predication and essential predication do. So the ontological presuppositions of the most general type of predication differ completely from those of the other two types by which it is implied.

The final result of Wyclif's choices is therefore an incompletely developed system of intensional logic that he superimposes on the standard extensional system. Because the ontological basis of the most general type of predication, that is, habitual predication, is completely different from those of the other two types of predication that imply it, Alyngton and other Oxford authors of the subsequent generation tried to improve Wyclif's theory by excluding habitual predication and redefining the other two kinds in a slightly different way.

¹⁴ Cf. Wyclif, *Tractatus de universalibus*, ch. 1, ed. Mueller 1985 (above, n. 3), 28-9. See also *Purgans errores*, ch. 2, ed. Thomson, p. 342.

¹⁵ Cf. Wyclif, *Tractatus de universalibus*, ch. 1, ed. Mueller 1985 (above, n. 3), 30. See also *Purgans errores circa universalia in communi*, ch. 2, in Thomson 1929 (above, n. 9), 342-3.

¹⁶ Cf. Wyclif, *Tractatus de universalibus*, ch. 1, ed. Mueller 1985 (above, n. 3), 34.

2. According to Alyngton,¹⁷ who depends on Avicenna and Wyclif, the formal universals are common natures in virtue of which the individuals that share them are exactly what they are, just as humanity is the form by which every man formally is a man. Unlike Wyclif, however, he does not think that universals exist *in actu* in the external world.¹⁸ As natures, they are prior and indifferent to any division into universals and individuals. Although universality (*universalitas* or *communicabilitas*) is not a constitutive mark of the nature itself, it is its unique, inseparable property. As a consequence, formal universals can be conceived of in two different ways: by themselves, as first intentions, or in union with and from the point of view of their inseparable property, i.e. the *communicabilitas*, and therefore as second intentions. In the first case, they are natures of a certain kind and are identical with their own individuals. For example, man is the same thing as Socrates. In the second case, they are properly universals (i.e. something that can be present in many things at once), and distinct from their own individuals, considered *qua* individuals, because of the opposite constitutive principles: *communicabilitas* and *incommunicabilitas*.¹⁹ Hence, universals are really (*realiter*) identical to, but formally (*formaliter*) distinct from, their individuals. In fact, universals are formal causes in relation to their own individuals, while individuals are material causes in relation to their universals.²⁰ Thus three different kinds of entities can be qualified as formal universals: <1> the common natures instantiated by individuals, which are things of first intention; <2> the form itself of universality that belongs to a certain common nature when seen in its relation to the individuals, which is a thing of second intention; <3> the intelligibility proper to the common nature, by which it is a possible

¹⁷ Alyngton was one of the most important authors of the generation after Wyclif. He was deeply influenced by Walter Burley's logico-ontological system and Wyclif's metaphysics. His major extant work, a commentary on the *Categories*, heavily relies on Burley's last commentary on the *Categories* and Wyclif's *De ente praedicamentali*. He was nonetheless able to develop new logical and semantic theories while following the general strategy of the Oxford Realists and methodically replacing references to linguistic and/or mental activities with references to external objective realities. On his theory of universals and predication see Conti 1993 (above, n. 2), 193-208.

¹⁸ Cf. Alyngton, *Litteralis sententia s. Praedicamenta*, ch. *de substantia*, in: Conti 1993 (above, n. 2), 279.

¹⁹ Cf. Alyngton, *Litteralis sententia s. Praedicamenta*, ch. *de substantia*, 268.

²⁰ Cf. Alyngton, *Litteralis sententia s. Praedicamenta*, ch. *de substantia*, 275-6.

object of our mind—that is, the real principle which connects formal universals with mental universals.²¹

Since Alyngton accepted the core of the traditional, realist account of the relationship between (formal) universals and individuals, he, like Wyclif, had to define its logical structure more accurately, in order to avoid the inconsistencies stressed by Ockham and his followers.²² Thus he states that <1> a universal in the category of substance can directly receive only the predications of substantial forms more common than it; and <2> the accidental forms inhering in individual substances can be predicated of the universal substantial form that those individuals instantiate only indirectly (*essentialiter*) through and in virtue of the individuals themselves of that substantial form.²³ For this reason, Alyngton's description of the logical structure of the relationship between universals and individuals demanded a redefinition of predication. Indeed, he was the first one to ameliorate Wyclif's theory by dividing predication into formal predication (*praedicatio formalis*) and remote inherence (*inhaerentia remota*), or predication by essence (*praedicatio secundum essentiam*). Remote inherence is grounded on a partial identity between subject and predicate, which share some, but not all, metaphysical constituents, and does not demand that the form signified by the predicate-term be directly present in the entity signified by the subject-term. On the contrary, such a direct presence is required by formal predication. 'Man is an animal' and 'Socrates is white' are instances of formal predication; '(What is) singular is (what is) common' (*'singulare est commune'*) and 'Humanity is (something) running' (*'humanitas est currens'*) are instances of remote inherence, since, according to Alyngton, the property of running is imputable to the form of humanity, if at least one man is running. He is careful, however, to use a substantival adjective

²¹ Cf. Alyngton, *Litteralis sententia s. Praedicamenta*, ch. *de substantia*, 277. This partition of the formal universal is very similar to that propounded by Wyclif in his *Tractatus de universalibus*, ch. 2, ed. Mueller 1985 (above, n. 3), 64.

²² Both in his commentary on the *Categories* (ch. *de substantia*) and in his *Summa Logicae* (pars I, chs. 14-15) Ockham stressed that many unacceptable consequences follow from the twofold admission that universals are something existing *in re*, and are constitutive parts of the essence of individuals. For example: <1> whatever is predicated of individuals will be predicated of their universals too; and therefore a unique common nature at the same time would get contrary attributes from its individuals. <2> God could not annihilate Socrates (or any other individual substance) without at the same time destroying the whole category of substance, and therefore every created being, since every accident depends on substance for its existence.

²³ Cf. Alyngton, *Litteralis sententia s. Praedicamenta*, ch. *de regulis praedicationis*, in: Conti 1993 (above, n. 2), 246-8; ch. *de substantia*, 288-9.

in its neuter form as a predicate-term, because only in this way can it appear that the form signified by the predicate-term is not directly present in the subject, but is indirectly attributed to it through its individuals:²⁴

Sed sciendum est quod duplex solet poni praedicatio in communi. Aliqua enim est praedicatio secundum essentiam et aliqua est praedicatio formalis. Est autem praedicatio secundum essentiam quando eadem essentia significata per praedicatum est res significata per subiectum, vel quando subiectum a parte rei est praedicatum, sed aliqua ratio formalis connotatur, ut sic, per subiectum quae non inest primo et denominative praedicato, vel e converso. Ut sic: 'natura humana est homo singularis', 'humanitas est currens', 'homo singularis est species', et ita de aliis. Non tamen est ista praedicatio concedenda 'homo est asinus', quia subiectum non est praedicatum, quamvis animalitas sit tam homo quam asinus, quia oporteret ad illam praedicationem quod animalitas esset primo formaliter vel homo vel asinus, quod non est verum. Conceditur tamen quod singulare est commune, quia aliqua essentia formaliter communis est homo singularis. Non tamen album est nigrum nec e contra, nec rationale est irrationale, quia nulla essentia formaliter alba est nigra nec e contra, nec aliqua essentia formaliter rationalis est irrationale; et ita de aliis. Et iuxta hoc conceditur quod species specialissima est genus generalissimum, quamvis non formaliter. Sed alia est praedicatio formalis, ut quando ratio prima praedicati, ut huiusmodi, inest formaliter primo subiecto; ut 'homo est animal', 'Sortes est albus'. Et ista duplex est: substantialis vel accidentalis.

Formal predication itself is in turn divided into formal substantial and formal accidental predication, since formal predication necessarily demands the direct presence of a form in a substrate, and, according to Alyngton, this can occur in two different ways: either as one of the inner constitutive element of the substrate (substantially), or as one of its subsidiary properties (accidentally).²⁵ Formal accidental predication is then further divided into *secundum motum* and *secundum habitudinem*:²⁶

Accidentalis ultra dividitur in formalem praedicationem accidentium quae implicant subiectum suum esse per se mobile et aliorum accidentium quae non sic implicant, quae vocatur praedicatio secundum habitudinem—de quibus dictum est prius.

The basic idea of this last division seem to be that modes of being and natures of the accidental forms determine the set of substances which can play the role of their substrate. Alyngton distinguishes between those accidental forms that require a substance capable of undergoing change (*per se mobile*) as their own direct substrate of inherence, and those ones which do not need a substrate with such a characteristic. Forms like quantity, whiteness, *risibilitas*, alteration, diminution and so on belong to the first

²⁴ Alyngton, *Litteralis sententia s. Praedicamenta*, ch. *de substantia*, 289.

²⁵ Cf. Alyngton, *Litteralis sententia s. Praedicamenta*, ch. *de substantia*, 263.

²⁶ Alyngton, *Litteralis sententia s. Praedicamenta*, ch. *de substantia*, 289.

group, while relations of reason²⁷ and *respectus*, like causation, difference, *dilectio* and so on, fall under the second one. The forms of the first group bring about formal accidental predication *secundum motum*, and the forms of the second group formal accidental predication *secundum habitudinem*. The former necessarily entail singular substances as their substrates, since singulars alone can undergo change, while the latter only can directly inhere in universal natures (*possunt inesse denominative universalibus*).²⁸

3. Some years later, in their treatises on universals William Penbygull²⁹ and Roger Whelpdale,³⁰ who almost certainly belong to the same generation as Sharpe, divided predication into formal (*praedicatio formalis*), by essence (*secundum essentiam*), and causal (*secundum causam*). Predication by essence shows a partial identity between subject and predicate, which

²⁷ According to Alyngton, whose account partially differs from those of Burley and Wyclif, in the act of referring of one substance to another four distinct constitutive elements can be individuated: the relation itself, for instance, the form of paternity; the substrate of the relation, that is, the substance which denominatively receives the name of the relation, for instance, the substance which is the father; the object of the relation, that is, the substance with which the substrate of the relation is connected, for instance, the substance which is the son; and the foundation (*fundamentum*) of the relation, that is, the absolute entity in virtue of which the relation inheres in the substrate and in the object. The foundation is the main component, since it <1> joins the relation to the underlying substances, <2> allows the relation to link the substrate to the object, and <3> transmits to the relation some of its properties. Unlike Burley and Wyclif, Alyngton affirms that not only qualities and quantities, but substances also can be the foundation of a relation. On this basis, he defines relations of reason, eliminating from their description any reference to our mind and utilising objective criteria only based on the framework of reality itself. In fact he maintains that what characterizes the relations of reason is the fulfilment of at least one of these conditions: <1> the subject of inherence of the relation, or its object, is not a substance; <2> the object is not an actual entity; <3> the foundation of the relation is not an absolute being—i.e. a substance, or a quantity, or a quality—cf. Alyngton, *Litteralis sententia s. Praedicamenta*, ch. *de relativis*, in: Conti 1993 (above, n. 2), 291-306. On Alyngton's theory of relations see Conti 1993 (above, n. 2), 222-9.

²⁸ Cf. Alyngton, *Litteralis sententia s. Praedicamenta*, ch. *de subiecto et praedicato*, in: Conti 1993 (above, n. 2), 245; ch. *de substantia*, 274.

²⁹ Penbygull was from Exeter diocese; he studied at Oxford, where he was fellow of the Exeter College in 1399, and rector in 1406-07. He probably died at Oxford in 1420. According to Emden 1959 (above, n. 1), vol. 3, 1455 he wrote the following treatises: *De universalibus*, *Divisio entis*, and *Super Porphyrii Isagogen*. Among the Oxford Realists Penbygull was the most faithful to Wyclif, since his extant writings appear to be essentially devoted to a defence and/or explanation of Wyclif's main philosophical theses.

³⁰ We possess some information on the life and works of Roger Whelpdale. He was born at Greystoke. He studied at Oxford, where he was fellow of Balliol College in the last decade of the fourteenth century; then fellow of Queen's College in 1401-02, provost of Queen's College from 1404 to 1420, when he became bishop of Carlisle. He died in 1423. According to Emden 1959 (above, n. 1), vol. 3, 2031 he wrote a treatise on universals, commentaries on Porphyry's *Isagoge* and Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*, and a compendium of logic (*Summulae logicales*).

share some, but not all, metaphysical component parts, and does not require that the form connoted by the predicate-term is directly present in the essence denoted by the subject-term. Formal predication, on the contrary, requires such a direct presence. If the form connoted by the predicate-term is intrinsic to the nature of the subject, then there is a case of formal essential predication, while if it is extrinsic, then there is a formal accidental predication. ‘Man is an animal’ is an instance of formal essential predication; ‘Socrates is white’ is an instance of formal accidental predication. Moreover, Penbygull and Whelpdale, as did Alyngton, divide formal accidental predication into *secundum motum* and *secundum habitudinem*, but unlike Wyclif, who applied predication by essence to second intentions only, they claim that it holds also when applied to first intentions. Thus, like Alyngton, they maintain that, for instance, it is possible to predicate of the universal-man (*homo in communi*) the property of being white, if at least one of its individuals is white. In this case, it is necessary to use a substantival adjective in its neuter form as a predicate-term, because only in this way can it appear that the entity connoted by the predicate-term is not a form directly present in the subject, but indirectly attributed to it through its individuals and in virtue of the partial identity which holds between the form of humanity and the singular men who instantiate it. Hence, they acknowledge that the proposition ‘The universal-man is (something) white’ (*homo in communi est album*) is true, if at least one existing man is white:³¹

Aliqua est praedicatio secundum essentiam et aliqua est praedicatio formalis. Praedicatio secundum essentiam est quando res primarie significat per subiectum est res primarie significata per praedicatum, dum tamen nulla forma inclusa in praedicato, ut forma, requiritur inesse rei significatae primarie per subiectum ut verificetur data propositio. Ut hic ‘homo communis est album’ et in consimilibus, ubi praedicatum existens adiectivum non substantivatur per subiectum . . . Praedicatio formalis est duplex:

³¹ Penbygull, *De universalibus*, ed. Conti 1982 (above, n. 2), 186-7. See also Whelpdale, *Tractatus de universalibus*, in: Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalia*, ed. Conti 1990 (above, n. 1), 190-2: “Praedicatio secundum essentiam est duplex: aliqua enim est termini de termino et aliqua rei de re. Praedicatio secundum essentiam termini de termino est quando res primarie significata per praedicatum est res primarie significata per subiectum, et nulla forma connotata principaliter per praedicatum, ut sic, requiritur inesse rei primarie significatae per subiectum formaliter et denominative, ita quod iste terminus, ut sic, dicat[ur] rationem sub qua propositio verificatur. Praedicatio secundum essentiam rei de re est quando subiectum a parte rei est praedicatum, licet diversa sit ratio praedicati et subiecti, ut ‘singulare est universale’ . . . Praedicatio formalis rei de re est quando ratio praedicati, hoc est forma inclusa in praedicato vel existens praedicatum ut huiusmodi, formaliter inest subiecto, ut ‘homo est animal’, ‘Sortes est albus’. Et dividitur talis praedicatio in praedicationem essentialem et accidentalem”.

aliqua est praedicatio formalis essentialis et aliqua formalis accidentalis. Praedicatio formalis essentialis est quando forma inclusa in praedicato, ut forma, requiritur inexistere essentialiter et denominative rei significatae per subiectum. . . . Praedicatio formalis accidentalis est quando per praedicatum significatur aliqua forma accidentalis quae requiritur ad verificationem propositionis inexistere rei significatae per subiectum; et hoc denominative.

Finally, like Wyclif in the *Purgans errores circa universalia in communi*, they affirm that there is causal predication when the entity signified by the predicate-term is not present in any way in the entity signified by the subject-term, but the real subject has been caused by the real predicate.³²

According to Penbygull and Whelpdale, formal essential and formal accidental predication would correspond to Aristotle's essential and accidental predication.³³ But, as a matter of fact, they agree with Wyclif in regarding predication by essence as more general than formal predication. As a consequence, in their theories the formal predication is a particular type of predication by essence. This means that they implicitly recognize a single ontological pattern, founded on a sort of partial identity, as the basis of every kind of standard philosophical statement (subject, copula, predicate). But in this way, formal essential predication and formal accidental predication are very different from their Aristotelian models, as they express degrees in identity as well as predication by essence.

³² Cf. Penbygull, *De universalibus*, ed. Conti 1982 (above, n. 2), 188: "Sed praeter istas praedicationes est dare praedicationem secundum causam, et non quamcumque causam; ut hic 'dies est latio solis super terram', 'vox est aër tenuissimus ictus'"; Whelpdale, *Tractatus de universalibus*, in: Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalia*, ed. Conti 1990 (above, n. 1), 190: "Praedicatio secundum causam est duplex: aliqua est termini de termino et aliqua rei de re. Praedicatio secundum causam termini de termino <est> quando per praedicatum significatur primarie causa rei significatae per subiectum, ut haec 'dies est latio solis super terram'. Praedicatio secundum causam rei de re est quando praedicatum a parte rei est causa subiecti. Et debet ista intelligi principaliter de causis materialibus et efficientibus".

³³ On Aristotle's theory of predication see: D.W. Hamlyn, *Aristotle on Predication*, in: *Phronesis*, 6 (1961), 110-26; G.E.L. Owen, *Inherence*, in: *Phronesis*, 10 (1965), 97-105; J.M.E. Moravcsik, *Aristotle on Predication*, in: *Philosophical Review*, 76 (1967), 80-96; J. Duerlinger, *Predication and Inherence in Aristotle's Categories*, in: *Phronesis*, 15 (1970), pp. 179-203; J.C. Kunkei, *A New Look at Non-Essential Predication in the Categories*, in: *The New Scholasticism*, 45 (1971), 110-6; B. Jones, *Individuals in Aristotle's Categories*, in: *Phronesis*, 17 (1972), 107-23; Ch.I. Stough, *Language and Ontology in Aristotle's Categories*, in: *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 10 (1972), 261-272; R.E. Allen, *Substance and Predication in Aristotle's Categories*, in: E.N. Lee – A.P.D. Mourelatos – R.M. Rorty (eds), *Exegesis and Argument*, Assen 1973, 362-73; S.M. Cohen, *Predicable of in Aristotle's Categories*, in: *Phronesis*, 18 (1973), 60-70; B. Jones, *Introduction to the First Five Chapters of Aristotle's Categories*, in: *Phronesis*, 20 (1975), 146-72; and, for a new interpretation, according to which 'is' functions as an assertoric operator rather than as a copula, L.M. de Rijk, *Aristotle: Semantics and Ontology*, vol. 1, Leiden 2002.

This interpretative scheme of the nature and kinds of predication is ultimately grounded on a notion of identity that is necessarily different from the standard one. According to the most common opinion, as it is summed up by Burley in his last commentary on the *Categories* (1337), the logical criteria for identity and (real) distinction are the following:³⁴

a is identical with *b* iff for all *x*, it is the case that *x* is predicated of *a* iff it is predicated of *b*;

a differs from *b* iff there is at least one *z* such that *a* is predicated of *z* and *b* is not, or *vice versa*, VEL there is at least one *w* such that *w* is predicated of *a* and not of *b*, or *vice versa*.

From this one can easily conclude that universals and individuals can never be the same, at least because universals have generality, which cannot be predicated of individuals, and individuals thisness, which cannot be predicated of universals. So Penbygull³⁵ put forward new criteria for identity and distinction. First of all, he distinguishes between the notion of non-identity and that of difference (or distinction) and denies that the notion of difference implies that of non-identity;³⁶ then he affirms that the two notions of difference and real identity are logically compatible;³⁷ finally he suggests the following definitions for these three notions—non-identity, difference or distinction, and (absolute) identity:³⁸

a is not-identical with *b* iff there is not any form *F* such that *F* is present in the same way in *a* and *b*;

³⁴ Cf. W. Burley, *Expositio super Praedicamenta Aristotelis*, cap. *de oppositione*, in *Expositio super Artem Veterem Porphyrii et Aristotelis*, ed. Venetiis 1509, fol. 44r: “Nota quod ex isto loco sumitur doctrina bona ad cognoscendum identitatem vel diversitatem aliquorum ad invicem. Et est: si unum praedicatur de aliquo de quo non praedicatur reliquum, illa non sunt eadem, sed diversa; et si aliquid praedicatur de uno quod non praedicatur de reliquo, illa non sunt idem. Et e contrario: si quicquid vere praedicatur de uno vere praedicatur de reliquo, illa sunt eadem”. See also his *Tractatus de universalibus*, ed. H.-U. Wöhler, Leipzig 1999, 22.

³⁵ There is no new formulation of the notions of identity and distinction in Whelpdale’s treatise on universals. On Penbygull theory of identity and distinction see Conti 1982 (above, n. 2), 153-6.

³⁶ Cf. Penbygull, *De universalibus*, ed. Conti 1982 (above, n. 2), 190.

³⁷ Cf. Penbygull, *De universalibus*, 190.

³⁸ Cf. Penbygull, *De universalibus*, 184 and 189-90: “Item, si aliqua duo sint, et aliquid inest uni quod a reliquo removetur, illa differunt; sed aliquid inest formaliter communi, quia communicabilitas, quod removetur a singulari; ergo universale et suum singulare differunt; et per consequens unum non est reliquum, ut patet per exponentem huius verbi ‘differt’. . . . Ad quintum, cum arguitur ‘si aliqua duo sint’ etc., dicitur quod multipliciter dicuntur aliqua differre. Primo modo aliqua differunt plus quam genere, ut Deus et homo. Et aliqua differunt genere, ut homo et quantitas. Et aliqua secundum rationem differunt,

a differs from b iff there is at least a form F such that F is *directly* present in a but not in b ;

a is (absolutely) identical with b iff for all forms F , it is the case that F is present in a iff it is present in *the same way* in b .

The criteria for non-identity are stronger than the common ones for real distinction: two things can be qualified as non-identical if and only if they belong to different categories. On the other side, the definition of difference does not exclude the possibility that two things differ from each other but share one or more constitutive items. Thus, there are degrees in distinction, and what is more, the degree of distinction between two things can be read as the inverse measure of their partial identity. For instance, if we compare the list of both substantial and accidental items that constitute Socrates with those that make up the universal-man (*homo in communi*), it is evident that Socrates and the universal-man differ from each other, since there are forms that belong to Socrates but do not belong to the universal-man and *vice versa*. It is also evident, however, that the two lists are identical for a large section—that is, that Socrates and the universal-man, considered from the point of view of their metaphysical composition, are partially the same.

Such is the historical framework against which Sharpe develops his own ontology.

Sharpe's Ontology

As is the case for the other Oxford Realists, the core of Sharpe's ontology lies in his theory of universals. Indeed, he is a medieval realist, since he defends the extra-mental existence of universals:³⁹

Unde dico quod est dare universalia in mente et extra mentem.

quando una essentia est alia, rationes tamen formales sunt diversae; et sic universale et suum singulare differunt. Sed aliqua ratione solum differunt, et una cum hoc est identitas in singulari essentia; et sic differunt memoria, ratio et voluntas, quae sunt haec anima, ut placet pluribus probanter ponere. Qua distinctione habita conceditur quod universale et suum singulare differunt. Et ulterius, cum arguitur sic 'ergo unum non est reliquum', negatur consequentia, nec arguitur ab exposito ad unam eius exponentem; sed hoc verbum 'differt' debet resolvi sic 'aliqua differentia, ut communicabilitate, universale differt a suo singulari'. Et antecedens probatur sic: communicabilitas inest formaliter universali et non sic inest suo singulari, ergo universale et suum singulare differunt. Vel sic, et brevius: aliquod ens inest formaliter universali quod non sic inest dato singulari, ergo universale et datum singulare differunt".

³⁹ Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalia*, ed. Conti 1990 (above, n. 1), 68.

However, his approach to the whole matter can be defined as “analytic”, since he seems to believe that <1> any ontology has to be constructed in relation to the resolution of semantic problems, <2> any philosophical explanation of reality has to be preceded by a semantic explanation of the function of our language, and <3> that there is not a close correspondence between the elements and structures of language and the elements and structures of the world. So Sharpe distinguishes two main kinds of universals: universal forms, like humanity, really present in a multiplicity of things, and universal signs, both mental and extra-mental, by means of which we refer to real universals and/or signify something in a universal manner:⁴⁰

Universalia in mente vel sunt intentionalia, et hoc rerum vel signorum, vel sunt habitualia vel actualia, sicut universales intellectiones. Sed universalia extra mentem vel sunt signa subordinata illis universalibus in mente, cuiusmodi sunt termini universales scripti vel vocales, vel sunt res distinctae contra talia signa, de quibus iam locutum est. Et de istis est quaestio principalis.

On the other hand, the theoretical framework of this division is an analysis of the various meanings of the term ‘universal’. According to Sharpe, they are six, since we can count the following entities universal: <1> those causes that have a multiplicity of effects; <2> the ideas in God; <3> the universal quantifier; <4> universal propositions, both affirmative and negative; <5> universal forms, or real universals; and <6> universal signs:⁴¹

Est ergo notandum quod universale multis modis, quantum ad praesens sufficit, invenitur acceptum. Uno modo sumitur pro universali in causando, et sic dicimus aliquas causas esse universales et aliquas particulares. . . . Secundo modo accipitur universale pro ratione causali universali, quae vocatur idea. . . . Tertio modo accipitur universale pro syncategoremate universaliter distributivo, nato facere propositionem universalem dum ponitur a parte subiecti in propositione. Quarto modo accipitur pro propositione universali. . . . Quinto modo capitur pro universali in essendo, quod est idem in multis, eis realiter communicatum. Et sic humanitas, in qua omnes homines conveniunt, dicitur universale in essendo. Sexto modo et ultimo dicitur aliquod esse universale in praedicando, significando vel supponendo. Et isto modo intentio vel signum commune dicitur universale.

The being of real universals coincides with the being of their own individuals, so that real universals can be said to be everlasting, because of

⁴⁰ Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalia*, 68; see also 50.

⁴¹ Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalia*, 49-50.

the continuous succession of their individuals, and really identical with them.⁴² On the other side, universals and individuals are formally different from each other, as they have distinct constitutive formal principles, and therefore different properties.⁴³ The most important among the universal signs are mental universals, which are both acts of intellection (*intellectiones*), through which our mind grasp the nature of universal forms, and concepts (*intentiones*), through which it connects general names with the things to which they refer.⁴⁴ Since they are not univocally predicated of their inferiors, the transcendentals (*ens, aliquid, res* etc.) are not universals in the strict sense of the term (*proprie*).⁴⁵ Universal forms are of five distinct kinds (*quinque sunt maneries formarum universalium*), depending on the different ways in which they are participated by singular substances: genera, species, differences, *propria*, and accidents.⁴⁶ Mental concepts and linguistic signs are universals in a derivative way, because of what they directly or indirectly signify.⁴⁷ There are not real universals corresponding to common accidental terms like 'white' ('*album*') or 'sweet' ('*dulce*'):⁴⁸

Tertia et ultima conclusio ad praesens est ista: nulla sunt universalia concretive accidentalia ex parte rei, suis singularibus communicabilia. Unde intentio illius conclusionis est quod istis terminis concretis accidentalibus, scilicet 'album', 'dulce', 'risibile', etc., non correspondent appropriate aliqua universalia ex parte rei praeter formas connotatas; puta quod non est dare a parte rei album in communi, etc.

The existence of such real universals would entail a twofold absurdity: the possibility of <1> a direct inherence of accidental forms in universal substances and <2> of a unified entity compounded of substance and accident, which would therefore be neither substance nor accident.⁴⁹

As a consequence, Sharpe's position on the problem of universals can be summed up as follows. <1> Universals exist in a threefold way, as common natures *in re*, as concepts in our mind, and as spoken and written

⁴² Cf. Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalia*, 97 and 105.

⁴³ Cf. Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalia*, 91-2.

⁴⁴ Cf. Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalia*, 68-9.

⁴⁵ Cf. Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalia*, 74: "Licet aliquod sit commune transcendens ex natura rei, nullum tamen tale est proprie universale".

⁴⁶ Cf. Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalia*, 81-2.

⁴⁷ Cf. Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalia*, 82: "Ex illa conclusione correlarie sequitur quod conceptus et signa sunt secundarie universalia. Patet: nam quodcumque inest signo ratione significati, illud secundarie sibi inest; sed esse universale inest signo ratione significati; ergo etc."

⁴⁸ Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalia*, 83.

⁴⁹ Cf. Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalia*, 83-4. See also 67-8, 72-3, and 140-1.

linguistic signs. <2> Real universals are naturally apt to be present in many things as their main metaphysical components. <3> Real universals have no being outside the being of their individuals. <4> Mental universals are partially caused in our mind by the common natures existing outside. This theory of universals is obviously modelled on the canons of moderate Realism, nevertheless an important difference marks his position off from the most common ones, as exemplified by Aquinas' doctrine. Whereas according to St Thomas universals exist *in potentia* outside the mind and *in actu* only in the mind, according to Sharpe's account they exist *in actu* outside the mind, since their being is the same as the being of individuals, which is actual. For Sharpe an universal is *in actu* if and only if there is at least an individual in which it is present. Therefore, our mind does not give actuality to universals but a separate mode of existence.

As we have already seen, the description of the relationship between universals and individuals in terms of real identity and formal distinction, entails <1> that not everything predicated of individuals can be *directly* (*formaliter*) attributed to their universals, nor *vice versa*, but <2> that everything predicated of individuals has to be in some way or another attributed to universals and *vice versa*. Therefore, a redefinition of the standard kinds of predication was required. Like Alyngton, Penbygull, and Whelpdale, Sharpe modifies Wyclif's theory. Agreeing with Alyngton, but differing from Penbygull and Whelpdale, he divides real predication, which is a real relation between two entities of the world, into formal predication (*praedicatio formalis*) and predication by essence (*praedicatio essentialis vel secundum essentiam*), removing habitual and causal predications. These are not homogeneous with the first two, since they do not require any kind of identity between the entities signified by the subject and predicate terms. Predication by essence <1> shows a partial identity between the subject-thing and the predicate-thing, which share some metaphysical component parts, and <2.1> does not require (or even <2.2> excludes) that the form connoted by the predicate-term is directly present in the essence signified by the subject-term. Formal predication, on the contrary, requires such a direct presence:⁵⁰

Sed ad hoc intelligendum oportet scire quomodo praedicatio formalis et essentialis distinguuntur. Pro quo sciendum quod aliqui distinguunt illas duas praedicationes

⁵⁰ Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalia*, 89-90.

sicut inferius et superius, ita videlicet quod omnis praedicatio formalis sit essentialis sed non econtra. Et aliqui distinguunt illas praedicationes sicut duas species disparatas praedicationis. Sed de illo non est magna cura. Loquendo secundum primum modum, quaelibet praedicatio ex parte rei est essentialis, quia in qualibet tali praedicatione idem vel eadem entitas vel essentia est subiectum et praedicatum, sicut in qualibet praedicatione signorum sibi debite subordinata idem vel eadem res significatur per subiectum et praedicatum. . . . Sed praedicatio formalis est ex parte rei quando ultra illam identitatem additur quod praedicatum vel importatum per modum formae in praedicato insit subiecto per modum formae quidditative informantis, ut hic 'homo est animal', vel concretive denominantis, ut hic 'homo est risibilis, rationalis vel albus', etc.

Unlike Alyngton, Penbygull, and Whelpdale, however, Sharpe does not explicitly divide formal predication into formal essential and formal accidental predication; moreover, as is evident from his formulations, he offers two different readings of the distinction between formal predication and predication by essence. According to the common view, predication by essence is more general than formal predication. As a consequence, in the standard theory of the Oxford Realists formal predication is a subtype of predication by essence. Sharpe introduces another interpretation, according to which the two kinds of predication at issue are complementary and mutually exclusive. This happens when predication by essence *excludes* that the form connoted by the predicate-term is *directly* present in the essence signified by the subject-term.⁵¹

Sed secundo modo distinguendo illas praedicationes dicendum est quod praedicatio formalis est ut prius, sed praedicatio secundum essentiam est quando non est talis habitudo formalis inter subiectum et praedicatum, et tamen propter realem identitatem inter illa est ibi vera praedicatio.

Although, according to the latter reading, formal predication is not a kind of predication by essence, this reading nevertheless implies an interpretation of the 'is' of predication in terms of identity and, therefore, a new definition of the pair of antonymous notions of identity and difference (or distinction). Sharpe's theory of identity and distinction combines those of Duns Scotus,⁵²

⁵¹ Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalia*, 91.

⁵² On Scotus' formal distinction see: M.J. Grajewski, *The Formal Distinction of Duns Scotus*, Washington D.C. 1944; R.G. Wengert, *The Development of the Doctrine of the Formal Distinction in the Lectura prima of John Duns Scotus*, in: *The Monist*, 49 (1965), 571-87; A.B. Wolter, *The Formal Distinction*, in: J.K. Ryan & B.M. Bonansea (eds), *John Duns Scotus 1265-1965*, Washington D.C. 1965, 45-60; M. McCord Adams, *Ockham on Identity and Distinction*, in: *Franciscan Studies*, 36 (1976), 5-74, on 25-43; A.B. Wolter, *The Philosophical Theology of John Duns Scotus*, ed. M. McCord Adams, Ithaca & London 1990, 27-48; A. Bäck, *The Structure of Scotus' Formal Distinction*, in: I. Angelelli and P. Pérez-Illzarbe (eds), *Medieval and Renaissance Logic in Spain*, Hildesheim 2000, 411-38.

Wyclif⁵³ and Penbygull. <1> Like Penbygull, he considers identity and distinction (or difference) as the two possible inverse measures of the coincidence of the metaphysical components of two given entities:⁵⁴

Identitas et diversitas, convenientia et distinctio vel differentia habent se quasi private opposita, in quibus quante unum oppositorum est maius vel intensius tante alterum est minus vel remissius.

<2> He speaks of formal and real (or essential) identity, formal and real (or essential) distinction (or difference), and <2.1> states that formal identity is stronger than real (or essential) identity, since the former entails the latter, while, on the contrary, real difference is stronger than formal distinction, since the latter is entailed by the former:⁵⁵

Ad probationem posset dici, ad maiorem quod dupliciter potest una identitas dici maior alia, scilicet extensive et intensive. Sed de intensiva videtur magis ad propositum. Ideo iuxta illam dicitur consequenter negando minorem, scilicet quod identitas realis vel essentialis est maior quam formalis; nam e contra est, eo quod formalis actualiter includit identitatem realem et non e contra, sicut ex opposito differentia essentialis actualiter includit differentiam vel distinctionem formalem, sed non e converso. Unde sicut sequitur 'illa sunt formaliter idem, ergo realiter idem', sed non e converso, ita permutatim sequitur 'illa sunt realiter distincta, ergo sunt formaliter distincta', et non e converso.

<3> Finally, he admits degrees in formal distinction, as he recognizes two different types, the first of which comes very close to that proposed by Scotus in his *Ordinatio*,⁵⁶ while the second is drawn from Wyclif's *Tractatus de universalibus*.⁵⁷ The first type of formal distinction holds among things such as the intellective faculties of the soul, whereas the second holds between such things as the essence of the soul and its intellective faculties and a species and its individuals:⁵⁸

Sed distinctio formalis consistit in gradibus. Nam quaedam ex hoc distinguuntur formaliter quod neutrum eorum est in recto de altero praedicabile, sed tamen illa conveniunt in tertio singulari vel indistincto, sed tamen quod neutrum eorum formaliter est quid[am] subsistens. Et isto modo se habent potentia intellectiva et potentia voli-

⁵³ On Wyclif's formulation of the "family" notions of formal distinction see Spade 1985 (above, n. 3), xx-xxxi; Conti 1997 (above, n. 3), 158-63.

⁵⁴ Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalibus*, ed. Conti 1990 (above, n. 1), 92.

⁵⁵ Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalibus*, 91-2.

⁵⁶ Cf. Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* I, d. 2, p. 2, q. 1-4, ed. Vaticana, vol. II, 356-7; *Ordinatio* II, d. 3, p. 1, q. 6, ed. Vaticana, vol. VII, 483-4.

⁵⁷ Cf. Wyclif, *Tractatus de universalibus*, ch. 4, ed. Mueller (above, n. 3), 90-2.

⁵⁸ Sharpe, *Quaestio super libros De anima*, q. II: "utrum potentia intellectiva distinguatur ab essentia animae", Oxford, New College, ms. 238, fol. 236r-v.

tiva ad ipsam animam intellectivam. Et consimiliter habent se, secundum quosdam, bonitas, unitas et veritas respectu transcendentis, scilicet entis in communi—quod est multum probabile. Sed aliqua ex hoc distinguuntur formaliter quod aliquid est praedicabile de uno quod non de altero, licet unum de altero in recto praedicetur, et sic identificantur. Et sic concedatur quod essentia animae et sua potentia distinguuntur formaliter; sicut conceditur in alia materia quod species et suum individuum distinguuntur formaliter; et a quibusdam theologis quod essentia et persona, sicut et ipsa attributa, distinguuntur formaliter.

The two different sets of conditions for the formal distinction can be formalized as follows:

1. two entities x and y are formally distinct iff <1> both of them are constitutive elements of the same reality, but <2> neither of them can exist by itself, nor <3> is part of the definite description of the other.
2. two entities x and y are formally distinct iff <1> there is at least one z such that z is predicated of x and not of y , or *vice versa*, but <2> x and y are really identical, as one is directly predicated of the other *qua* its main intrinsic metaphysical component.

Accordingly, real identity, which is presupposed by the formal distinction, has to be defined in these terms:⁵⁹

a is really identical with b iff both of them are constitutive elements, or material parts, of the same reality, VEL one of them is directly predicated of the other *qua* its superior in the categorial line (that is, *qua* its main intrinsic metaphysical component).

As a result, Sharpe's world consists of finite beings (that is, "things" like men, horses, stones etc.), really existing outside the mind, made up of an individual substance and a host of formal entities (common substantial natures and accidental forms, both universal and singular) existing in it and through it, since none of these formal entities can exist by themselves. They are real only in so far as they constitute individual substances or are present in individual substances *qua* their properties. Specific substantial

⁵⁹ Cf. Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalia*, ed. Conti 1990 (above, n. 1), 98: "Pro quo sciendum quod dupliciter dicuntur aliqua realiter, deducta operatione intellectus creati, convenire. Uno modo quia uniuntur vel identificantur in aliquo quod est commune utrique et a quolibet illorum distinctum formaliter vel secundum rationem; et isto modo omnes homines singulares conveniunt in specie humana. Alio modo conveniunt aliqua realiter, vel ex natura rei, quia sic uniuntur vel identificantur quod unum est alterum propter essentialem habitudinem inferioritatis vel superioritatis unius ad alterum; et hoc modo homo communis et homo singularis conveniunt. Et haec convenientia videtur esse maior quam praecedens".

natures (or essences) can be conceived from two points of view: intensionally (*in abstracto*) and extensionally (*in concreto*). Viewed intensionally, specific substantial natures are nothing but the set of essential properties that individual substances are to instantiate, but considered without any reference to such instantiations. Viewed extensionally, specific substantial natures are those same forms conceived of as instantiated by at least one singular substance. For instance, human nature considered intensionally is humanity (*humanitas*), extensionally the universal-man (*homo in communi*). Humanity is properly a form, or more accurately, the essential principle of a substantial form, that is, something existentially incomplete and dependent; the universal-man is this same form considered according to its own mode of being, and therefore as a sort of existentially autonomous and independent entity.⁶⁰ Consequently, like Wyclif, Sharpe holds that a formal universal actually exists outside the mind if at least one individual instantiates it, so that without individuals common natures (or essences) are not really universals.⁶¹ This means that the relationship between common natures and singulars is ultimately based on individuation, since no actual universality and no instantiation is possible without individuation. On this subject Sharpe seems to accept the essentials of Aquinas' doctrine, since he affirms that <1> the universal-man is compounded of both common matter and form and that <2> matter as affected by dimensive quantity and other accidental properties (*materia quanta et accidentibus substrata*) is the very principle of individuation, since it causes the passage from the level of universals to that of singulars.⁶² Thus, according to Sharpe, explaining individuation means explaining how a multiplicity of individuals can be obtained from a single specific nature, the problem at issue being the dialectical development from one to many and not the passage from abstract to concrete.

Sharpe's world counts many types of entities: universal and individual substances and accidents (like *homo in communi* and Socrates and the general form of whiteness and this particular form of whiteness), universal abstract substantial essences (like humanity), universal and individual substantial forms (like the human soul in general and the soul of Socrates), general and individual differences (like the universal-rationality and the rationality proper to Socrates)—each one characterized by its own mode

⁶⁰ Cf. Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalia*, 102.

⁶¹ Cf. Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalia*, 105-6.

⁶² Cf. Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalia*, 137-9.

of being. This world is certainly very complex, but its complexity is exceeded by complexity in language. Sharpe denies that there is a close correspondence between language and the world, as he believes that our thought is caused by the world, and our language by our thought, and the relation between causes and effects is a relation of the one to the many.

Sharpe's Theory of Meaning

The basic idea of the common, medieval realist theory of meaning was that semantic classifications derive from ontological differences between the signified objects. So, according to this approach, the simple expressions of our language (i.e. names) are distinct from the complex expressions (i.e. sentences) by virtue of their own *significata*, that is, by virtue of the different kinds of objects to which they refer. In fact, the objects signified by complex expressions are compounds of at least two of those signified by simple expressions and a relation of identity (or non-identity, in the case of a true negative sentence). A simple object is an item in a category, that is, either a singular substance, a substantial form, or an accidental form. Furthermore, every simple expression of our language is like a label that names just *one* object in the world, but whereas proper names and singular expressions label individuals (that is, token-objects), general terms label common natures (that is, type-objects), which are the main metaphysical constituents of that set of individuals which instantiate them. For instance, the general expression 'man' labels and can stand for each and every man only because it primarily signifies the universal form of humanity *qua* present in each and every man as the main constitutive principle of their essence.

As we have already said, Sharpe rejects the common realist criteria for the generality of terms and accepts the core of nominalist criticisms. In his opinion, to correspond to a common nature really existing in the world is no longer the necessary and sufficient condition for being a general term. He thinks that not only those terms which signify a common nature existing outside the intellect have to be viewed as common, but also those which signify universally.⁶³

Dico quod sicut communitas signorum extra mentem scilicet vocalium etc., oritur a communitate conceptuum, ita communitas conceptuum oritur a communitate rerum

⁶³ Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalialia*, 69.

ad extra. Et ideo sicut contingit maiorem esse multiplicitem in posterioribus quam in prioribus, sicut maior est multiplicitas in effectibus quam in causis, ita non oportet quod sit tanta multiplicitas in communitate rerum ad extra quanta est in communitate conceptuum vel signorum ad placitum impositorum. Et ideo male imaginantur qui dicunt quod oportet omnem communitatem signi esse a communitate sui primarii significati.

What is more, according to him, signifying universally (that is, signifying a unified concept which, in its turn, refers to a multiplicity of things displaying at least a similar mode of being), is the most important condition for semantic universality:⁶⁴

Unde patet quod modus significandi illimitate et communiter maxime facit ad communitatem signorum.

Nevertheless, other principles of Sharpe's semantics are similar to the most important features of Burley's semantics. Thus, Sharpe maintains that <1> abstract terms, such as 'humanity' or 'whiteness', signify a common form, which is part of the essential nature of many individuals, and which has the same kind of existence as them,⁶⁵ that <2> concrete accidental terms do not signify simple categorial items but aggregates composed of an individual substance and a singular accidental form,⁶⁶ and that <3> a sentence is true if and only if it is the sign of a real truth (*veritas complexe significabilis*), that is, describes how things are in the world.⁶⁷

In Sharpe's opinion, common natures really existing in the world are causes <1> of our acts of intellection (*intellectiones*) by which we grasp them, and <2> of the mental concepts (*intentiones*) which are the semantic contents signified by spoken (and written) terms. In their turn, *intellectiones* and *intentiones* are like causes in relation to spoken and written terms. Still, neither are our acts of intellection and mental concepts universal because of the common natures, nor are our spoken (and written) terms universal because of *intellectiones* and *intentiones*. In other words, there is not a close isomorphism between the world, our thought, and our language, but only a loose connection.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalia*, 71. See also 129-30.

⁶⁵ Cf. Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalia*, 71-2.

⁶⁶ Cf. Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalia*, 83-4, and 140-1.

⁶⁷ Cf. Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalia*, 131-2.

⁶⁸ Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalia*, 68-9. See also p. 71: "Sed quoad res ad extra, in quibus primo et originaliter reperitur communitas, est longe paucior communitas quam in conceptibus vel signis".

In notitiam illorum universalium <i.e. universalium extra mentem> pervenimus ex notitiis signorum universalium et e contra. Et ratione illius provenit multis deceptio, quod credunt nullum terminum esse communem nisi sibi correspondeat aliquid ex parte rei commune, si sit terminus habens supposita actualia—quod dico propter tales terminos 'chymaera', etc. Et ratione illius ponunt aliqua communia extra genus et aliqua in genere; et illorum in genere aliqua sunt essentialia, quae significantur per terminos abstractos vel concretos substantiales, et aliqua sunt accidentalia, quae significantur per terminos concretos accidentales, ut album in communi etc. Sed illa multiplicitas universalium videtur esse tracta a posteriori, scilicet a multitudine signorum communium; et ideo non reputo eam satis securam, cum prius naturaliter sit universalitas in rebus quam in signis, et etiam quia signa possunt esse communia aliis modis quam ab universalitate significatorum.

Thus, according to Sharpe, there are six different kinds of general (or universal) expressions, both spoken and written, four kinds of common mental concepts, and three ways in which an extra-mental form can be common in relation to its *supposita* and *subiecta*. Among the simple expressions, those are universal that: <1> universally signify a common nature really existing in the world (*in re*), like the term 'humanity'; <2> universally connote a common nature really existing in the world, without directly signifying it, like the term 'white' (*'album'*), which refers to white things and connotes the form of whiteness; <3> do not refer to anything really existing in the world, but which are correlated with a universal positive concept, like the terms 'void' and 'chimaera'; <4> correspond to no common nature really existing in the world but simply to a common, trans-categorical negative concept under which a multiplicity of things can be collected, such as 'individual', 'singular', and 'person', to which correspond a concept equivalent to the negation of the notion of being common; and this in two very improper ways (*valde improprie*): <5> equivocal terms as such, since they are connected with a multiplicity of different notions, and <6> demonstrative pronouns, like 'this (one)' (*'hoc'*), when used to supposit for a common nature, even though they can signify in a singular manner (*discrete*) only.⁶⁹

As is evident, Sharpe's analysis of the types of universality for linguistic terms is based on two distinct but compatible criteria: <1> the existence of a common nature directly or indirectly signified by them, and <2> the universal mode of signifying—the latter being more important than the former. Thus, based on the satisfaction of these two criteria,

⁶⁹ Cf. Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalia*, 69-71.

Sharpe himself reduces the preceding division of the kinds of universality to a threefold partition: <1> terms that signify in a universal mode a common nature existing *in re* and thus are properly common, such as 'homo'; <2> terms that signify in a universal mode but do not refer to any common nature *in re* and thus are common in a less proper way, such as 'chymaera' and 'persona'; finally, <3> terms that do not signify in a universal mode and thus are common in an improper way whenever they refer to a common nature existing *in re*, such as 'hoc' and other demonstrative pronouns:⁷⁰

Unde posset sub trimembri divisione dici quod signorum communium aliud est commune ex parte significati et modi significandi simul, ut 'homo'; aliud ex modo significandi tantum, ut 'chymaera' vel 'persona'; et aliud ex parte significati tantum, ut ly 'hoc', etc. Et primus modus est proprius, secundus minus proprius, et tertius maxime improprius.

In turn, mental concepts are common in four ways only, corresponding to the first four ways of universality peculiar to spoken (and written) terms, since there are no universal concepts that correspond to demonstrative pronouns or equivocal terms as such:⁷¹

Sed quoad conceptus in mente dicitur quod non tante multiplicantur in communitate; nam non est dare conceptum rei pure aequivocum et communem, sicut est signum extra mentem. Similiter etiam probabile est quod talibus pronomibus demonstrantibus res communes non correspondet conceptus communis alius a conceptu termini proprie communis, nisi conceptus signi.

On the other hand, a real form (or nature) is common <1> intrinsically and quidditatively (*intrinsece et quidditative*), <2> intrinsically and qualitatively (*intrinsece et qualitative*), or <3> extrinsically and denominatively (*extrinsece et denominative*). Abstract substantial forms, like humanity, are common in the first way only, since they are real exclusively *qua* parts of the essence of individual substances. Essential differences, like rationality, are common in the first way when considered in relation to their singulars, like the rationality of Socrates or that of Plato, but in the second way in relation to the individual substances, which are their ultimate substrates of existence. Universal accidental forms, like whiteness, are common in the first way in relation to their own singulars, like the whiteness of

⁷⁰ Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalia*, 71.

⁷¹ Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalia*, 71.

Socrates or Plato, and in the third way in relation to the individual substances in which their singulars inhere.⁷²

As a consequence, within Sharpe's semantic system, concrete accidental terms (like 'white' or 'father'), whose *significata* are neither simple nor composite objects, that is, neither categorial items nor truths signifiable in a complex way (i.e. by a sentence), are a third kind of expression between those that are simple (nouns) and complex (sentences). In fact, as we have already seen, Sharpe affirms that concrete accidental terms do not signify simple objects, but aggregates compounded of substance and accidental form. Such aggregates lack numerical unity and hence do not fall into any of the ten categories, for they are not properly beings (*entia*). For this reason, concrete accidental terms, although simple expressions from a merely grammatical point of view, are not names. The two metaphysical components of such aggregates (i.e., individual substance and singular accidental form) are related to the concrete accidental term in the following way: although the concrete accidental term connotes the accidental form, this latter is not its direct *significatum*, so that the concrete accidental term can supposit for the substance only. In other words, the concrete accidental terms label substances by means of the accidental forms from which they draw their name, so that they name substances only *qua* bearers (*subiecta*) of an extrinsic form.⁷³

This fact accounts for the difference between general names of the category of substance (or concrete substantial terms), like 'man', and concrete accidental terms. The form that general names of the category of substance principally signify is really identical with the substances that they label. Hence, in this case, the name itself of the form can be used as a name of the substance. This obviously implies a slight difference in meaning between abstract and concrete substantial terms, such as '*humanitas*' and '*homo*'. While 'humanity' is not the name of the form considered in its totality, but the name of the essential principle of the form only, that is, of the intensional content carried by the term 'man', this latter term signifies the substantial form considered as constitutive element of the reality (*esse*) of a certain set of individual substances that instantiate it. As a consequence, according to Sharpe, 'man is humanity' (*homo est humanitas*) is a well formed and true sentence, since both subject and predicate signify the same entity, but 'white is whiteness' (*album est albedo*)

⁷² Cf. Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalia*, 71-2.

⁷³ Cf. Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalia*, 72.

is not, since 'white' does not directly signify the accidental form, but only the substrate in which it inheres as the bearer of that form. Therefore, it cannot stand for such a form in any sentence.⁷⁴ Thus, Sharpe refuses to follow the common opinion about the possible kinds of supposition proper to the concrete accidental terms, according to which a concrete accidental term, like '*album*' can supposit for <1> the substrate of inherence of the accidental form that it connotes (*suppositio personalis*), or <2> the accidental form itself, that is, the whiteness (*suppositio abstractiva*), or <3> the aggregate composed of the individual substance, which plays the role of the substrate of the form, and the singular accidental form at issue (*suppositio concretiva*).⁷⁵

By limiting the kinds of supposition proper to concrete accidental terms to the personal supposition alone, Sharpe goes against the developments of semantics in his time. The same independence and originality of thought appears in his solution to the problem of the semantic status of terms of second intention such as 'individual' or 'singular'—a question that was very controversial in Oxford at the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth centuries.

According to the Oxford Realists, a common term is always matched by a common nature existing *in re*, by which it can refer to a multiplicity of things. Therefore, since the term 'individual' appears to be common, as it can stand for a multiplicity of individual things, it would signify an extra-mental common nature present in them. As a result, we would have to admit the existence of an individual common nature, which would be a paradoxical entity present in all the individuals *qua* cause and principle of their being individuals.

The most common way of avoiding such a paradox was that proposed by Alyngton in his commentary on the *Categories*, which was then accepted and repeated by Penbygull⁷⁶ and Whelpdale⁷⁷ in their treatises on universals. According to Alyngton, terms like 'individual' have to be considered as singular expressions; more precisely, they are "range-narrowed"

⁷⁴ Cf. Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalia*, 72-3.

⁷⁵ Cf. for instance Penbygull, *De universalibus*, ed. Conti 1982 (above, n. 2), 196-7; John Tarteys, *Problema correspondens libello Porphyrii*, in: Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalia*, ed. Conti 1990 (above, n. 1), Appendix III, p. 175. On this subject see Conti 1990 (above, n. 1), 328-30.

⁷⁶ Cf. Penbygull, *De universalibus*, ed. Conti 1982 (above, n. 2), 194-5.

⁷⁷ Cf. Whelpdale, *Tractatus de universalibus*, ed. Conti 1990 (above, n. 1), 194-5.

expressions (*a limitatione intellectus*), like 'this man', because they identify a singular referent as a member of a given set of individuals. In fact, like any other "range-narrowed" expression, the term '*individuum*' presupposes a general concept (the concept of being), the range of which is narrowed by an act of our intellect to just a unique object among beings, or more precisely, to one object that is not common.⁷⁸ Sharpe argues that Alyngton's answer goes against linguistic usage (*communis modus loquendi*) as well as established facts (*ratio experimentalis*). If Alyngton were right, then the following argument, that everyone would admit, would be formally incorrect:

man runs (*homo currit*)
and not the universal-man (*et non homo communis*)
therefore an individual man runs (*ergo homo singularis currit*),

just like this other one:

man runs (*homo currit*)
and not the universal-man (*et non homo communis*)
therefore Socrates runs (*ergo Socrates currit*).

The reason is that the syntagm 'an individual man' (*'homo singularis'*) would be a singular term standing precisely for only one individual, just like 'Socrates' (*'Sortes'*). Furthermore, it is a fact that anyone can understand this sentence 'an individual man runs' (*'homo singularis currit'*) even without knowing who the man who is running is—which would be, on the contrary, a necessary requisite according to Alyngton's theory. Therefore, Sharpe regards second intentions of this kind as common:⁷⁹

Et ad confirmationem, qua arguitur quod ille terminus '*individuum*' vel conceptus sibi correspondens est communis; sed omnis communitas conceptus vel termini est respectu sui significati; ergo etc., hic potest dupliciter responderi. Uno modo, secundum sententiam prius tactam in positione, negando minorem. Nam multo maior varietas reperitur in communitate signorum quam rerum, sicut maior multiplicitas est effectuum quam suarum causarum. Dicitur ergo quod in quibusdam terminis solus modus significandi sufficit facere communitatem, ut videtur esse de istis terminis '*chymaera*', etc., qui non sunt termini specifici ex hoc quod representant aliquas species ex natura rei, sed quia habent quodammodo similem modum significandi cum aliis terminis specificis quibus correspondent naturae specificae in re. Et similiter dicitur quod isti termini, licet aliquo modo, sunt communes, scilicet '*singulare*', '*individuum*', '*persona*', etc., propter modum indeterminate representandi plura, licet hoc non sit pure aequivoce nec pure univoce, sed quodammodo medio modo.

⁷⁸ Cf. Alyngton, *Litteralis sententia s. Praedicamenta*, ch. *de substantia*, in: Conti 1993 (above, n. 2), 270-1.

⁷⁹ Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalibus*, ed. Conti 1990 (above, n. 1), 129-30; see also 132-3.

In this way, he restores the semantic rank that intuitively would be assigned to the ‘individual’-like terms—something Alyngton was unable to achieve. Furthermore, he admits that the nominalist explanation of the universality of signs holds in the particular case of second intentions, thus implicitly rejecting the universal value of the philosophical strategy developed by Wyclif and the other Oxford Realists of methodically replacing logical and epistemological rules with ontological criteria and references. According to Sharpe’s account, our language and thought have their own range and norms partially independent of those of the external reality, so that he acknowledges both the realist and Ockhamist foundations of universal concepts: <1> in some cases we recognize that two (or more) things are essentially or accidentally similar because of a universal nature common to them, in which they are united; but <2> sometimes we are forced to admit that two (or more) individuals are similar to one another by themselves, that is, simply because the nature of the first individual and that of the second individual at issue are alike.⁸⁰

Pro quo ulterius sciendum quod unitas intentionis, qua plura immediate univoce repraesentantur, potest dupliciter causari. Uno modo ex unitate naturae in qua multa essentialiter vel accidentaliter conveniunt; alio modo potest causari talis unitas propter similitudinem vel proportionalem habitudinem multorum inter se, licet illa similitudo non sit in aliquo uno. Et ideo magis proportionalis vel consimilis habitudo posset vocari. Et illum secundum modum solum acceptant negantes universalialia, credentes se per ipsum salvare naturam universalium—quod tamen non est verum. Et aliqui, ponentes universalialia, solum acceptant primum. *Sed ego credo utrumque modum esse accipiendum.* Primo ergo modo principaliter et secundo modo secundarie causatur unitas intentionis proprie specialis et generalis. Sed secundo modo specialiter causatur unitas quarumdam intentionum quae non sunt proprie in genere, sed circumeunt multa genera. Et isto modo, quia omnia singularia habent quosdam similes et proportionales modos existendi quorum unus ut sic non habet attributionem ad alterum, utpote quia quaelibet talis est simpliciter una et indivisa etc., ideo eis secundum istos modos similes potest correspondere unus conceptus communis cui subordinatur hoc nomen ‘singulare’, et sic de similibus. Et talis nec est proprie univocus, nec proprie aequivocus, nec proprie analogus, et potest vocari conceptus illimitatus vel conceptus vagus, ut aliqui ipsum vocant. Et isto modo bene dico ‘commune’ vel ‘conceptum vagum’, licet non admittam singulare vagum. Et ex illo patet quomodo tales termini sunt communes propter modum significandi principaliter.

⁸⁰ Sharpe, *Quaestio super universalialia*, 130-1.

Concluding Remarks

In his works, Wyclif often expresses the deepest hostility to the nominalist approach to the question of the relationship between our thought (and language) and the world. As a matter of fact, medieval Nominalists drew a sharp distinction between things as they exist and the ways in which we think of and talk about them. While the world consists only of two (or three) kinds of individuals, the concepts by which we grasp and refer to these individuals are both singular and universal, but other types as well. Nor do the relations through which we connect our notions in a proposition closely correspond to the real links which join individuals in a state of affairs. In sum, our knowledge and language do not identically reproduce the elements of reality in their inner structure and mutual relationships, but merely concern them and their connections. On the contrary, Wyclif believed that language was an ordered collection of signs, each referring to one of the constitutive elements of reality, and that true (linguistic) propositions were like pictures of their inner structures and mutual relationships. For this reason, he <1> conceived of universals as those real essences common to many individuals that are necessary conditions for our language to be significant, and <2> thought that only by associating general nouns with such universal realities could the fact be accounted for that each common term can stand for many things at once and can label all of them in the same way. His peculiar form of realism and his philosophical strategy are the logical consequences of this rejection of nominalist semantics. Oxford Realists followed Wyclif down this path and, furthermore, attempted to remove the aporetic and unclear aspects of his metaphysics. Thus, they <1> accepted his philosophical strategy and the main principles of his semantics, and <2> tried to improve his ontology by redefining identity, distinction, and predication.

As it is evident from the foregoing analyses, Sharpe is a patent exception, since he substantially shares the metaphysical view and principles of the other Oxford Realists, but he elaborates a completely different semantics, based on the following five theses, among others, which are opposed to the basic semantic assumptions of his fellow Realists: <1> the *modus significandi communiter* is the most important criterion for establishing whether a simple term is common or not; <2> there are not universal aggregates, compounded of universal substances and universal accidental forms, signified by the concrete accidental terms, like 'album'; <3> mental universals are signs of both real universals and individual things; <4> there are two

kinds of mental universals, intellections (*intellectiones*), which are the acts by means of which we understand the nature of universal forms, and intentions (*intentiones*), which are the concepts through which both general and proper names of our language are related to the things they signify; <5> transcategorical terms of second intention, like ‘*individuum*’ and ‘*persona*’, are common nouns and not singular expressions. In this way, Sharpe tried to reconcile some demands of nominalist philosophy with the realist tradition, taking into account the actual uses of words and the manner in which the terms were tied, by the rules of the language, to each other and to our concepts and ideas. As we have seen, on some very crucial points, he clearly refers to empirical facts (the *ratio experimentalis*) concerning linguistic usage in order to confute some theses proper to realist semantics. So, whereas the semantics that the other Oxford Realists wished to construct was a sort of formal language whose principles, rules, elements, and structures derived from ontology, since they conceived of semantics as a ‘translation’ of reality into natural language, Sharpe rather directs his efforts towards building up a semantics as a sort of empirical analysis of our language—a study of essentially the same kind as that occurring in modern linguistics. For him, to understand an expression is not merely to be aware of the entity connected with it, but also to be aware of its actual or potential use—an absolute novelty within the medieval realist setting.

Unfortunately, Sharpe’s semantic approach partially undermines his defence of realism. His acceptance, although restricted, <1> of the nominalist principle of the autonomy of thought in relation to the world, and <2> of Ockham’s explanation for the universality of concepts, deprives Sharpe of any compelling semantic and epistemological reasons to posit *universalia in re*. Therefore, his main ontological theses certainly are sensible and reasonable, but, paradoxically, within Sharpe’s philosophical system they cannot in any way be considered as absolutely consistent.

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