Understanding Universals in Abelard's *Tractatus de Intellectibus*: The Notion of "Nature"

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on Abelard's solution to the problem of understanding universals as presented in the *Tractatus de Intellectibus*. He examines this issue by asking what is understood when we consider the term 'man', a problem I call the '*homo intelligitur* [man is understood]' problem. This is an important question, since earlier in the *Treatise*, Abelard states that understandings paying attention [*attendens*] to things otherwise than they are are empty, and thus, cannot be true. The challenge is therefore to explain how understandings about universals, such as genera and species, can be sound, given that Abelard is a nominalist and, as such, does not believe in the existence of universal entities. His own answer to the problem is that such understandings attend to natures. However, since natures are, on his view, nothing more than the individuals they belong to, it is unclear how his solution is intended to work.

I propose two ways to understand Abelard's solution to the '*homo intelligitur*' problem, identifying their respective merits and drawbacks. The first one is to treat 'nature' as meaning '*status*'. I explore this solution in Chapters 2 and 3, and conclude that while it has the advantage of establishing links between *De Intellectibus* and previous logical works by Abelard, it has some significant drawbacks, most notably that it is unclear how we can have epistemic access to *status* given that *status* are not things, which renders unclear how the criteria for the soundness of understandings can be met. The second one involves treating natures as referring to behaviors typical of members of a given genus or species. These behaviors come from the particular essential forms possessed by individuals, *i.e.* their *differentiae* understood as analogous to nuclear tropes in Peter Simons' trope theory. I conclude that this solution is more intuitive than the first one and has the advantage of not depending on a specific interpretation of the evolution of Abelard's thought. However, it is unclear how to treat behaviors and regularities in his ontology.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS OF WORKS BY ABELARD

LI^{PS} *Logica 'Ingredientibus'*, Paul Vincent Spade's partial translation in Spade, Paul Vincent. (1994). *Five Texts on the Mediaeval Problem of Universals*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, pp. 26-56

LI^G *Logica 'Ingredientibus'*, Geyer's Latin edition in *Peter Abaelards Philosophische Schriften*, in *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters*. Band 21, Heft 1-4. Munich: Aschendorff: 1919.

TI^{PK} *Tractatus de Intellectibus*, draft English translation by Peter King

TI^{PM} *Tractatus de Intellectibus*, Patrick Morin's Latin edition and French translation in Abelard. *Des intellections*. Paris : Vrin, 1994.

Introduction
Understanding Universals

As a dog lover, I spend a great deal of my time thinking about dogs. It is a pretty mundane activity that I can accomplish with much ease: indeed, even a toddler is capable of it. But behind the apparent simplicity of such a mental act lies a set of complex issues. Most notably, we can ask what it is that we are thinking about when we are thinking about dogs. If I reminisce about my childhood dog, Pixel, then it seems obvious that what I am thinking of is Pixel. But since Pixel no longer exists, what am I thinking about *now*, since there is nothing in the world in its current state that corresponds to Pixel? And, more importantly, what am I thinking about when I think about *dogs*? Do natural kinds exist outside the mind along with their individuals, or only inside it, as products of its activity? If they do exist, what kind of thing are they? Are they found *in* the things that we sense and think about, or are they part of a separate realm? Does the existence of a species depend on the existence of items belonging to it?

Those questions are central to the medieval version of the problem of universals, which is framed by Porphyry (c. 234 - c. 305 AD) in his *Isagoge*. He begins by asking three questions, leaving them open for further, deeper inquiry:

> (a) whether genera and species are real or are situated in bare thoughts alone
> (b) whether as real they are bodies or incorporeals[1]
> (c) whether they are separated or in sensibles[2] and have their reality in connection
> with them.[3]

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[1] Incorporeals are things that are devoid of a physical, material body. In his second commentary on the *Isagoge*, Boethius identifies two types of incorporeals: those that can subsist apart from corporeal things (he gives the examples of God, the mind, and the soul) and those that are always found in corporeal things (his examples include numbers, lines, and surfaces).

[2] Sensibles are items that can be perceived by our senses; sensibles are corporeal.

[3] Spade (1994), p. 1.

Broadly speaking, there are two families of positions regarding the medieval problem of universals. Realists believe that genera and species are actual things [*res*], whereas nominalists believe that even though there are universal names [*nomina*], there are no universal *things*. In other words, realists answer the first of Porphyry's questions by saying that universals (like genera and species) are real, and not situated in thoughts alone. They can answer the second and the third questions in various ways: a realist could say that universals exist as corporeal, material things,[4] or that universals are incorporeal things that exist outside sensible things.[5] What makes these positions realist is the contention that universals exist as things outside the mind, be they corporeal or incorporeal in nature. Nominalists, on the other hand, do not believe that such things exist at all, and are therefore likely to answer Porphyry's first question by saying that universals are merely names [*nomina*]. In other words, if we were to make a list of all the things that exist, the realists would list individual entities, like dogs, but also natural kinds, like the kind 'dog.' On the other hand, nominalists would only list individuals in their inventory of every existing thing.

The medieval problem of universals, then, concerns ontology, but also language and thought. As was said before, thinking in terms of genera and species is something that comes naturally to us and that is accomplished without much effort. The question is to determine whether the generic and specific terms that we use so casually refer to corresponding universal entities outside the mind, or whether their signification can be explained without postulating anything other than individuals. One key problem for nominalists is to find a way to separate genuine natural

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[4] See for example Abelard's account of material essence theories, in LI^PS §§ 23-40; according to these theories, associated most famously with William of Champeaux, there are all in all ten material essences corresponding to Aristotle's categories. They are individuated by each thing's form, which accounts for the diversity of particulars that we encounter, and the similarities we see between particular things are explained by their really having something in common.

[5] Which is what a Platonist, who believes that universals are Ideas in a realm separate from the sensible world, would say.

kinds (such as 'dogs') from kinds that are made up (like 'dogs that have lived with me'), whereas realists will have to explain how these common natures exist, given that we never experience them directly but always as a feature of particulars.

The problem

My thesis is directly related to this discussion. Abelard is generally regarded as the first medieval thinker to defend an explicitly nominalist program. Considering that he was probably the most famous philosophical figure of his century, the literature discussing his work is surprisingly scarce compared to other main figures in medieval philosophy, such as Thomas Aquinas or William of Ockham. As a nominalist, the challenge he faces is to explain how we can understand genera and species and, most importantly, how we can make true judgements about them, if they are not actual or real things that can be found outside of the mind. More specifically, I am interested in Abelard's solution to the problem of understanding universals as presented in the *Tractatus de Intellectibus*, a treatise about understandings, i.e. "instances of conceptual thinking."[6] He examines this issue by asking what is understood when we consider the term 'man [*homo*].' This is an important question, since earlier in the *Treatise*, Abelard states that understandings paying attention [*attendens*] to things "otherwise than they are"[7] are empty, and thus, cannot serve as the basis "according to which a thing can be examined truly."[8] Of course, truth and falsity are properties of propositional compounds, but Abelard adheres to the principle of semantic compositionality, the psychological version of which holds that the conceptual features

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[6] TI^PK, §1
[7] TI^PK §67.
[8] TI^PK §63

(soundness/emptiness, truth/falsity) of composite thoughts depends on the conceptual features of their components.

His adherence to this principle can be seen first through the analogy he draws between thought and conventional languages, saying that just as we use simple words to build more complex expressions, so too we build more complex understandings out of simpler ones: we build propositional understandings with understandings of terms.[9] In addition, when Abelard discusses what makes compound understandings true or false, he assigns a role to each part:

> a thing is initially introduced into the understanding through [the subject-term], a thing we subsequently examine in the connection or removal of something else. This connection or removal (conjunction or disjunction) is accomplished by the predicate-term, and in this combination or removal we say of the thing that is the subject what we meant to point out about it.[10]

This threatens to make every single proposition about *genera* or *species* turn out false, since the truth-value of a proposition hinges on the soundness or emptiness of its subject term. The problem arises because Abelard denies realism about universals: according to him, "any thing, wherever it exists, is personally distinct and found as numerically one."[11] A thing's being "numerically one" means that it can be counted separately from other things, as when we say "this one, that one, that other one, etc." Personal discreteness or distinction is defined by Abelard as "the discreteness according to which this one is not that one";[12] it is an ontological notion, since it means that each entity is a distinct, separate *essentia*.[13] He therefore needs to explain what is understood when we understand universal terms, since they will not correspond to any kind of universal entity. If it

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[9] *Ibid.*, §29
[10] *Ibid.*, §61
[11] *Ibid.*, §74
[12] LI^PS, §41
[13] I define the notions of "numerically one" and "personally distinct" separately to insist that each is a separate notion; numerical oneness is about denumerability, personal distinction about identity.

turns out that these terms fail to refer to anything, the risk is that they will give rise to empty understandings, which in turn cannot be used to form true judgements.[14]

Abelard's argument has many steps that will be made explicit in Chapter 1, but what is important here is that his solution invokes the notion of what he calls a 'nature [*natura*]': "the nature of humanity is attended to in any of these conceptions, whether with the distinctness of a definite person, *e.g.* Socrates or someone else, or indifferently, lacking any definiteness of person."[15] How is this concept of a nature to be understood in the context of Abelard's nominalist ontology? This is the central question that I will explore in my thesis.

My approach, again, is to start from the problem of understanding universals in *De Intellectibus*. Since not much has been written about this specific work, I will clarify what is at stake in this treatise and how it relates to similar themes developed in Abelard's "Glosses on Porphyry" in his *Logica Ingredientibus*. Indeed, most of the secondary literature focuses on Abelard's treatment of the problem of universals in the *Logica*, with occasional forays into the *Tractatus de Intellectibus* to discuss certain issues present in the "Glosses on Porphyry [*Super Porphyrium*]," an important sub-treatise of the *Logica*. By taking *De Intellectibus* as my starting point, I intend to shed new light on the relationship between these works of Abelard, despite the lack of consensus on the evolution of his thought. Whereas John Marenbon paints a picture where Abelard's position on universals becomes more elaborate starting with the *Logica* and ending with

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[14] At this point, it is important to note that an empty understanding is not the same as a meaningless understanding. If I understand a chimaera, I understand something, even though this something is not a likeness of any existing thing outside of the mind. However, even though Abelard would say that the understanding of a chimaera is meaningful and has content, he considers it as a chief example of an empty (*cassi*) understanding, for it doesn't bear a relation of likeness per se with any real thing, even though it is made up of parts of things that actually exist, such as lions, goats, etc.

[15] TI[PK], §94

the *De intellectibus*,[16] Alain de Libera thinks that, on the contrary, Abelard's position in the latter work "regresses" to a form of Platonism.[17] Even though there is a wide consensus that the *De Intellectibus* was written later than the *Logica*, it is unclear how to interpret the changes between these two writings.

To accomplish my goal, I will lay out in Chapter 1 the parameters of the problem posed by the understanding of universal terms in the *Tractatus de Intellectibus*, especially in sections §91-§94 of the *Treatise*. The next four chapters will examine two ways of interpreting Abelard's solution to the problem. Chapter 2 draws on Abelard's *Logica Ingredientibus' Super Porphyrium* and proposes the hypothesis that the term 'nature' be taken as synonymous with '*status*'. Abelard's *Logica Ingredientibus* (Logic "For Beginners")[18] is his main logic textbook. It contains various commentaries on the texts of the so-called *Logica vetus*, the "Old Logic."[19] Abelard not only comments Porphyry's text, but develops his own views through his comments. Chapter 3 adds the notion of divine 'common conceptions', which Abelard borrows from Priscian and uses in the same work, to solidify the solution presented in Chapter 2. Chapter 4 turns to another type of solution, less dependent on Abelard's other writings. I examine the possibility that 'nature' might be taken in a modal sense, as to refer to behaviors observed regularly among members of a given species. Finally, Chapter 5 draws on contemporary trope theory, especially Peter Simons' "nuclear" model, to address some of the questions left unanswered by the modal reading of

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[16] Marenbon (1997), p. 172
[17] de Libera (1999), p. 385
[18] Abelard's works were not originally titled, but were named after the first few words on the manuscript. There are two '*Logica*' by Abelard, one that starts with '*Ingredientibus*', and one with '*Nostrorum Petitioni Sociorum*'.
[19] The so-called '*logica vetus*' consisted of Boethius' translations of Aristotle's *Categories* and *De Interpretatione*, Porphyry's *Isagoge*, and Boethius' commentaries on these texts -- basically the texts that were available in Latin translation prior to the recovery of the rest of the Aristotelian logical corpus in the twelfth century.

'nature.' The conclusion will evaluate the respective merits and drawbacks of the potential solutions explored in the previous chapters.

Chapter 1: *'Homo Intelligitur'*: Understanding Universals in *Tractatus de Intellectibus*

Tractatus de Intellectibus: Context and Structure of the *Treatise*

The *Tractatus de Intellectibus* is among Abelard's late logical writings, composed before he turned to writing his theological works; it is usually dated between c. 1120 and c. 1126.[20] It is therefore taken to be posterior to the *Logica Ingredientibus*, which was almost certainly written before 1121.[21] Logical writings in the twelfth century for the most part fall into two categories: commentaries on the texts of the *Logica vetus*, which are usually anonymous, and independent treatises attributed to their author in their *incipit*. *Tractatus de Intellectibus* falls into the latter category. It is attributed to Abelard in the title of its only manuscript, Avranches Bib. mun. 232, f. 64r-71v.[22] It is mostly concerned with the way the mind works and how it relates to both reality and language. In other words, *De Intellectibus* is a treatise on philosophy of mind, which explores related ontological and epistemological issues. One can easily see that this treatise is intended to be a part of some larger work. Indeed, Abelard remarks that some phrases, like 'man or horse' and 'man and horse,' can be "the same in awareness" but not in grammatical construction, a fact he says he will "pursue more fully in discussing grammatical constructions."[23] However, this discussion of grammatical constructions is nowhere to be found in the *Treatise* as it stands. Marenbon hypothesizes that *De Intellectibus* could be a part of a lost work called the *Grammatica*, which Abelard mentions having written in *Theologia Christiana* and *Theologia Scholarium*.[24] Indeed, a section discussing grammatical constructions would make perfect sense in a grammar

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[20] Marenbon, John (1997). *The Philosophy of Peter Abelard*. Cambridge University Press, p. 50
[21] Marenbon (1997), p. 46
[22] The manuscript is titled "*De Abaelardi Tractatus de Intellectibus*" by the scribe
[23] TI^PK §65
[24] Marenbon (1997), p. 51

volume. Moreover, since Abelard treats grammatical questions as closely related to his philosophy of mind, a preliminary discussion of understandings would not be out of place.[25]

Having given some background information on *Tractatus de Intellectibus*, I shall now present, roughly, the structure of the *Treatise*. Since the manuscript itself contains subtitles,[26] it is not too hard to see its principal sections. Abelard starts by distinguishing understandings from other "passions of the soul," before differentiating between various types of understandings. In the last section, he examines some problems stemming from his taxonomy. Based on King's forthcoming revised translation of *De Intellectibus*, I have established the following outline:

1. Introduction (§1)
2. Distinguishing the understandings from other passions of the soul (§2 to §27)
    2.1. Understanding vs sense (§2 to §6)
        2.1.1. Similitudes (§2 to §3)
        2.1.2. Differences (§4 to §6)
    2.2. Understanding vs reason (§7 to §11)
    2.3. Understanding vs imagination (§12 to §23)
    2.4. Understanding vs assent [*existimatio*] (§24 to §25)
    2.5. Understanding vs knowledge (§26 to§27)
3. Distinguishing between various forms of understandings (§28 to §66)
    3.1. Program (list of understandings) (§28 to §29)
    3.2. Simple vs composite (§30 to §36)
    3.3. Conjoined vs conjoining (§37 to §39)
    3.4. Divided vs dividing (§40 to §44)
    3.5. Single vs multiple (§45 to §54)
    3.6. Sound vs empty (§55 to §65)
        3.6.1. True vs false (§59 to §60)
        3.6.2. Examining something according to an understanding vs through an understanding (§61 to §62)
    3.7. Dividing, disjoining and abstracting (§66)
4. Issues raised by the distinction between empty and sound understandings (§67 to §78)

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[25] The relation between grammar and philosophy of mind will be explored more thoroughly in Chapter 2.
[26] The subtitles could have been added by a scribe. We cannot assume they are from Abelard himself.

The goal of this chapter is to expose *Tractatus de Intellectibus*'s version of the problem of understanding universals, which can be found in TI[PK] §91 to §94.[27] To accomplish this, I will first go through sections 1 to 3 of the above plan and examine how Abelard defines the key concepts used in his *Treatise*. Then, I will analyze the '*homo intelligitur*' argument itself, showing how Abelard's solution is, in fact, a dead end. Finally, I will conclude this chapter by investigating his treatment of the notion of 'nature [*natura*]' in *De Intellectibus*, showing how restricting ourselves to Abelard's definitions in this specific work cannot yield a full solution to his problem.

The Taxonomy of Understandings

Understandings and Other Passions of the Soul

The first task undertaken by Abelard in the *De Intellectibus* is to distinguish understandings from other passions (*passiones*) of the soul, namely sense, reason, knowledge, assent [*existimatio*] and imagination.[28] He starts with sense, stating that there are both similarities and differences

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[27] See Appendix I

[28] In the medieval sense, passions of the soul are ways in which the soul is affected, acted upon (from the Latin '*passio*', which means 'enduring', 'affection'). This is not to be confused with the early modern sense of "passions of the soul", which roughly means "emotions". Abelard presumably borrows this term from Boethius, who uses it in

between the two faculties. First, as he says, "understanding is bound up with sense by origin and by name."[29] When it comes to the name, we do often use the word "sense" to talk about the sense (as in the "meaning") of a sentence, which is a way to talk about how we understand this sentence. However, the similitude in their origin is far more interesting, since Abelard's point is that every time we sense something (no matter which one of the five senses is involved), we "quickly [*mox*]" understand this very thing. Since these are both mental acts that unfold in time, this means that the sensation and understanding of a thing are usually co-present in the human soul. Abelard even adds that this is why human minds have to understand things "in the likeness of corporeal things [*corporalium rerum*]," since we learn through sensory experience of our surroundings. Finally, Abelard adds a peculiar element to his analogy between sense (especially vision in this case) and understanding when he claims that "the mind situates the thing we understand before itself, in the way in which we typically tell that a thing put before us is either near or far away."[30] This suggestion is interesting, for it seems to imply that the objects of our understandings can be more complex than what we are able to discern. Just as a round tower that is far away from us can appear to be square,[31] maybe the object of an understanding can appear to us more indiscriminately than it *actually* is. This is particularly intriguing if we note that Abelard speaks of the thing the understanding "puts before itself" as some kind of mental object constructed by our own minds. Could it be the case that our mental images are more complex than what we are able to discern?

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general to cover pretty much anything that happens in the mind. On Abelard's (and Boethius') use of the term, see Guilfoy, Kevin (2004). "Mind and Cognition", in Brower, J. E., & Guilfoy, K. (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Abelard*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 200-222.

[29] TI[PK] §2

[30] TI[PK] §3; "*Eam quippe rem quam intelligimus sic animus ante se collocat, quomodo rem nobis antepositam aut proximam aut longinquam cernere consueuimus.*"

[31] This example is found in Descartes' Third Meditation in *Les meditations metaphysiques*

At this point, it is important to note that an understanding is a mental act, not the contents of the act itself, much like vision is an act which is distinct from the thing seen.

Despite the significant connection between sensing and understanding, however, there are some key differences between the two faculties, the main one having to do with the corporeal nature of the objects of sensing. We can only sense corporeal things that exist, and we do so through the use of "corporeal instrument[s],"[32] namely our sense organs. By contrast, acts of understanding require no corporeal instrument and they do not *need* to be about corporeal things, even though they *can* be. Moreover, an understanding always pays attention to things according to one or more of their properties, whereas sensing doesn't.[33] This is why sensing is common to all animals whereas acts of understanding can only happen where there is reason: this discriminative power is a distinctive trait of reasoning beings, such as humans and angels. Reason is of course always present when there is an understanding, but Abelard wants to avoid confusion between those two *passiones*. According to his terminology, reason is ease in the use of rationality. Abelard even adds that understandings "spring forth from reason as the proposed effect of reason."[34]

Understanding must also be distinguished from imagination, which is the mind's ability to recollect what was previously sensed in the absence of the sensed thing, to form mental images. Imagination is likewise distinct from reason, since imagining a thing doesn't involve any kind of examination of it with regard to some property. This was the case too with mere sensing. If such an examination of the mental image occurs, this examination is an act of understanding, not of imagination. He also adds that one can not only imagine things that have previously been sensed, but also things that have never been sensed at all (or even things that are impossible to sense, such

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[32] TI^PK §5
[33] TI^PK §7
[34] TI^PK §11

as incorporeals like the number 7), since the presence of a sensed object is not necessary for imagination. It is in this sense that Abelard claims that it is a "confused perception of the soul." Without the power of imagination, we would only be able to think about what is present to us and we would not be able to refrain from doing so.[35]

When it comes to drawing the line between understanding and assent, the important factor is whether or not we give credence to a certain understanding. Therefore, assent (or dissent) is always relative to an understanding which is of the form of a sentence asserting a division or a conjunction of things, such as 'Man is wood.'[36] However, understandings can occur without any kind of assent or dissent, since I can entertain the thought 'Man is wood' without thereby giving credence to it or denying it. Finally, Abelard discriminates between knowledge and understanding by defining the former as "mental certitude [*animi certitudo*]"[37] which subsists even if we are not currently understanding something or giving our assent to an understanding. Indeed, even if I am sleeping or not currently and actively thinking about it, I still know various things, such as my cat's name, the date of my birth, that the capital of France is Paris, etc. This characterization of knowledge seems to point towards the fact that assent is voluntary, whereas knowledge is passive, since it does not require us even to be awake and actively thinking. Moreover, since the question of assent is separate from the discussion of the truth conditions of understandings,[38] it cannot be the case that assent is automatically entailed when the understanding in question is true, otherwise the distinction between understanding something and giving assent to it would collapse into the distinction between sound and empty understandings. However, it is not clear whether, by identifying knowledge with "mental certitude [*animi certitudo*]," Abelard thinks that we can

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[35] TI^{PK} §14
[36] TI^{PK} §25
[37] TI^{PK} §26
[38] See the distinction between sound and empty understandings below.

exhibit this certitude towards understandings that are actually false, and if not, what exactly ensures that we will only be certain of things that are true. It would be very odd for him to speak of the "knowledge" of something that is false, so I will assume that there can only be knowledge of what is true even though he does not elaborate on the conditions of knowledge.

Different Types of Understandings

After differentiating understandings from other passions of the soul, Abelard classifies understandings according to whether they are:

1. simple or composite;
2. conjoining or of the conjoined;
3. dividing or of the divided;
4. single or multiple;
5. sound or empty.

Whereas simple understandings are those that can be expressed using a single word, such as 'cat' or 'dog,' composite understandings are expressed by expressions composed of more than one significant[39] word, like 'white cat' or 'The dog is barking.' One could ask whether there is a perfect symmetry between the nature of words and of understandings, namely whether all simple words give rise to simple understandings and *mutatis mutandis* for composite understandings. It seems that Abelard's answer to this question is affirmative, since he writes that "some understandings are simple (namely those to be gathered from simple words) whereas others are composite (those to be gathered from composite [expressions])."[40] Notice also that composite understandings include full sentences but are not limited to them. This distinction, in turn, leads Abelard to

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[39] TI^PK §31; Abelard here is talking about what would later be called "categorematic terms".
[40] TI^PK §30

distinguish between conjoining understandings, on the one hand, and understandings of conjoined things, on the other hand. He holds that, by understanding a name like 'animal', we have an understanding of a conjoined (or compounded) thing, since there are many constitutive parts in animals (body, 'animateness,'[41] 'capability-of-sensing,'[42] and so on).[43] This is still a simple understanding, however, since we grasp the concept 'animal' all at once, in a united way. This is not the case for conjoining understandings, which join (or copulate, in logical terms) two elements together through predication. Therefore, whereas understanding 'animal' is understanding a conjoined thing, we have a conjoining understanding when we understand the many different parts of an animal successively, as in 'animate thing that is capable of sensing.' In the same manner, we have a dividing understanding when we remove something from what was initially understood, such as when I say 'thing that is not an animal,' but we have a simple understanding of a divided thing when we consider 'non-animal.'

When it comes to telling whether an understanding is single or multiple, Abelard provides two alternative sufficient conditions for an understanding to be considered simple: it must either be simple or, if it is composite, contain a single conjunction, division or disjunction. Otherwise, if it has none of these traits, the understanding is called multiple. Here Abelard gives a characteristically temporal twist to this distinction by saying that a single conjunction, division or disjunction takes place whenever "the mind proceeds *continuously* by single mental impulse and is directed by a single intention" and "finishes without interruption the process it somehow undertook."[44] In that sense, understandings like "non-rational animal" or "Socrates' house" are

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[41] Noun formed from the adjective *animatum*
[42] Noun formed from the adjective *sensibile*
[43] TI^PK §38
[44] TI^PK §46, emphasis mine

single.[45] On the other hand, a multiple understanding contains many parts that are not connected, an understanding where "in each of the conceptions the mind returns to itself again, as if it were to begin anew in each case the movement of its awareness."[46] Examples of multiple understandings includes cases where the grammatical structure of a phrase is faulty, like in 'man wood,' or understandings which are interrupted, like if one was to have an understanding of 'rational,' pause, and then understand 'animal.'[47]

Finally, Abelard devotes almost half of the *Treatise* to the discussion of "sound [*sani*]" and "empty [*cassi*]"[48] understandings and the issues that are raised by his characterization of each; for now, we will only be concerned with his definition, even though the next section will examine one of the problems stemming from this distinction. He defines a sound understanding as an understanding "through which we pay attention to the thing as it is, whether the understandings are simple or compound."[49] When understandings fail to pay attention to things as they are, they are deemed to be empty. He then gives separate accounts of what this definition means in the case of simple and composite understandings. When it comes to singular understandings, i.e., about individual things, being sound means being "in accord with the status of things." Abelard does rely on a more technical notion of '*status*' in some other works, but in this part of the *Treatise* it seems to refer to the ontological status of a thing, that is to say, whether it exists or not. At the very least, he only gives examples in which existence or non-existence are concerned: an understanding

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[45] Examples taken from TI^{PK} §48 and §49
[46] TI^{PK} §53
[47] *Idem*
[48] King translates '*cassi*' as 'empty', but other possible translations would be 'creux [hollow]' (which Claude Lafleur opts for in his French translation of *Logica Ingredientibus*) or 'vain [futile]' (which Patrick Morin uses in his French translation of *Tractatus de Intellectibus*)
[49] TI^{PK} §55; remember that this capacity of "paying attention" is characteristic of rational beings and, as such, is proper to understandings. Whereas imagination is the activity of the mind by which we recollect images of things previously sensed, understanding necessarily implies an act of *attentio* by which a thing will be considered with respect to some nature or property.

of a chimæra is empty, because we understand through it a combination of things which doesn't exist. More interestingly, he states that "the understanding of the name 'man' would turn out to be empty if it were had with absolutely no men existing."[50] This seems to hint that the soundness of an understanding can change with the circumstances: right now an understanding of "man" is perfectly sound, but what if the human race goes extinct? Will such an understanding be empty? On the face of it, it seems that the answer to this question is affirmative, at least for a simple understanding of 'man.'

When it comes to compounding or dividing understandings, however, things get more elaborate, for they are the only ones that can be true or false. An understanding which is an affirmation or a negation is true if sound, and false if empty. Basically, in an affirmation or a negation, we first understand a subject, which we then examine according to some predicate: "a thing is initially introduced into the understanding through it [the subject term], a thing we subsequently examine in the connection or removal of something else."[51] If the results depict the thing picked out by the subject as it really is, our understanding is true; if not, it is false. In other words, the sound/empty distinction is not equivalent to the true/false distinction; truth and falsity only concern understandings which have a propositional form. It is also important to note that the soundness or emptiness of an understanding is not equivalent to its meaningfulness or its meaninglessness: when I understand 'chimaera', I understand *something*, even though I have an empty [*cassi*] understanding.[52] Whereas meaning has to do with what the understanding

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[50] TI^PK §58
[51] TI^PK §61
[52] On that topic, see Rosier-Catach, Irène (forthcoming), "Understanding as Attending. Semantics, Psychology and Ontology in Peter Abelard."

"constructs [*conficiat*] for itself,"[53] soundness and emptiness ultimately have to do with how understandings relate to the real world.

Analysis of the '*Homo Intelligitur'* Argument

Abelard is confronted with the problem of explaining what is understood in an understanding of 'man [*homo*]' when he examines some apparent implications of his definition of sound and empty understandings:

> It's usually customary to ask about the signification and understanding of universal terms (*vocum*) what things they signify or which things are understood in them. For example, when I hear the name 'man,' which is common to many things to which it is related equally, the question is raised which thing I understand in it. But if the reply were made (as it should be) that man is understood in it, there remains the question how this is true unless this man or that man or some other man were understood here, since it is the case that any man is either this man or that man or some other man.[54]

The problem arises because of Abelard's nominalist claim that "any thing, wherever it exists, is personally distinct and found as numerically one."[55] Indeed, if only individual men exist, and if we say that what is understood in an understanding of 'man' is man, it seems that the only way this can be true is if everybody understands by 'man' one of the particular, personally distinct men that exist. Otherwise, it would seem that it is just as empty as an understanding of, say, 'chimaera.'

There are three main steps to Abelard's solution to this problem. First, he invokes a possible comparison between sensing and understanding, which would result in the conclusion that understanding 'man' (the species) amounts to understanding a singular man, just like seeing something is necessarily seeing a discrete, singular thing. Second, he shows that the conclusion that understanding a universal term always means understanding an individual doesn't follow from

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[53] TI^{PK}, §5
[54] TI^{PK}, §91; Latin added by King.
[55] TI^{PK}, §74

the premises, even though in the case of sensing the conclusion happens to be true. Even if the argument is "not firm [*non esse firmam*]," it has to do with the nature of sensing, which is to deal with particular corporeal objects using particular corporeal instruments (i.e., organs like the eyes, the nose, and so on). Third, if an individual man is not what is understood through the understanding of 'man,' Abelard needs to say what *is* understood by this term. The answer he provides is that even though understandings about universals appear, *prima facie*, to be empty, they are not. They do not fail to signify: even though there are no universal things, they aim at the 'natures' of the things they are concerned with. Each of these steps will be thoroughly examined in the sections to follow.

The Analogy between Understanding and Perception

As was noted before, Abelard thinks that understanding and sense are, despite their differences, closely linked with one another. Therefore, it is not surprising to see him examining a problem that stems from the comparison of perceiving a man and understanding the word 'man.'[56] His objectors[57] contend that, if only singular men exist, then it must be the case that understanding 'man' amounts to understanding a certain particular man, in the same way that seeing a man necessarily implies that a certain particular man is seen:

> They say that just as when man is sensed, then either this man or that man or some other man must be sensed, since any man is either this man or that man or some other man, so too they reason about the understanding by analogy to sense – namely, that if man is understood, then either this man or that man or some other man must be understood.[58]

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[56] Because there are no articles such as 'a' and 'the' in Latin, it is important to note that "Seeing 'man'" and "Seeing a man" are one and the same Latin phrase, just like "Understanding a man" and "Understanding 'man'".

[57] The Latin text has '*inquiunt*', "they say", but as it stands we have no indication of whose argument Abelard is examining.

[58] TI^PK, §92

But, according to Abelard, this is absurd: it cannot be the case that, in understanding the universal term 'man', what I understand is always an individual man, be it Socrates, Plato, or Cicero. We have to be able to understand 'man' in a general manner, without the distinction of a determinate individual.

Abelard's Reply

Abelard's strategy to address the aforementioned problem is to show that this analogy between sensing and understanding does not hold. More precisely, he shows that even though it is true that someone who perceives a man perceives a singular man, someone who is understanding a man does not *have* to understand a singular man. To illustrate this point, Abelard uses an analogy between understanding and desiring:

> Likewise, when we say that a hood is desired by me, that is:
>
> > I desire a hood, and every hood is either this hood or that hood
>
> it nevertheless does not follow that I desire this hood or that hood.[59]

The fact that I desire a hood does not imply that the object of my desire is a specific hood. Indeed, it is possible for me to desire a hood even if there are no hoods in existence, or it is possible that just any existing hood will do. Perhaps even more interestingly, someone can desire a thing of a certain type, but nevertheless desire none of the existing tokens of that type. A striking example of this can be construed with regards to the TLC TV show, *Say Yes to the Dress.* Indeed, every woman that figures in the show arguably comes into the store vehemently desiring a wedding dress. However, it is possible that one of these women tries on every single dress in the store, but finds none that she desires. Logically speaking, it is possible for her both to desire a wedding dress *and* to desire none of the particular wedding dresses that exist; there is no contradiction here. In

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[59] TI[PK], §93

addition, if desiring a hood amounted to desiring a specific, existing hood, it would be possible to

desire a specific hood before even knowing this very hood exists, which is absurd. One should also

note that even if a desire is a desire for a type, it can only be satisfied by a token. From the above

remarks, we can see how it cannot be the case that, if I desire a hood, then I desire a certain

particular hood.[60]

However, in the case of sensing, it is true that, if one perceives a man, one perceives a

particular man. This is because of the very nature of sensing, which, as one will recall, is always

directed at existing, corporeal things by the means of corporeal instruments, i.e., sense organs. On

the contrary, it is possible to understand things that do not exist, such as past or future events and

even fictional beings like chimaeras or goat-stags. Accordingly, it is correct to say that "if I

perceive a man, then I perceive a certain particular man," even though the resulting inference "is

not firm [*non esse firmam*]."[61]

Universal Understandings Attend to Natures

After showing that understanding 'man' does not amount to understanding a particular

man, Abelard must explain what is attended to when we have an understanding of a universal term

like 'man'. His response is as follows:

> Thus it isn't necessary that if I were to understand man or have some concept in which to
> conceive human nature, I would thereby attend to this man or that man, since there are
> innumerably many other concepts in which human nature is thought of, such as the simple
> concept belonging to the species-name 'man', or simply of a white man or a sitting man,
> or even a horned man (although this never exists)|and the nature of humanity is attended to

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[60] Note that the analogy between desiring and understanding is taken for granted by Abelard here. In contemporary
terms, we can say that both are intentional mental states, but it is far from obvious that they have the same structure.
However, for the purpose of this argument and for the sake of simplicity, we will take it for granted that the analogy
works here.

[61] The inference is "not firm", because even though the conclusion appears to be true, it is not in virtue of the
premises themselves and the structure of the argument, but because of a fact about perception.

in any of these conceptions, whether with the distinctness of a definite person, *e. g.* Socrates or someone else, or indifferently, lacking any definiteness of person.[62]

Therefore, when we understand universal terms, we attend to natures. As Abelard states, it is possible to do so with or without "the distinctness of a definite person." But how does that solve the '*homo intelligitur*' problem, that is to say, what exactly is understood when 'man' is understood? To answer this question, we must investigate what is meant by 'nature' [*natura*] in the *Treatise*.

The Notion of 'Nature'

One major difficulty with Abelard's solution is that nowhere in *De Intellectibus* does he provide a clear definition of what he means by 'nature.' Therefore, the best we can do is to locate the passages where he gives us information about what natures are and what they are not, and give a coherent reading of the way the word is used in this specific work. Abelard talks about natures in some of his other works, but I will only reference them as needed in other chapters, as we cannot simply assume that his use of the word '*natura*' and his views have not changed from one work to another. Accordingly, my focus is on the notion as it appears in *De Intellectibus* and I will only draw on other Abelardian works insofar as they can clarify the problem in *De Intellectibus*.

Natures Are "Essentially the Same" as Their Bearers

The most explicit passage when it comes to saying what natures are is found in TI[PK] §75, where Abelard asks rhetorically: "Or what else is human nature in this man (i.e., in Socrates) but him?" before concluding, "Without a doubt it is nothing else, but exactly the same essentially."[63] Here, the fact that the nature 'man' and Socrates are essentially the same means simply that they

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[62] TI[PK] §94

[63] "*Nichil utique aliud, sed idem penitus essentialiter*", TI[PM], §76

are one single concrete thing [*essentia*]. In other words, Socrates' human nature is not something separate from him, nor something inside of him that could be considered, by itself, to be a distinct concrete thing. Therefore, natures are always individual natures, essentially identical to their bearers. Hence, Abelard's nominalist claim that "any thing, wherever it exists, is personally distinct and found as numerically one" is respected.[64] One should note, however, that a nature's being essentially the same as its bearer does not mean that it is the same in all respects. If this were the case, they would be reciprocally predicable, or convertible. This is not the case: Socrates is human, but we cannot say that human (or humanity) is Socrates. This shows that natures have a semantic and logical behavior that is different from the individuals with which they have a relation of essential sameness.

Natures Do Not Subsist Indifferently

Not only are natures essentially identical to their bearers, they also do not subsist "indifferently," that is, by themselves, "without any personal distinctness."[65] What Abelard means here by "personal distinctness" is the distinctness according to which each thing has its own identity. For example, human nature does not exist indifferently because it always has the personal distinctness of either Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, etc. In other words, it always exists in a definite, given subject, and not as a universal thing that can be instantiated. However, we can conceive of this same nature indifferently. According to Abelard, we do so by the mind's power of abstraction, which can "speculate upon the nature of some form in itself, free from any respect of subject matter, or […] reflect upon any nature indifferently, that is, without distinguishing among its

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[64] TI^PK §74
[65] TI^PK §74

individuals."[66] Thinking about natures indifferently, however, does not necessarily mean having an empty understanding:

> When the question is raised whether anyone saying that a thing is otherwise than it is says something false, it should be clarified and answered in the same ways. If we were to connect the adverb 'otherwise' to the verb 'says' and not to the verb 'to be', we shouldn't grant that anyone saying that a thing is otherwise than it is would be speaking a falsehood.[67]

In other words, what makes an understanding empty is conceiving a thing *as if it were* otherwise than it is. However, this does not mean that the mode of understanding cannot be "otherwise" than the mode of being of this same thing. By understanding human nature by abstraction, I do not understand human nature to subsist by itself. Understanding something in isolation from other properties does not amount to a denial of the existence of these other properties. In that way, even though understandings by abstraction *can* turn out to be empty, they are not automatically so. It seems that we need some kind of account of abstraction which could explain which understandings by abstraction are to be called sound, but Abelard does not provide such an account in *De Intellectibus*. To go back to the '*homo intelligitur*' problem, this helps us to see how a universal understanding is not necessarily empty just because its mode of understanding is different than the mode of subsistence of the things it applies to, but it does not explain how and when a universal understanding is sound.

Natures and Properties

Another clue as to what Abelard means by 'nature' can be inferred from the fact that throughout the *Treatise*, he keeps speaking of natures alongside properties, for example when he states that the power of reason is to attend to something according to some property or nature.[68] This suggests that both are on the same ontological plane. Indeed, both natures and properties are

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[66] TI[PK] §69
[67] TI[PK] §81
[68] See TI[PK] §7-§8 and §19

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said to behave in similar ways: neither of them can subsist indifferently, even though they can be conceived as such, and just as there can be many properties for one single thing, there can be many natures too.[69] As for the differences between natures and properties, the *Treatise* contains no explicit discussions on this topic. Abelard does give us some examples to work with, however: in §35, he cites 'body' as an example of a nature, and 'animate' and 'capable of sensing' as examples of properties. We also know from the '*homo intelligitur*' problem that 'man' is a nature. One way to explain the difference between the two is therefore grammatical: properties are what is referred to using adjectives (or maybe nominalized adjectives such as 'animateness', 'capability of sensing'), whereas natures are referred to by using nouns. Abelard's examples also seem to indicate that natures are linked to the categories present in Porphyry's tree: they are indicated by names of *genera* and *species*, like 'animal', 'body', and 'man'; this is another way of explaining the difference between natures and properties. Furthermore, in §37, Abelard states that the nature 'animal' is constituted of matter and form. In the case of human nature, he specifies that it is the same as 'rational mortal animal.'[70] From these comments, we can see that the philosopher of Le Pallet seems to think of natures as substantial properties and, as such, situated in Porphyry's tree.

Evaluation of Abelard's Solution to the '*Homo Intelligitur*' Problem

Recall that Abelard's problem was to explain how understandings about universals could avoid being empty; since he believes that only individuals exists, on the face of it, it seems that he is committed to saying that, when I understand the universal 'man,' I understand a specific man, where I am not supposed to. His solution involved saying that universal understandings are not about individuals, but rather about natures. However, as we have seen, natures are essentially the

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[69] TI^{PK} §73
[70] TI^{PK} §20

same as the individuals they apply to. Therefore, Abelard's proposed solution does not solve the problem, but merely pushes it further away. If natures are essentially the same as individuals, we are stuck with the same problem as before. Abelard's characterization of natures as composites of matter and forms also points in this direction: it seems that natures, in *De Intellectibus*, are effectively nothing more than the individual substances. He does state that we can understand natures "by abstraction," with no distinction of subject, but it is unclear how we can do so and what would remain, since he also states that natures are *nothing more* than the individuals that bear them. Moreover, we still need some kind of account of what makes an abstract understanding of a nature empty or sound; we know such an understanding is not necessarily empty, but we lack the conditions under which it is. If there is any hope of solving the problem of universal understandings, we will have to consult other works from Abelard to find the tools to escape this dead-end, in particular we need more complete accounts of (1) what a nature is and (2) how the mind relates to natures.

Chapter 2: Natures as *Status*

The goal of this chapter is to explore a potential solution to the '*homo intelligitur*' puzzle, which involves treating the notions of 'nature' and '*status*' as synonymous. I start by explaining the proximity between the two notions, which is what suggests that this solution is viable. I next explore its potential as a solution to the puzzle. Then, I consider a few obstacles encountered by such an approach, and suggest ways in which they can (or cannot) be overcome. I end the chapter by concluding that even though this solution sheds some light on the puzzle, it is not ideal and, therefore, we ought to continue looking for a better solution, a search that will continue in the chapters to come.

Nature and *Status*

To someone acquainted with Abelard's major works, it is easy to notice how closely related his notions of '*natura*' and '*status*' are. Indeed, as Abelard states in the 'Glosses on Porphyry' from his *Logica Ingredientibus*, "Now someone's being a man, which is not a thing [*res*], we call the *status* of man. […] We can likewise call the *status* of man the things [*res*] themselves established in the nature of man, the common likeness of which he who imposed the word conceived."[71] As Spade remarks in a footnote, this last sentence is puzzling, because in this passage and others, Abelard strongly emphasizes the fact that *status* are not things. However, we will leave this issue aside and, to be consistent with the rest of his works, assume that *status* are not things [*res*], though not nothing [*nihil*] either. It is still hard to understand what a *status* is ontologically speaking, which is also the case with the notion of nature. All that we know is what they aren't things [*res*] subsisting by themselves, apart from individual entities. This passage from the *Theologia Christiana* adds some precision as to the meaning of *status*:

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[71] LI^{PS}, §92

> And we commonly speak of "the same type [*status*]" or "diverse types [*status*]" for items the same or diverse in definition. Thus we say that this type [*status*] is that only when this thing is completely the same as that in definition, and we say this type [*status*] is not that only when this thing is not completely the same as that in its expressed being [*in expresso esse suo*], i.e. it is not completely the same in definition.[72]

It is important to note that Abelard speaks of items themselves as being defined, not merely the words associated with them. Moreover, as King notes, Abelard's use of definition goes beyond the strict Aristotelian notion of definition (which entails that only *species* can be defined, since an Aristotelian definition is a combination of *genus* and *differentia*). Indeed, as we will see in the next passage, the peripatetician of Le Pallet hold that singulars and even artifacts can be *definienda*.[73] In King's words, "Abelard holds that x is the same in definition as y when (a) what it is to be x requires x to be y, and (b) what it is to be y requires y to be x; otherwise, x and y are different in definition."[74] This is made more explicit by Abelard's example involving a sword and a blade:

> Thus when it is said that a blade [*ensis*] and a sword [*mucro*] are the same by definition it is as though it were said that a blade and a sword are the same essence in a such a way that its being a blade demands only that it be a sword and conversely. That is, a blade and a sword are not only the same essence but also being a blade [*esse ensem*] is completely the same as being a sword [*esse mucronem*].[75]

Since Abelard states that items that are the same in definition are the same in *status*, it follows that, if natures are the same as *status*, items that are the same in definition have corresponding natures. Intuitively, this makes sense. For example, two things that are defined as rational animals are also two things with a human nature. This is also true of *status*, as we have seen: two things having the

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[72] Excerpt from Abelard's *Theologia Christiana*, in Tweedale (1976), p. 190
[73] King (2004), p. 88
[74] *Idem*
[75] Excerpt from Abelard's *Theologia Christiana*, in Tweedale (1976), p. 189. Here, Abelard is describing his stricter notion of sameness by definition, which only applies to one essence (or, in our terms, one concrete thing). He is therefore speaking about how a single thing can be both a blade and a sword, and that these are the same in definition. This strict sense of sameness in definition implies sameness in essence, insofar as only one concrete thing is concerned. However, as King notes, Abelard often speaks of sameness in definition in a broader sense, according to which two distinct essences can be "the same in definition". It is this broader sense that we are concerned with here. For more on this, see King (2004), p. 88.

same *status* is the same as two things being the same in definition. Given how close the two notions are, it seems that understanding the term 'nature' as a synonym of '*status*' is a plausible interpretation of what Abelard means by the former.

The Role of *Status* in the 'Glosses on Porphyry'

To gain insight on how the notion of *status* can be used to solve problems related to the semantics of universal terms, one can look at Abelard's 'Glosses on Porphyry', a commentary on Porphyry's *Isagoge*, which was itself written as an introduction to Aristotle's *Categories*. This text is part of the *Logica 'Ingredientibus'*, a collection of commentaries on the texts of the *logica vetus*, or 'Old Logic.'[76] The main goal of the 'Glosses on Porphyry' is to answer the three important questions left unanswered by Porphyry in the *Isagoge*, albeit slightly reformulated and examined through the lens of Boethius' answers to them:

> There are three questions, as Boethius says "mysterious" and "very useful" ones, attempted by not a few philosophers, but solved by few of them. The first is this: "Do genera and species subsist, or are they posited only in", etc.?[77] As if he said: "Do they have true being, or do they reside in opinion only?" The second is: "If it is granted that they truly are, are they corporeal essences or incorporeal?" The third: "Are they separated from sensibles or posited in sensibles?"[78]

Abelard starts by examining (and then refuting) the possible realist answers to these solutions, in which universals are said to be existing things [*res*], before presenting his own nominalist theory. The central role played by the notion of *status* is to explain the common cause of imposition of universal names on many different individuals. In other words, why does a universal name, like 'cat,' apply only to a certain group of things, and not to other things? How are the boundaries of

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[76] The so-called '*logica vetus*' consisted of Boethius' translations of Aristotle's *Categories* and *De Interpretatione*, Porphyry's *Isagoge*, and Boethius' commentaries on these texts -- basically the texts that were available in Latin translation prior to the recovery of the rest of the Aristotelian logical corpus in the twelfth century.

[77] Here Abelard is citing from Boethius' second commentary on the Isagoge, where Boethius asks about genera and species "whether they subsist or are posited in bare understandings only"; see Spade (1994), p. 20

[78] LI^PS, §§3-6

this group determined? *Status*, according to Abelard, is what is responsible for a name's being applied to a definite collection of objects. For example, 'man' names all singular men in virtue of the fact that they all agree in being men [*in esse hominem*]. One should not make the mistake of thinking that this means that there is a thing [*res*] in which all men agree: their *status*, i.e. their being men, is not a thing at all, as was stated before. But Abelard anticipates a potential objection here: if *status* are not things, then how can they be the cause of anything? He addresses this concern quickly by saying that there are causes which are not things. To support his point, he uses the example of a man who was flogged because he did not want to go to the forum. In this case, the cause of his being flogged is the fact that he did not want to go to the forum, which is not a thing. Therefore, according to Abelard, there is no problem at all with saying that *status* are the cause of the imposition of a universal name on a diversity of singular things, and saying at the same time that *status* are not things.[79]

This example is intended to work by drawing an analogy between the man's not wanting to go to the forum causing his being flogged, on the one hand, and how *status* are the common cause of imposition of universal names, on the other hand. But how can this analogy between a mental state (the lack of desire to go to the forum) and *status* work, given that *status* are part of the extramental world? Just like desires, *status* concern individuals. Abelard goes to great lengths to remind us that there are no universals, and *status* are no exception:

> Thus Socrates and Plato are alike in *being a man*, as a horse and an ass are alike in *not being a man*, for which reason each of them is called a 'nonman'. So for things to agree with one another is for each one of them *to be the same* — or *not to be the same* — for example, *to be a man* or *to be white*, or *not to be a man* or *not to be white*.[80]

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[79] Here, even though Abelard states that his example proves that *status* can be causes without being things, it seems that he actually does not succeed. Indeed, his argument merely goes to show that causes do not need to be things [*res*], but that doesn't establish that *status* themselves can be actual or real causes, and how it would work.

[80] LI^PS, §90

Socrates' *being a man* and Plato's *being a man* are not one and the same thing in which they meet, but rather they are *alike*; Abelard does not expand on this matter, but in all likelihood what he has in mind is a basic relation of similitude between the *status* of these two men, which allows us to tell unproblematically that they are "the same" in that regard when we attend to them. The analogy between *status* and desire is also helpful in understanding just how *status*, which are not things [*res*] but nevertheless exist, can be causes. *Status* are a *sui generis* ontological category, but they seem to have an ontological status close to what we now call facts (understood as obtaining states of affairs), insofar as they exist without being concrete things or properties of things.

Provided that we give credence to the idea that *status* can be properly regarded as causes, the role of *status* in fixing a term's reference suggests that universals might be said to signify *status*. Some commentators take that route. For example, Martin Tweedale, in *Abelard on Universals*, concludes his fifth chapter by saying that, for Abelard, "universal expressions signify types [*status*], but types [*status*] are not themselves denotable[81] and thus are not at all things".[82] However, some contend that this cannot be right. For example, John Marenbon, reconstructs the argument for treating *status* as the signification of universal terms as follows:

> (1) That according to which a word is imposed is that word's signification.
> (2) The common cause of the imposition of a word is that according to which it is imposed.
> (3) Abelard says explicitly that the common causes of the imposition of universal words are *status*.
> Therefore
> (4) According to Abelard, universal words signify *status*.[83]

According to him, we cannot accept (4), because Abelard arguably did not accept (1); in other words, he believes that Abelard did not accept that a word's signification is that according to which

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[81] According to Tweedale, types [*status*] are not denotable because they are always expressed through verb phrases (*esse* + accusative), where the noun itself is not detachable; since they are only expressed by phrases that are not denotative, they cannot be denoted. See Chapter V of Tweedale (1976).
[82] Tweedale (1976), p. 304
[83] Marenbon (1997), p. 193

it is imposed. Note here that this is an argument about the signification of universal words, rather than universal understandings. According to Marenbon, even though the common cause of imposition is indeed the *status* of things, universal words do not signify *status*, but rather the universal understandings to which these words give rise in a listener's mind. He draws a distinction between two senses of the word 'signification' in the twelfth century. In the broad sense, a word's signification is "any sort of way in which language stands for a thought or thing."[84] However, twelfth century thinkers tended to also use the word 'signification' in a stricter sense to refer to whichever of these significations in the broad sense was most important on their view. And for Abelard, as he argues, it was acts of understandings that were to be regarded as the 'correct and proper' signification of words.[85] It might be true that, as Marenbon holds, Abelard thinks that universal words signify understandings rather than the types themselves, but it is an open possibility, at this point, that universal understandings do signify *status*.

The Solution: Treating Natures as *Status*

The debate on the signification of universal words and understandings in *Logica Ingredientibus* offers insight as to what a potential solution to the '*homo intelligitur*' problem could look like. Recall that, in *De Intellectibus*, Abelard says that universal understandings are not automatically empty, because they are about natures. If we also adhere (*contra* Marenbon) to the idea that universal expressions signify *status*, then it seems like the talk about 'natures' could just be a way to speak of *status*. Consistent with this interpretation is the way that Abelard talks about *status* in *De Intellectibus*. Sometimes he seems to use the term in a way that makes it close to his notion of a nature, such as when he states that "Aristotle calls sound understandings 'the likenesses

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[84] Marenbon (1997), p. 182

[85] *Idem*

of things', *i.e.* understandings that conceive the *status* of a thing as it is,"[86] which is strikingly similar to Abelard's claim that universal understandings are sound insofar as they attend to natures. At other times, he reserves the word '*status*' to talk about the ontological status of things: "Singular understandings are sound when they are in accord with the status of things; otherwise they are empty, *e.g.* if I were to understand a chimæra (which doesn't exist at all) or if I were to understand a chimæra to be something (although it is nothing at all)."[87] From these passages, it seems like the *status* as it appears in *Logica Ingredientibus* and the notion of nature in *De Intellectibus* could have the same meaning, with Abelard using the word '*status*' in the latter work to talk about whether a thing exists or not (*i.e.* its ontological status) and the word 'nature' when he wants to talk about *status* understood as belonging to a certain natural kind (i.e., the technical notion of *status* introduced in the *Logica Ingredientibus*).

Now, it remains to see how identifying nature with *status* could solve the '*homo intelligitur*' problem. First, it could explain how universals are not empty even if there are no universal things. Indeed, even though *status* are not things [*res*], they are not nothing [*nihil*] either, and are part of reality. The *De Intellectibus* did not introduce such entities, but by borrowing the notion from the *Logica Ingredientibus*, we can see how universal understandings could be sound without needing to postulate the existence of corresponding universal things; we merely need *status*, which exist and are individual, but are not things. The threat of emptiness is defeated by the fact that we identify what understandings are about in the extramental world (namely, *status*), without needing to treat them as universal things.

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[86] TI$^{\text{PK}}$, §57
[87] TI$^{\text{PK}}$, §58

How Can We Understand *Status*?

The most obvious obstacle to this solution is that it seems to create a problem when combined with Abelard's requirement that sound understandings "conceive the *status* of a thing as it is". It is hard enough to understand what *status* are, ontologically speaking, but it is even harder to see how we could picture them by means of mental images. What does the *status* of "being a man [*esse hominem*]" looks like, and how can I conceive of it? This question seems like a critical threat to the solution, but it might not be so threatening after all, given the role played by mental images in the *De Intellectibus*. Whereas it is true that in other works, such as the *Logica Ingredientibus*, Abelard held that the validity of our thoughts depended on their degree of resemblance with the external world, this is no longer the case in *De Intellectibus*. Not only are images unnecessary for understanding; they are now conceived as potential obstacles. While it is true that human understanding is always accompanied by images made up by acts of imagination, Abelard claims that this is an effect of our habit of sensing:

> as long as we are trying to examine some nature or property in a given thing through an understanding, and we want to attend to that alone, the customary manner of sensing (from which every human notion arises) forces certain things on the mind through imagination, and we don't pay any attention to them.[88]

In this passage, we can see that the mental images created by our imagination often involuntarily come to mind, and can constitute an obstacle to cognition by contaminating our understanding with irrelevant or even misleading information. For example, if I try to think about the redness of my tea cup, I can't help thinking of its shape, its coldness, its hardness, and so on. Not only are these images "forced" on our minds; they can even impair our understanding, especially when it comes to things that we cannot sense:

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[88] TI^{PK}, §19

> Indeed, this happens to such a remarkable extent that while I am attending to something *qua* incorporeal through an understanding, I am constrained to imagine it as though it were corporeal, in the fashion of the senses. Or, while I am understanding something *qua* not coloured, I imagine it as though it were coloured, compelled by the customary force of sense.[89]

From these passages, we can conclude that Abelard has revised his views about the role of images: even though they were the necessary objects of acts of understanding in the *Logica Ingredientibus*, they can now be obstacles for our understanding to overcome. Whereas the soundness of understandings in the *Logica* was judged in accordance with the level of resemblance to the extramental world, Abelard relies on a different relation of thoughts with reality in his *De Intellectibus*. Instead of the qualities of the images themselves, what becomes central to Abelard's account of cognition is the notion of attention [*attentio*]: what matters is not everything that comes to mind, but what we *pay attention* [*attendere*] to. As such, the truth of our thoughts is not a function of the disposition/characteristics of our mental images but rather a function of the mode of attending [*modus attendendi*]. *Attentio* is a characteristic necessary to constitute an understanding, since understandings must examine things according to a certain nature or property; otherwise, there would not be any act of understanding; only acts of imagination by which the mind entertains a certain image. Indeed, the mental images that almost always accompany our understandings are acts of imagination; even though imagination and understanding often occur together, the two acts are distinct. Therefore, what matters for the soundness of an understanding is not the image formed by imagination simultaneously with the act of understanding, but rather what nature or property the latter attends to. Sound understandings are those according to which we can "truly examine" an existing thing, and this is determined by what we attend to.[90] If no object is examined according to our understanding, such as when I understand a chimaera, then

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[89] TI^{PK}, §20
[90] See TI^{PK}, §63 and §69

this understanding is empty. In the same way, if I have an understanding of a laughing cat, by which I attend to the nature "cat" as conjoined with the property of risibility, then I have an empty understanding. What images accompany these thoughts is not what determines their soundness or emptiness.

As Irène Rosier-Catach puts it, the recurrent notion of *attentio* discussed by Abelard in dealing with understandings directs him "towards an intentionalist semantics, which insists on the difference between the speaker's act of focusing on something (the *modus attendendi*) and this something as existing (the *modus subsistendi*), and away from a semantics based on the notion of similitude."[91] The importance of this notion in *De Intellectibus*, she remarks, is made manifest by the number of times it is used throughout this short treatise of little more than 20 pages. Indeed, I have counted at least 54 occurrences of forms of the noun '*attentio*' or the verb '*attendere*,' which shows how important this notion became for Abelard. As Rosier-Catach emphasizes, one of the important things it allows him to do is to explain how the mode of attending to something can differ from this thing's mode of subsistence, pointing to two possible readings of the question "whether every understanding is vain [*vanus*][92] that attends to a thing otherwise than it is."[93] On the one hand, if we think that the adverb 'otherwise' modifies the verb 'attends,' then we should answer negatively. Indeed, the mode in which I understand a thing can be otherwise than a thing's mode of subsistence, without resulting in a vain understanding. This is exactly what happens in the case of what he calls understandings by abstraction, where a nature, such as 'humanity,' is examined by itself, setting aside the specific individual it belongs to and its accidents. On the other

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[91] Rosier-Catach (forthcoming). "Understanding as Attending. Semantics, Psychology and Ontology in Peter Abelard", p. 2

[92] The Latin text uses '*vanus*' instead of '*cassus*', but it is pretty clear from the context that Abelard is using them as synonymous in this passage. Indeed, he is merely restating his criterion for empty understandings, only using a different term; this is not a new notion being defined, merely an inconsistency in his terminology.

[93] TI[PK], §80

hand, if the adverb 'otherwise' is taken to modify the verb 'is,' we should answer that, yes, such an understanding is vain (or empty): if we think of something as being otherwise than it really is, such as thinking that cats have wings, then surely such an understanding should be called empty.

Now that we have established that understandings which attend to a thing in a mode different than its mode of subsistence can be sound, we still need to explain under which conditions they are sound or empty. According to Rosier-Catach, this is determined by a further act of *attentio*. Therefore, if we consider the case of an understanding with a propositional structure, such as "Socrates is sitting", three acts of attention are involved: we must attend to Socrates as a subject thing, we attend to him as sitting, and only through an additional act of attention we can determine in what way we take these understandings to relate to the world. For example, do we understand "Socrates" and "sitting" as being conjoined, or disjoined? Do we consider them as describing the current state of the world, or something that happened in the past? Do we assent to the sentence, or merely entertain the thought without giving it credence? It is the answers to these questions that will determine whether we are mistaken or not. Notice how the soundness of our understandings depends not on features of mental images, but merely on the way we attend to certain things or mental contents. As Rosier-Catach puts it, "it is the act of attending to this combination of images at a given time, according to a given mode, that characterizes the rational activity." Therefore, even if it is the case that we can't picture the *status* correctly, as it subsists, in terms of the mental image which is formed in the process, that is not enough to say that we have an empty understanding. We also have to remember that assent is an act of the soul distinct from understanding, even though it is also an effect of *attentio.* Therefore, one can entertain an empty understanding, such as the idea of a flying cat, without giving it credence through a further act of

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attentio. Even if this person cannot be characterized as being mistaken, her act of understanding a flying cat is nevertheless empty.

We now know what the relation is between thoughts and reality that determines whether our thoughts are sound or empty. However, it is unclear whether this really solves the problem. Indeed, the fact that we cannot picture what a *status* is like is not a problem anymore, but a new problem now looms: what kind of epistemic access do we have to *status*? Unfortunately, we are left with no clue as to how to answer this question. We are left without an explanation of how we could be said to attend to *status*, given that we can hardly be said to experience *status*.

Sound Understandings Must Attend to *Things*

In addition to the problem posed by our lack of epistemic access to *status*, equating nature with *status* creates another concern, this time regarding its compatibility with the very definition of sound understandings. Indeed, it states that "understandings are sound through which we pay attention to the thing [*res*] as it is, whether the understandings are simple or compound".[94] Notice how the definition is worded: it specifies that sound understandings must attend to *things* [*res*] as they are. Given how '*res*' is a technical term in Abelard, and the lengths to which he goes to specify that *status* are not *res*, it would be surprising for him to consider that *status* are some of the things our sound understandings can attend to. The use of this term cannot be taken as a simple mistake, even moreso because this wording of the definition of sound understandings is consistent throughout the *Treatise*. The formulation of the '*homo intelligitur*' problem itself uses this terminology:

> It's usually customary to ask about the signification and understanding of universal terms (*vocum*) what things they signify or which things are understood in them. For example,

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[94] TI^PK, §55; in Latin : " Sanos quidem dicimus intellectus per quoscumque ita ut sese **res** habet attendimus, siue illi quidem sint simplices, siue compositi."

when I hear the name 'man,' which is common to many things to which it is related equally, the question is raised which thing I understand in it.[95]

From these passages it seems clear that Abelard thinks that for an understanding to be sound, it must be about one or more *res*. If it's about something other than a thing [*res*], it does not satisfy the criteria for soundness. The most obvious answer to this problem is to invoke §75 of *De Intellectibus*: "What else is corporeal substance in this body but this body? Or what else is human nature in this man (i.e. in Socrates) but him? Without a doubt it is nothing else, but exactly the same essentially."[96] If we consider natures and *status* to be one and the same thing, it follows from this passage that *status* are essentially the same as the individuals that they apply to. In this sense, attending to a *status* would be the same as attending to an individual, which is itself a concrete thing.

But this interpretation creates a new issue. If *status*, like natures, are one and the same as the individuals they belong to (i.e. "exactly the same essentially", as Abelard puts it), it seems that we still fall prey to the problem identified in the first chapter, namely that our universal understandings are empty because they attend to individuals rather than universals. At the very least, it seems that the introduction of the notion of *status* does little to solve the problem created by Abelard's claim that natures are essentially the same as individuals, while still being the proper objects of universal understandings.

Status and Natures Are Expressed Using Different Grammatical Forms

One final concern about treating natures as equivalent to *status* is that they are always expressed using different grammatical forms. Human nature is expressed as a noun phrase,

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[95] TI[PK], §91. Latin : "Solet frequenter quaeri de significatione atque intellectu uniuersalium uocum, quas res uidelicet significare habeant, aut quae res in eis intelligantur. Ut cum audio hoc nomen *homo* quod pluribus commune est rebus ad quas aequaliter se habet, quam rem in ipso intelligam quaeritur."
[96] TI[PK], §75

'*humana natura*', whereas the corresponding *status* is expressed by an infinitive verb phrase, '*esse hominem* [being a man].' This grammatical difference could indicate that Abelard draws a distinction between both concepts, especially given how Abelard emphasizes the relation between the grammatical categories of our conventional languages on the one hand and the features of our acts of thinking on the other.[97] One possibility is that Abelard might mean something more "substantial" by 'nature,' whereas *status* are abstract. Related to this is the fact that it is dubious that we can substitute these terms *salva veritate*: "I understand human nature" does not seem to have the same truth conditions as "I understand being a man." Furthermore, "I understand 'man'" seems to mean something closer to "I understand human nature" than to "I understand being a man." If this grammatical difference is relevant and not merely an artifact of conventional languages, it seems like natures can be understood, whereas it is hard to say how *status*, like being a man, could be understood.

Conclusion

In summary, treating 'nature' as having the same meaning as '*status*' is perhaps the most intuitively plausible way of making sense of what Abelard means by the former in his solution to the '*homo intelligitur*' problem, especially given the striking resemblances in the way each term is used. The central issue is to explain how universal understandings, such as 'cats are animals,' can be sound, even in the absence of universal entities. Equating 'nature' with '*status*' is promising in that regard, since it provides an interpretation of the obscure notion of 'nature' that treats it like an existing entity, albeit not a thing [*res*]. It provides us with an explanation of why our universal understandings can avoid the threat of automatic emptiness: they can be sound, insofar as they are

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[97] See TI[PK], §30: "The nature of understandings is just like the nature of the words that give rise to the understandings." Simple understandings are those gathered from words, just like those gathered from phrases are composed understandings.

about *status*, and existing entities, although not universal things that would violate Abelard's nominalist ontology. However, this reading does not come without difficulties. First, it is hard to understand how we can have any kind of epistemic access to *status* and, therefore, how we can *attend* to them. Second, the fact that *status* are not things conflicts with Abelard's definition of sound understandings as attending to *things* in the way they really are: if *status* aren't things, it seems they cannot satisfy the condition for having sound understandings. Third, differences in the grammatical forms used to refer to natures and *status* create doubt as to whether the two notions are really equivalent. Perhaps most concerning, however, is the fact that the notion of *status* seems unable to do more work than the notion of 'nature' to solve the '*homo intelligitur*' problem. This solution also assumes that Abelard kept the same notion of *status* throughout his writings and really viewed nature and *status* as equivalent notions. In other words, it is dependent on a certain reading of the evolution of Abelard's thought. As a consequence, a more flexible solution which fits with more than one interpretation of how his thought developed would be preferable. The search for such a solution continues. In Chapter 3, I attempt to solve some of the issues underlined above by appealing to the notion on 'common conceptions'. In Chapter 4, I examine another reading of nature, which I call the 'modal conception of nature', and which could allow us to avoid some of these criticisms.

Chapter 3: Divine Common Conceptions and the Soundness of Understandings

In the last chapter, I have shown that treating 'nature' as synonymous with '*status*' provided a partial and thus unsatisfactory solution to the '*homo intelligitur*' puzzle. Indeed, even though this provided us with a viable hypothesis of what Abelard means by 'nature', in the end this interpretation fell short of providing the tools needed to fully solve the puzzle. Along the way, however, we have gathered some useful elements: most notably, we have seen that *attentio* was the relation between mind and world that allowed us to judge which understandings are sound and which ones are false.

This chapter will build onto the work done in Chapter 2 to present an improved version of the proposed solution, drawn from Abelard's discussion of divine common conceptions in the *Logica Ingredientibus'* 'Glosses on Porphyry'. I will start by explaining the notion of common conceptions as it appears in the Glosses. Then, I will draw on this notion to improve the solution presented in Chapter 2. I will end the chapter with a critical evaluation of the revised solution.

Common conceptions

Abelard discusses Priscian's notion of 'common conceptions' (or 'common forms') in the part of his 'Glosses on Porphyry' where he explains the signification of universal names. According to the peripatetician of Le Pallet, these names signify certain individuals, but also signify a form in the understanding of the listener (in today's terms, the concept corresponding to that universal word). In addition to these two modes of signification, universal names can be said to "signify" in yet another way, which he draws from Priscian's writings: in a certain sense, these names signify "the general and special forms of things constructed intelligibly in the divine mind

before[98] they go forth into bodies."[99] These exemplary forms are the common conceptions [*communes conceptiones*], which belong only to God.[100] They were conceived by Him before the act of Creation and it is according to them that He brought all the substances into existence out of nothing. This suggests that things that are alike in *status* are so because their origin can be traced back to the same common conception. Therefore, *status* are mind-independent in the sense that they do not depend on human cognition, even though they are not things [*res*]. However, even though human beings can identify things as being alike in *status*, they cannot understand these common conceptions proper to the divine mind, since "the external sensuousness [*exterior sensualitas*] of accidents prevents men from conceiving the natures of things purely."[101] Accordingly, human beings cannot have true "awareness" [*intelligentia*] of the things they encounter in this life, because they can only come to know these things by sense perception.[102] As a consequence, it seems that they can only have "opinions" [*opiniones*] about these matters.[103]

At this point, it would seem that we can also merely have opinions (rather than *intelligentia*) about species and genera, especially because we cannot even sense them. However, it is not that simple:

> Yet any names of any existing things, insofar as is in their power, generate understanding
> rather than opinion, since their inventor[104] meant to impose them in accordance with certain

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[98] Note that the priority here must be understood as logical rather than temporal, since time only came to existence with the Creation.

[99] LI^PS, §111

[100] This is the technical term used in Abelard's 'Glosses on Porphyry'. It is important to note that these 'common conceptions' are divine conceptions. The use of the term 'common' can be misleading here, as it seems to suggest that these conceptions are in some way shared, but this is not the case.

[101] LI^PS, §113

[102] *Intelligentia* (which King translates as "awareness" in his translation of *De Intellectibus*) is not to be confused with *intellectus* (which is translated as "understanding"). The two terms do not seem to be interchangeable, as Abelard speaks of *intelligentia* especially when discussing divine knowledge; *intelligentia* seems to refer to a full awareness of what a thing is, whereas an *intellectus* can be sound or empty, i.e. be more or less exact.

[103] LI^PS, §§ 114-115

[104] In Abelard's times, Adam was considered to be the original impositor of words, on the authority of Gen. 2:20

natures or characteristics of things, even if he did not know how to think out the nature or characteristic of the thing.[105]

In other words, even though we cannot understand the common conceptions that correspond to universal names, those names can generate a certain awareness [*intelligentia*], not only opinion, about the things that they name because they were intended to do just that. Indeed, in the scheme of Porphyry's tree, a species is defined by the genus to which it belongs, combined with one or more *differentiae*, that is to say traits that are only possessed by the members of a given species and that allow us to identify them more precisely. When the original impositor imposes a name for a species, his intention is to name it in accordance with all the *differentiae* that characterize it, even if he might not currently know all of them. As Abelard explains in *Dialectica*, "Although the impositor did not understand distinctly all the *differentiae* of man, he wanted the word to be taken according to all the *differentiae* of man, whatever they might be, although he conceived them confusedly."[106] This view depends on a thesis that Marenbon calls Abelard's "strong naturalism": the idea that (1) the world is made of natural kinds and that (2) we unproblematically know to which kind a given substance belongs.[107] Strong naturalism explains how the impositor of a name can succeed in identifying an individual as a member of a certain kind, and the fact that it is named in virtue of features that it possesses, although they might not appear clearly to the mind of the impositor. It is important to note, however, that this does not mean that our understandings can be as perfect as those of God. Divine understandings transcend sense and imagination, whereas human ones are bound to these lesser faculties. Abelard claims that such pure understandings "[belong] to very few men and [are] characteristic of God alone," which I think should be interpreted as meaning that these understandings specifically belong to God, but can be bestowed

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[105] LI^PS, §116
[106] Excerpt from Abelard's *Dialectica*, from Marenbon (2004), p. 162
[107] See Marenbon (1997), p. 117

upon human beings in the rare case of a divine revelation. However, the texts suggest that such understandings cannot occur naturally in human beings (since they can only be the result of divine revelation), although some of our understandings are closer to divine understandings and some others are more confused.

But the names of species and genera are not only used to refer to the natural world. According to Priscian, these names also act like proper names for the common conceptions and can "direct the listener's mind" towards them, although it is unclear what he means by "directing the mind" towards these forms. It is by interpreting this phrase that I intend to propose a second solution to the '*homo intelligitur*' problem. However, before we can explain how the notion of 'common conceptions' can be used in our solution to the puzzle, two difficulties with using this notion must be addressed.

Two Difficulties Associated with the Notion of 'Common Conceptions'

Abelard's discussion of Priscian's divine common conceptions is still puzzling to many commentators. A first difficulty with the treatment of this issue in *Logica Ingredientibus* is that it is unclear whether he adheres to this theory or if he merely acknowledges its existence. Tweedale, for one, thinks that Abelard merely mentions that it is possible to hold that universal words name divine common forms, because there is no passage where the peripatetician of Le Pallet refutes this view, but nothing suggests that he endorses it either.[108] But as attractive as such a simple explanation might be, I believe it is untrue that Abelard does nothing more than to acknowledge the existence and coherence of Priscian's view in his Glosses. Indeed, after his extensive discussion of common conceptions, Abelard brings them up once more when he gives his own

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[108] Tweedale (1976), p. 187

solution to Porphyry's three questions.[109] When giving his answer to the second one,[110] Abelard is confronted with the question of "whether universals [appellate] only the sensibles themselves or also [signify] something else,"[111] to which he answers that "they signify the sensibles themselves and at the same time the common conception that Priscian ascribes especially to the divine mind."[112] If it were the case that Abelard did not subscribe at all to Priscian's theory, it is hard to see why he felt compelled to reference it yet again in his own solution to Porphyry's questions. Strengthening my case is the fact that Abelard does not mention other authors whose views he expounded earlier in his commentary, like Plato. This further supports the view that Abelard does more than merely acknowledge Priscian's views on common conceptions. In addition, Tweedale's reasons for suspecting that Abelard did not buy into what he calls the 'Priscian-Plato view' leave me unconvinced. He holds that "the Priscian-Plato thesis would seem to run counter to Abailard's basic tenet that words must signify the real world we think and talk about, not something mental which we use to think of things."[113] Yet, as we have seen, Abelard thinks that universal words can be said to 'signify' in various ways, and the fact that they signify Priscian's divine common conceptions in a certain way does not prevent them from signifying, in another way, the things that populate the natural world. There is no problem with Abelard holding that words have different types of signification, and this is indeed what he holds in LI^{PS} §§107-111. I therefore am of the opinion that Abelard genuinely believes that a universal word's directing the mind towards a divine conception is one of the ways in which it signifies, at least in the *Logica 'Ingredientibus'*.

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[109] See Chapter 2 (p. 28)
[110] "If it is granted that they [genera and species] truly are, are they corporeal essences or incorporeal?" (LI^{PS}, §5)
[111] LI^{PS}, §157
[112] LI^{PS}, §158
[113] Tweedale (1976), p. 187

A second difficulty that makes the discussion of common conceptions puzzling is its conspicuous absence from *Tractatus de Intellectibus*. This is especially mysterious given the presence of the "quasi-mystical" themes identified by Alain de Libera in this treatise.[114] Indeed, as we have seen in the previous chapter, Abelard considers that our senses can be an impediment to the proper understanding of things, insofar as we cannot refrain from imagining or sensing properties that we are not interested in, or even imagining non-corporeal things as if they were corporeal. The discussion takes a turn that De Libera qualifies as "quasi-mystical" when Abelard draws on Boethius, who says that "the customary manner of sensing is bound to us to such an extent that we can never, or hardly ever, understand something we don't imagine as corporeal or subject to distinctively corporeal properties,"[115] further adding that "this awareness – which he [Boethius] says belongs to extremely few men and is more characteristic of God alone – so transcends any sense and imagination that we have it without either, so that nothing occurs to the mind except that alone which is understood and attended to."[116] These "extremely few men" can only attain this form of knowledge through "an excess of contemplation" [*excessum contemplationis*] which brings "divine revelation."[117] De Libera describes this discussion as "quasi-mystical" because of the insistence on the possibility of revelation, but also because he remarks the presence of terms characteristic of twelfth-century mysticism, like *contemplatio*, *revelatio*, *excessus*,[118] or the participle '*assumpta*'.[119] Therefore, even though Abelard does not talk about common conceptions in *De Intellectibus*, he treats of a related theme: understandings

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[114] For this discussion, see De Libera (1999), pp. 430-443.
[115] TI[PK], §21
[116] *Idem*
[117] TI[PK], §22
[118] King translates *excessus* as 'excess', but Morin's French translation, '*ravissement*' (which is close to the English 'rapture') seems to convey the Latin meaning more accurately.
[119] De Libera (1999), p. 437

which properly belong to God and are "purer", more accurate than human ones, and which humans cannot access except through divine revelation.

Common Conceptions and the Solution to the '*Homo Intelligitur*' Puzzle

The idea that *intelligentia*, the highest form of knowledge, is only attainable through divine revelation hints to a possible solution to the '*homo intelligitur*' problem. Indeed, it suggests that the validity of our understandings is linked to their causal connection with divine conceptions. Recall that, in the 'Glosses on Porphyry' of the *Logica Ingredientibus*, Abelard claims that universal words (1) name divine conceptions and (2) "direct the listener's mind" towards them. Since the knot of the '*homo intelligitur*' problem is to explain just how universal understandings can be sound when no universal things exist, this "directing of the mind" towards common conceptions could be the key to explaining the soundness of universal understandings.

Given that a sound understanding must be about something that exists, Abelard addresses the problem of what is understood when 'man' is understood by saying that such an understanding is about the nature [*natura*] of man. In the previous chapter, I sketched a hypothesis: that the notion of 'nature' should be taken as synonymous to the notion of '*status*'. However, as we have seen, this assimilation of nature to *status* was by itself insufficient to explain the soundness of universal understandings, even though it provided a plausible reading of what was meant by the obscure notion of *natura*. However, as was also mentioned above, common conceptions can be regarded as the source of *status*, since they are the "blueprints" according to which every natural thing was created *ex nihilo*. Accordingly, things that are alike in terms of their *status* are so because they can be traced back to this same origin. As an example, all human beings have the *status* of 'being human' [*esse hominem*]; through their lineage, they can be traced back to Adam and Eve, the original human beings who were directly created by God in accordance with God's conception of

them. Combined with the claim that universal terms are proper names for common conceptions which direct our minds toward them, this suggests a solution. This 'directing of the mind' could be accomplished through the act of *attentio* by which we attend to *status* through an understanding. The soundness of universal understandings could be a result of this indirect relation to common conceptions: since *status* ultimately come from them, an understanding of *status* is, in the end, linked to common conceptions belonging to God, through their effects. Of course, this is not to say that we can properly understand these ideas; our understandings lack the perfection of divine ideas. This approach fits with the "quasi-mystical" (in De Libera's words) discussion at the beginning of *De Intellectibus*, which explicitly states that true *intelligentia* is extremely rare among human beings, perhaps only possible in the rare case of divine revelation through "an excess of contemplation" [*excessum mentis*].[120] It is also in line with the idea that the highest form of knowledge comes from a divine source, through revelation.

In summary, we can devise a plausible solution to the '*homo intelligitur*' problem by interpreting 'nature' as meaning '*status*' while adding Abelard's claim that our universal understandings direct our minds towards divine common conceptions: the soundness of our universal understandings derives from their connection to divine ideas, to which we are linked through attending to *status*. Ultimately, we use universal words (and the corresponding concepts) to think about the world we live in, not about God's ideas. However, there is a connection between our language and divine ideas, both through the causal chain that links things to the conceptions in God's mind, and through this "directing of the mind". Because *status* are an effect of common conceptions, and because things have a *status* because of God's conceptions, it helps to explain why status have the kind of rigidity that they have, and need to have in order to solve the problem.

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[120] TI^{PK}, §22

It resembles a case of reference through misdescription insofar as our mental content need not be completely accurate for our minds to be "directed towards" the right divine conception.

Critical Evaluation

One of the problems with identifying the notion of nature with that of *status* is that it is unclear how *status* can map perfectly onto the kinds present in the natural world, which make them mind-independent. Common conceptions, as they appear in the *Logica Ingredientibus*, provide an answer to that question. Indeed, as we have seen, the *status* that are part of our world are a result of the fact that God created the world *ex nihilo* according to the various conceptions he had in mind, much like a carpenter makes a table following a mental model of what he wants to make. As an example, all horses have the status of 'being a horse' because they happen to have been created in accordance with the same 'blueprint', so to speak. This is useful in explaining why *status* have the degree of objectivity and stability they have in order to explain which understandings are sound and which ones are empty.

However, there are some concerns with relying on the notion of common conceptions to explain how attending to *status* can account for the soundness of our universal understandings. As we have mentioned before, there is no talk of common conceptions in *Tractatus de Intellectibus*. Yet, for the solution presented in this chapter to work, we have to assume that (1) Abelard genuinely bought into Priscian's account of common conceptions (which, as we have seen, is debatable) and that (2) he still held this theory to be true by the time *De Intellectibus* was written. Even though I gave a few reasons to think that (1) is the case, (2) poses a challenge. Indeed, we possess no evidence that would allow us to conclude that Abelard, when *De Intellectibus* was written, held the doctrine of common conceptions to be true. This is not enough to warrant a complete rejection of this solution, but it does call for caution.

Although Abelard doesn't mention common conceptions in his *Tractatus de Intellectibus*, he does talk about God, most notably in the aforementioned passage about reaching pure knowledge through *excessus mentis*. As we have said, linking the soundness of universal understandings to divine common conceptions fits well with some themes present in *De Intellectibus*, especially the idea that true intelligence [*intelligentia*] is only available to God or perhaps to a small number of human beings, through revelation. However, a problem looms. Indeed, this 'quasi-mystical' discussion, although present in *De Intellectibus*, is very short and circumscribed: it is brought up in §21 and it ends in §22, never to be raised again. It appears in the section of the *Treatise* where Abelard examines the relation between understanding and imagination, although it is important to note that when he speaks of God's *intelligentia* as being inaccessible to human beings, he is not talking about understanding [*intellectus*]. The relation between understandings and intelligence is, unfortunately, not discussed, and we are left with virtually no clue as to how Abelard intended the two notions to mesh together, even if that was his intention. It is also important to note that the discussion of the '*homo intelligitur*' problem itself, and of sound understandings in general, contains no trace of these discussions about God. This casts doubt on the idea that Abelard intended his solution to the problem to involve God in any significant way, which would be the case with a solution hinging on the notion of common conceptions.

In addition to the doubts created by the absence of common conceptions from the *De Intellectibus* and by the discussions about God in the treatment of the '*homo intelligitur*' problem itself, an even more important problem remains. Indeed, the proposed solution, i.e. treating 'nature' as meaning '*status,*' maintains some of its flaws despite the additions made in this chapter. Even though the appeal to common conceptions helps to explain what *status* are and how they can

account for the soundness of universal understandings, it cannot provide an explanation of how we can attend to *status* or, in other words, what kind of epistemic access we have to them. However, since Abelard states that in having a sound understanding we must attend to [*attendere*] natures, and since we assume in the proposed solution that natures are *status*, we need such an explanation. Unfortunately, common conceptions, even though they can help to resolve other issues, cannot help us with this task.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented the notion of common conceptions as it appears in Abelard's 'Glosses on Porphyry' and used it to supplement the solution sketched in chapter 2, which involved treating 'nature' as synonymous with '*status*.' Indeed, common conceptions can be seen as the source of *status*, which explain how they can be real, extramental entities that have the kind of stability required to explain the soundness of universal understandings. However, as we have seen, using the notion of common conceptions comes with its own problems. First, there are textual issues, as the notion is absent from *Tractatus de Intellectibus*, and whether Abelard ever did believe there were such things as 'common conceptions' at the time he wrote his 'Glosses on Porphyry' is not settled either. Second, and perhaps more importantly, one of the major problems with treating natures as *status* is left unsolved even by our improved version of the solution: we are still left with no account of what it means to 'attend to' natures, given that it seems we have no epistemic access to *status*. The next chapters will concentrate on this issue by presenting other possible readings of what natures are. The conclusion will evaluate these attempts in order to determine each one's merits.

Chapter 4: A Modal Conception of 'Nature'

In the previous chapters, I proposed a solution to the '*homo intelligitur*' problem which involved treating "nature" as a synonym of "*status*" (Chapter 2). I then used the notion of common conceptions as it appears in Abelard's 'Glosses on Porphyry' to explain the stability and rigidity of *status*, which was required to guarantee the soundness of universal understandings. Although the sketched solution is plausible, several problems remained with this approach, the most concerning of which is that it doesn't seem that we have any epistemic access to *status*. To address this issue, I will put forward another interpretation of what Abelard could have meant by '*natura.*' This interpretation, which I call the modal conception of nature, is intended as an alternative to the *status*/common conceptions solution. Therefore, after explaining the modal conception of nature and how it sheds light on the '*homo intelligitur*' problem, I will evaluate its merits in contrast with our previous solution.

Nature as a Modal Concept

In Chapter 1, I gathered what little information Abelard gives us as to what he means by 'nature' in *De Intellectibus*. Remember that, in the *Treatise*, he explicitly claims that natures are "essentially the same" as the individuals of which they are predicated, and that these individuals are "personally distinct" and "numerically one." They are "essentially the same" insofar as a thing and its nature are one single *essentia* (in the twelfth-century sense, i.e. a singular concrete thing), rather than two separate things. In the same sense, these things are "numerically one" because they are numerically the same; if they were numerically different, it would be possible to count them separately as discrete units, in the way I can count sheep in a pen. Lastly, "personal distinctness" is that according to which each thing has its own "identity"; for example, human nature does not exist indifferently because it always has the personal distinctness of either Socrates, Plato,

Aristotle, etc. In other words, natures always exist in a definite, given subject, and not as universal things that can be instantiated.

Since so little is said about natures in *De Intellectibus*, sketching a satisfactory solution to the '*homo intelligitur*' problem will require us to move beyond what is written in the *Treatise* itself. As Peter King notes in his chapter of *The Cambridge Companion to Peter Abelard*, Abelard, throughout his writings, seems to consider that an individual's nature is to be identified with its having a certain specific or generic substantial form. However, he also notes that Abelard "often uses the word 'nature' loosely to cover more than the individual's substantial form, instead capturing the typical material organization, behavior patterns, way of life, and so on."[121] As an example, we could say that boiling at 100°C is part of the nature of water, just like hibernating in the winter is part of a black bear's nature. This is an idea Abelard extracts from Boethius: "Boethius says that a nature is 'the likeness of things that come into being,' as though to say explicitly that the same things are of one nature that are similar to one another by natural activity."[122] Or, as King puts it: "what it is to be a certain kind of thing is deeply tied in with what things of that sort are able to do."[123] Therefore, I distinguish between the *strict sense* of the word 'nature', which is taken as a synonym of 'substantial generic or specific form,' and the *broad sense* of 'nature,' which is a way to speak of behaviors typical of the members of a certain natural kind.[124] The latter is what I call the modal conception of nature: something's nature in the broad sense is like a set of rules dictating a thing's behavior in modal terms, like what it will do under certain conditions or what is possible or impossible for such a thing to do. For example, in the medieval conception of human

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[121] Peter King, « Metaphysics », in Brower, J. E., & Guilfoy, K. (2004). *The Cambridge Companion to Abelard*. Cambridge University Press, p. 81
[122] *Ibid.*, p. 82. Quote taken from *Sententiae secundum Magistrum Petrum,* 17
[123] *Ibid.*, p. 83
[124] From this point forward, I will use the term "behavior" in a loose sense, to refer to the ways in which things react to various stimuli and situations, and how they function in general. This use of the term "behavior" does not imply that behaviors are voluntary actions on the part of an agent.

nature, a human being is necessarily rational. We could also say that human nature in the broad sense includes things like never having wings, or dying of hypothermia if left naked in a snowstorm for hours. Behavior is dynamic and contextual: a thing's behavior unfolds in time and depends on circumstances. This is interesting considering that, as Marenbon points out, Abelard tends to "think about possibilities in terms, not of alternative possible worlds, but of alternative possible life stories."[125] Therefore, the modal conception of nature urges us to think about things not only as they are present to us in an instant, but as acting in time. It is important to note, however, that the modal conception of nature is not fundamentally different from nature in the strict sense. Indeed, the behaviors that are part of something's nature (in the broad sense) stem from this thing's having certain forms.[126] To continue with our example, a human being must be rational because it possesses the form 'rationality.'

The solution

Recall that the knot of the '*homo intelligitur*' problem is that, since there are no universal things, it seems that our understandings about universals are empty, for they correspond to nothing in reality. Abelard meets this challenge by stating that universal understandings are not empty, because through them we understand 'natures.' However, this solution proves insufficient, for as we have seen, Abelard clearly says that natures are "nothing more" (metaphysically speaking) than individuals. Therefore, we have to explain how appealing to natures can solve a problem that an appeal to individual things cannot solve, given that those natures are nothing more than the individuals of which they are predicated.

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[125] Marenbon (2013), p. 178
[126] In Abelard's terminology, the term 'forms' refers to both particular accidents and *differentiae*. In today's terms, *differentiae* could be characterized as essential forms.

The modal conception of nature allows for a plausible interpretation of Abelard's solution: when he says that through universal understandings we understand natures, he could mean that we understand patterns in how certain things typically behave. It is an empirical and dynamic, since it relies on our observations and actual experiences of things over time. This is compatible with Abelard's nominalist claim that "any thing, wherever it exists, is personally distinct and found as numerically one."[127] There are only individuals, but they show certain typical behaviors that allow us to tell that they belong to a certain genus or species. Ultimately, the broad, modal sense of "nature" is reducible to the stricter sense of the word, since the behaviors typical of, say, a horse depend on its forms, especially its *differentiae*. However, since we do not have any kind of direct epistemic access to forms, understanding 'nature' in its modal sense yields a more intuitive picture of what it means to understand a thing's nature. This suggests that we can use the behavior of natural things as a kind of proxy by which we can come to have an understanding of their substantial forms. Since a thing's potentialities are rooted in its having certain given forms, its behaviors are an indication of an underlying metaphysical structure. Of course, since this knowledge of the nature of things is by proxy, it is always flawed. And since behaviors unfolds in time, getting to know a thing is always a gradual process. But this is consistent with the passages where Abelard talks about the imperfection of human understandings, a theme we approached in the previous chapter. In that sense, our understandings of natural things are not empty or mere opinions, insofar as even though we cannot sense (and therefore truly, fully understand) their substantial forms, there is still some evidence of these forms that is accessible to us through our senses (through observation of behavior).

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[127] *Ibid*., §74

Just as was the case with the *status* solution presented in Chapter 2, the notion of *attentio* plays a key role in explaining how the modal conception of nature provides a viable reading of Abelard's solution to the '*homo intelligitur*' problem. Recall from Chapter 2 that the soundness of understandings is not judged in accordance with the features of the mental images that accompany them, but rather it depends on an act of attention [*attentio*]. As such, sound understandings are those that attend to a thing as being the way it really is. Since Abelard tells us that what we understand through universal understandings is the nature of things, sound understandings must attend to the nature of things. Ultimately, as we have seen, this means that we attend to their substantial forms, but we do so by attending to the behaviors typical of a thing in virtue of the natural kind it belongs to. Therefore, the soundness of an understanding depends on whether I'm attending to a thing's nature in this modal sense in an accurate way, that is to say, whether I attend to something as behaving in the way that it actually does. To sum up, the modal conception of nature allows us to paint an intuitive picture of what it is to understand a nature: doing so means attending to a thing's essential forms, which is done by attending to their effects, that is to say the behaviors typical of a thing possessing certain given forms. For example, if I am observing Socrates, I can remark that he talks, reflects upon things, solves problems, and other behaviors that indicate his possessing rationality, which makes him human. And because I have observed other human beings, I notice that these behaviors are found among all members of this kind, and that Socrates' rational behaviors say something about his human nature.

At this point, it is important to clarify that taking 'nature' in its broad, modal sense does not mean that universal understandings attend to the behavioral *regularities* themselves. Indeed, such a reading implies that we would be attending to the relation of similarity between the behaviors of two or more substances, and one could argue that, since relations are a type of

universal, this is incompatible with Abelard's nominalism. However, this is not the case. In the proposed solution, recall that we attend to natures, which are particular; this was taken to mean that we attend to behaviors that are typical of a certain kind of thing. But these behaviors are nonetheless an individual's behaviors. For example, if I attend to Socrates' human nature, I attend to his typically human behaviors, such as his rational thinking. Of course, I know that rational thinking is typical of human beings *because* I have observed similarities between various human beings and the way they behave, but I am still attending to Socrates' own behavior, which stems from his own substantial form of 'rationality.' With that being said, nothing precludes us from forming an understanding about the relation of similitude between, say, two rationalities, like Plato's and Socrates', but this would be a different understanding altogether. But even in cases where we are attending to relations of similitude, there is no problem. Indeed, relations are not universals on Abelard's view. In the *Dialectica* and the *Logica*, he holds that they are particular accidents and, as such, particular things [*res*]. For example, each father has its own "fatherhood". More surprisingly, this also means that a father with three children will have three different fatherhoods, one corresponding to each child.[128] He later abandons this view in favor of the idea that relations are not things [*res*] at all.[129] It is difficult to know which view he held when he wrote *De Intellectibus*, but no matter which of the two views he held at the time, he does not see relations as universals, even though this view arguably has some surprising consequences.

Critical Evaluation

The link between substantial forms and behavior is what makes the modal conception of nature a good candidate for solving the '*homo intelligitur*' puzzle. An obvious advantage is that it

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[128] See Marenbon (1997), pp. 144-145
[129] This view is found in the *Theologia Christiana*, see Marenbon (1997) p. 157.

provides a reading of what Abelard means by 'nature' that is consistent with his nominalist ontology: it need not appeal to any entity in addition to the ones whose existence Abelard already acknowledges. More interestingly, though, it allows us to mitigate the pessimistic conclusion reached by Alain de Libera concerning the possibility of knowledge in *Tractatus de Intellectibus*. One of the main issues with human knowledge is that we can only have mere opinions about the things we cannot sense, rather than intelligence [*intelligentia*].[130] Unfortunately, we cannot perceive substantial forms through our senses; if natures are forms, it seems that we can never really *know* them. However, appealing to the broad sense of 'nature' in the solution to the '*homo intelligitur*' problem allows us to be more optimistic regarding what it is possible to know in this life. While it is true that we have no firm grasp of a thing's substantial forms, we do have a pretty good understanding of what kind of behavior to expect from animals, plants, and other natural things. And while that is undoubtedly not sufficient to have intelligence [*intelligentia*] of those things, it does open up the possibility of more comprehensive empirical knowledge. Indeed, we can use the behavior of natural objects as a proxy that allows us to have a certain understanding of a thing's generic/specific substantial form(s), without having *intelligentia* about them. And although the *intelligentia* of a thing is necessarily sound, it is not the only possible way to obtain a sound understanding. In that sense, our understandings of natural things are not empty thoughts or mere opinions, insofar as even though we cannot sense (and therefore can't truly, fully understand) their substantial forms, there is some evidence of these forms that is accessible to us through our senses, through the observation of the behavior of natural entities.

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[130] In this passage, *intelligentia* refers to a higher mode of cognizing, a full grasp of the thing that is understood. Sometimes Abelard seems to use the term to talk about the thought involved in an act of understanding, but here he seems to be thinking about the traditional sense of the word, namely higher cognition.

A potential problem with adopting a modal understanding of '*natura*' results from the emphasis on behavioral regularities. Indeed, as Porphyry remarks in his *Isagoge*, some traits are typical of a species, but nonetheless accidentally so:

> They [the ancients, especially the Peripatetics] divide property in four ways: (a) What belongs accidentally (i) to one species only, even if not to all of it, as practicing medicine or doing geometry does to man. (b) What belongs accidentally (ii) to all of a species, even if not to it alone, as being a biped does to man. (c) What belongs (ii) to all of a species and (i) to it alone at the same time, as growing grey-haired in old age does to man. (d) The fourth kind of property: that in which belonging (i) to only one species, (ii) to all of it, and (iii) always, all go together, as risibility does to man.[131]

Porphyry wants to restrict the strict sense of "property" [*proprium*] to the fourth one, where possessing the property implies being a member of a certain species: being human implies possessing the aptitude to laugh, as possessing the aptitude to laugh implies being human. These *propria* follow from a thing's nature, without being part of it. However, we can see that some properties (in the broad sense) are found in all and only members of a certain species, without being properties in the strict sense. How can we distinguish between accidental similarities and ones that are indicative of a thing's belonging to a given genus or species on the sole basis of observation? Moving beyond the cases identified by Porphyry, one could even conceive of the following situation: imagine that, at some point, winged dogs were roaming the earth. Unfortunately for them (but maybe fortunately for us), they disappeared in the wake of a tragic natural disaster that destroyed all traces of their existence. All current dogs are devoid of wings, and we have no way of knowing that there used to be winged dogs, and that the fact that those do not exist is simply coincidental. By mere observation of the natural world, we could conclude that dogs cannot, by their nature, fly. However, in our scenario, this conclusion would be incorrect. This suggests that a solution based on a modal understanding of nature creates an epistemological

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[131] Porphyry, *Isagoge.* in Spade (1994), p. 10

concern: if typical behavioral patterns are supposed to act as a proxy for substantial generic or specific forms, but we cannot determine which patterns reveal membership in a genuine natural kind and which ones are accidental, it seems that we should have a hard time properly mapping the joints of the natural world, so to speak. This runs contrary to our experience and to Abelard's strong naturalism.[132] Given the important role of this principle in his philosophy, the tension between it and the modal solution is troublesome. It seems that we want to reserve the term 'nature' to refer only to genera and species, but it is unclear how the modal solution allows us to do that. The *status* solution, for its part, resisted this problem because *status* have their origins in divine common conceptions, which guarantees that there can only be *status* of relevant, natural kinds. In other words, whereas the modal solution is more intuitive than the *status* one, it lacks the rigidity that comes from the latter's foundations in the Divine mind.

Conclusion

The goal of this chapter was to show how interpreting 'nature' in a modal sense could provide a plausible reading of Abelard's solution to the '*homo intelligitur*' problem. This solution involves thinking of universal understandings as attending to a thing's behaviors that are typical of members belonging to the same natural kind. These behaviors come from a thing's having certain substantial forms; as such, even though we have no direct epistemic access to them, observation of a thing's behavior can provide a form of knowledge by proxy of its forms. This solution has the advantage of being plausible not only philosophically but exegetically, in terms of understanding what Abelard is saying in this text. In addition, since the development of Abelard's views on universals is a controversial topic that depends on the dating and authenticity

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[132] According to Marenbon (1997), Abelard's strong naturalism corresponds to his view that (1) the world is made of natural kinds and that (2) we unproblematically know to which kind a given substance belongs.

of certain works, it is worth noting that the proposed solution does not rest on any specific interpretation of the relation between his writings. I have merely proposed an interpretation of the '*homo intelligitur*' problem as it appears in *Tractatus de Intellectibus,* relying heavily on this specific text and its features. However, this solution rests on the aforementioned principle of "strong naturalism": this is no problem for Abelard, since he accepts that there are natural kinds and that we know which members belong to them virtually without any difficulty, but might affect the philosophical value of the solution in the mind of contemporary readers who do not accept this principle as readily as he does. In addition, it cannot explain how we are able to isolate the behavior patterns that indicate belonging to a proper natural kind from accidental behavioral regularities, which seems to impair our ability to "carve nature at its joints". Drawing on contemporary trope theory, Chapter 5 will aim to correct this problem.

Chapter 5: Contemporary Trope Theory and the '*Homo Intelligitur*' Problem

Whereas the previous chapters marshalled the resources found throughout Abelard's works in order to shed light on the concept of 'nature' as it appears in *De Intellectibus*, the goal of the present chapter is to explore whether contemporary trope theories could provide insight on the same question. I will briefly introduce some of the main ideas found in contemporary trope theory. I will then underline the reasons why one could be tempted to draw a parallel with Abelard's metaphysics, and how this work has indeed been done by scholars such as Christopher Martin, John Marenbon, and Alain de Libera. However, they have mostly centered their discussion around early trope theorists such as D.C. Williams and Keith Campbell, whereas I believe that a comparison with Peter Simons' own brand of trope theory, which he calls the 'nuclear trope theory', brings us closer to what Abelard has in mind. The last section will therefore explore how this comparison can help us understand Abelard's solution to the '*homo intelligitur*' problem.

Contemporary trope theories: the basics

The origin of contemporary trope theory is usually traced back to D.C. Williams' 1953 article, "On the Elements of Being I", where he proposes that reality is made of only one type of entity, namely "tropes", or "abstract particulars."[133] The same core idea would be famously defended by Keith Campbell roughly three decades later, first in the article "The Metaphysic of Abstract Particulars,"[134] and then in a book titled *Abstract Particulars.*[135] For both authors, the objects we experience are nothing but bundles of properties, which are particular, as they have their own location in space in time. For example, my tea cup is a combination of its particular

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[133] See Williams (1953).
[134] See Campbell (1981).
[135] See Campbell (1990).

redness, its shape, its temperature, and so on. The fact that there are many red things is explained without needing to postulate the existence of universal entities: there are simply individual instances that resemble each other, and they form "resemblance classes." As for the 'abstract' part, Williams and Campbell understand it in slightly different ways. For Williams, tropes are abstract insofar as they are a "'thin' or 'fine' or 'diffuse sort of constituent, like the color or shape of our lollipop, in contrast with the 'thick', 'gross', or 'chunky' sort of constituent, like the stick in it."[136] For him, 'concrete' and 'abstract' are not two discrete categories, but are understood as a gradient: "The color-cum-shape is less abstract or more concrete or more nearly concrete than the color alone but it is more abstract or less concrete than color-plus-shape-plus-flavor, and so on up till we get to the total complex which is wholly concrete."[137] Thus, Williams' tropes are abstract because of their degree of metaphysical simplicity. On the other hand, Keith Campbell defines abstractness in the following way:

> an item is abstract if it is got before the mind by an act of abstraction, that is, by concentrating attention on some, but not all, of what is presented. A complete material body, a shoe, ship, or lump of sealing wax, is concrete; all of what is where the shoe is belongs to the shoe – its color, texture, chemical composition, temperature, elasticity, and so on are all aspects or elements being included in the being of the shoe. But these features or characteristics considered individually, e.g., the shoe's color or texture, are by comparison abstract.[138]

Even if Campbell's and Williams' definitions of abstractness are different, the core idea is the same: tropes are particular and metaphysically "simpler" than the concrete, "full" objects we encounter in our everyday experience and which are made of these simpler elements. Some other authors use 'abstract' to talk about entities that are not located in space and time, but this is not what Williams and Campbell have in mind. The motivation for devising such a theory as theirs is

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[136] Williams (1953), p. 15
[137] *Ibid.*, p. 6
[138] Campbell (1981), p. 478

that it allows us to account for the fact that there are recurrent characters found in different objects we encounter using a very elegant, minimalist ontology that is only committed to the existence of particular tropes.

The views discussed above can be characterized as a "bundle theory" of tropes, as it holds that objects are nothing but a group of compresent tropes, that is, tropes that are simply present in the same place. Or, in Campbell's terms, they are "collections of co-located tropes, depending on these tropes as a fleet does upon its component ships."[139] However, one of the difficulties for such a theory is to explain how a mere collection of tropes can become unified in a way that yields an individual or, in more medieval terminology, something that is one *per se*. This is why some other theories also recognize that properties are particulars rather than instances of a universal entity, but posit that there is some kind of substratum that holds the tropes together and accounts for the unity of the object. This idea is notoriously found in Locke but also supported by contemporary philosophers like C.B. Martin, who claims that the substratum is "that *about* an object that is the bearer of properties."[140] According to him, it is wrong to conceive of an object as a collection of compresent tropes in the same way that a crowd is a collection of compresent people (or, to use Campbell's analogy, in the same way that a fleet is made of ships). The way he sees it, neither the substratum nor the properties should be understood as parts of an object; rather, "they are the non-object things about an object."[141] Besides, he argues that in D.C. Williams' theory of tropes, the spatio-temporal region in which an object's tropes are located acts as a substratum. Some other authors understand substrata as "bare particulars," devoid of any properties.[142] And since they have

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[139] *Ibid.*, p. 479
[140] Martin (1980), p. 6
[141] *Ibid.*, p. 8
[142] See for example Bergmann (1967).

no properties, we cannot "know" them through experience. In summary, contemporary trope theories regard properties as particulars, and can consider that the objects we encounter in our everyday experience of the world are mere bundle of compresent tropes, or rather collections of tropes borne by some kind of substratum.

Peter Abelard and Tropes

At first glance, many aspects of Abelard's philosophy suggest a fruitful comparison with contemporary trope theories. Indeed, the peripatetician of Le Pallet, just like trope theorists, rejects the existence of universal entities to embrace a particularist ontology. Moreover, for Abelard, forms are particular: for example, Socrates' whiteness is completely distinct and independent from Plato's whiteness. For these reasons, many authors have explored whether Abelard could be considered as some kind of trope theorist, and some of the limitations of this construal.

The comparison was first suggested by Christopher Martin in a brief passage of his 1992 article, "The Logic of the *Nominales*, or, The Rise and Fall of Impossible *Positio*," where he simply states that Abelard, in contemporary terms, is to be characterized "as a transferable trope anti-realist."[143] Martin does not offer any argument in defense of this claim, but he does offer some reasons why he thinks such a characterization is accurate. First, he sees Abelard as an anti-realist about universals, insofar as he clearly denies that universal *res* can exist. Second, on his view, the Philosopher of Le Pallet's ontology includes tropes, which are to be identified with accidental forms. Third, what Martin means by trope transferability here is that "These forms [accidental forms] cannot exist apart from the substances to which they now adhere but before their attachment

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[143] Martin (1992), p. 112

they might have gone elsewhere."[144] However, unlike D.C. Williams or Keith Campbell, Abelard accepts substances in his ontology, which act as substrata for accidental forms. As such, even given the characterization of Abelard as a "transferable trope anti-realist," we should not make the mistake of thinking that he adheres to a bundle theory.

John Marenbon revisits Martin's suggestion in his 1997 book *The Philosophy of Peter Abelard*, but goes further. Indeed, he agrees with Martin that Abelard defends a "substance-based view" and that, for him, accidents are particular and correspond to what we would call "tropes" today. However, Marenbon shows that *differentiae* are also tropes in Abelard's view, as they are particular and "transferable" in much the same way as accidents. He shows how Abelard uses the scheme of Porphyry's tree as a way to think not about universals, but about the constitution of individuals, but with a slight modification: while substance rests at the top of Porphyry's tree, Abelard's account of individuals takes body as its starting point.[145] Therefore, each individual is a body which holds *differentiae* and accidents. For example, Socrates is a body with a particular form of 'animateness,' one of 'capability-of-sensing,' one of rationality, and so on. The resulting substances are, by themselves, independent essences and do not need to be "individuated" by their *differentiae*. Additionally, their identity does not depend on them having certain *differentiae*. As such, for Abelard, "particular substances are the basic building blocks of reality."[146]

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[144] Ibid. One concern I have is whether this is enough to warrant talking about trope *transferability*, as transferability seems to imply the possibility that a trope moves from one substance to another. Marenbon (2008) discusses different kinds of 'transferability' in more details, which helps to clarify this issue, but I am still unconvinced that we can speak of *transferable* tropes in Abelard. I am leaving this debate aside, however, as I am merely discussing the views of these commentators.

[145] Marenbon (1997), p. 124

[146] *Ibid*., p. 128. As Marenbon emphasizes, there are difficulties with Abelard's view that substances are the basic building blocks of reality and his idea that particular substances are a combination of body with *differentiae*, following the model of Poprhyry's tree. This discussion is beyond the scope of this thesis, however, and I shall not pursue this point further.

Whereas Martin's suggestion was intriguing but not fully fleshed out, Marenbon offers a convincing and extensive discussion of the parallels between Abelard's ontology and contemporary trope theory. However, Alain De Libera urges us to not be too quick in drawing this analogy. He argues that, even if there are some similarities between Abelard's thought and trope theory, these common points should not be exaggerated. In fact, he believes that William of Champeaux, a notable adversary of Abelard, comes closer to contemporary trope theory, since he holds that it is accidents that allow us to distinguish between individuals belonging to a same species.[147] Most notably, De Libera agrees with Marenbon that not only accidental forms but also *differentiae* must be considered in the discussion, but he stresses the difficulty of combining two important principles of Abelard, namely ontological particularism (every thing that exists is a particular) and the essential individuation of the particular (substances are not individualized by their forms, nor are forms individualized by the substances: forms are particular in themselves, as are substances).[148] De Libera is also unconvinced that Abelard's "tropes" are transferable in any relevant sense.

In light of these criticisms, Marenbon revisits his position in *Abelard in Four Dimensions*, 15 years after writing *The Philosophy of Peter Abelard*. He agrees that Abelard's adherence to the Aristotelian view of substance limits the analogy with contemporary trope theories. However, he maintains his view, inspired by Chris Martin, that the Philosopher of Le Pallet admits tropes in his ontology and that those are transferable, but only in a "weak sense" insofar as, "counterfactually, they might have belonged to different subjects from those to which in fact they belong".[149] Another concern that remains is that, whereas Abelard distinguishes between tropes that are accidental and

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[147] De Libera (2002), p. 498
[148]*Ibid.*, p. 489 & p. 492
[149] Marenbon (2013), p. 181

tropes that are, in today's terms, essential (*i.e. differentiae*), unlike bundle theories of tropes such as D.C. Williams' or Campbell's. In the next sections, I will explore how an analogy with Peter Simons' nuclear trope theory might be more illuminating than analogies with bundle theorists.

Peter Simons' Nuclear Trope Theory

In "Particulars in Particular Clothing,"[150] Peter Simons presents his trope theory, which he calls the 'nuclear theory', as an alternative to both bundle theories and substratum theories. According to him, his theory combines the main advantages of both while trying to avoid their weaknesses. As we have seen, bundle theories of tropes state that objects are nothing above and beyond a group of tropes that are compresent. The main problems for this group of theories is to explain how these tropes are bundled in a way that yields a unified individual, and how to distinguish between accidental and essential tropes. According to Keith Campbell,[151] the tropes in those bundles are united by the relation of compresence, but Simons doesn't think the relation of compresence is able to do much in terms of unification. First of all, how should we understand this relation? According to Simons, it can either be seen as a two-place relation, a three-place relation, or a many-place relation which gives rise to a system. In the first case, we are left unable to adequately explain change. For example, if a sheet of paper as a certain temperature trope T and a certain shape trope S that are compresent, we are confronted with a problem: the relation between S and T will lapse whenever there is a change in shape or temperature, i.e. when trope S is replaced with trope S' or when trope T is replaced with trope T'. Simons believes it suggests that the natures of S and T are not sufficient to explain compresence.[152] Things do not look better if we understand compresence as a three-place relation between two tropes and their spatial location. It is not clear

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[150] See Simons (1994).
[151] See Campbell (1990).
[152] As presented in Simons (1994), p. 559.

that places can be terms in relation, and if they can be, it seems that this bundle theory is in fact a substratum theory (which we will discuss shortly). More importantly, however, this construal of the compresence relation creates a problem when it comes to explaining movement, since the tropes cease to be in the place they initially occupied. The last option Simons considers is that the relation of compresence could be a many-place relation giving rise to a system, but this seems to leave us with the same problem this relation is supposed to explain. It merely states that the bundle of trope is held together in some way, but how? To summarize, bundle theories of tropes have trouble explaining how a collection of tropes can be conceived as an individual instead of a mere collection. In addition, they don't differentiate between what is essential to a substance and what is accidental, which is important for explaining persistence conditions and change.

Substratum theories do not seem to fare much better, for they give rise to different issues. They try to tackle the problem of unification by positing a component that is supposed to hold the tropes, such as Bergmann's bare particulars.[153] But since bare particulars cannot be objects of acquaintance and they have no essential properties, we obtain strange results, such as the fact that a bare particular cannot come into existence or be destroyed except by a miracle.[154] Additionally, the notion of a substratum has the disadvantage of being obscure: what is this substratum, and by what kind of relation is it connected to the tropes it holds? In light of these difficulties, Peter Simons' nuclear theory hopes to provide an account of how trope bundles, which comprise essential as well as accidental tropes, can indeed constitute a unified object, without relying on the obscure notion of a substratum.

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[153] See Bergmann (1967).
[154] Simons (1994), p. 566.

To do this, Simons proceeds with a two-step approach. First, he asks us to consider a collection of particular tropes which co-occur, and which form the nucleus of the substance. These tropes are united not because they are held by a substratum, but rather because they form a "foundational system", a concept he borrows from Husserl. This system is formed because the tropes in it are in a relation of *strong mutual foundation*, where A is said to be strongly founded on B iff (1) A is necessarily such that it cannot exist unless B exists and (2) B is not a part of A.[155] This relation is mutual when it holds true of A towards B and of B towards A. A foundational system is obtained from a collection "iff every member in it is foundationally related in it to every other, and none is foundationally related to anything which is not a member of the collection."[156] In that sense, it constitutes the essence of the object as it states its persistence conditions. Additionally, the nucleus is what individuates a substance and the foundation relation explains its unity, and this is done without the problems associated with bare particulars. In the second stage of the theory, Simons adds the notion of peripheral, accidental tropes, which depend on the nucleus for their existence, but can come and go without the corruption of the whole substance. However, the nucleus itself is not dependent on the accidental tropes: although it can require accidents of a certain type, such as a color or smell, it does not require any fixed individual accident. Whereas the dependence between the tropes constituting the nucleus is mutual, the dependence between accidental tropes and the nucleus is one-way: particular accidental tropes depend on the nucleus for their existence, but the reverse does not hold. But it does not mean that every substance must be constituted following this exact same structure: Simons' nuclear theory of tropes is flexible, in that it allows for the possibility of substances that either lack a nucleus or lack accidental tropes. In the former case, we would have objects without an essence (strictly contingent objects), whereas

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[155] *Ibid.*, p. 559
[156] *Ibid.*, p. 562

in the latter case we would have objects that have no accidental properties.[157] This theory also allows for embedding: a bundle of tropes consisting of a nucleus and accidental tropes could itself be included in the nucleus or periphery of another bundle. Simons doesn't discuss relational tropes in great detail but also stays open to the possibility that relations be treated as tropes.

In summary, Peter Simons regards individual substances as foundational systems, where a nucleus is "a tight bundle that serves as the substratum to the looser bundle of accidental tropes, and accounts for their all being together."[158] As he notes, his view is close to Aristotle's, since, on his construal, the Philosopher would hold that "matter is the substratum, the substantial form corresponds to the nucleus, and serves as the bearer for further, non-substantial tropes."[159] The main difference with Simons' theory is that Simons does not think an ultimate substratum (like Aristotle's matter) is needed.

Peter Abelard and Simons' Nuclear Trope Theory

Now that I have explained the basics of Peter Simons' nuclear trope theory, it remains to see whether it can be fruitfully applied to Abelard's '*homo intelligitur*' problem. Abelard contends that what is understood when 'man' is understood is human nature, and that natures are nothing above and beyond individuals. In the terms of Simons' theory, natures could be understood as the nuclei of individual substances. This requires us to accept, like John Marenbon, that both accidents and *differentiae* are particulars for Abelard, what he calls the 'forms'. The solution to the '*homo intelligitur*' problem would then be the following: through an understanding of 'man', I attend to the nature of man, that is to say to the nuclear tropes of a man. Such an understanding is not of an

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[157] As an example of such objects, Simons states that the "most basic building blocks of the physical universe" could be devoid of peripheral tropes.
[158] *Ibid.*, p. 568
[159] *Idem*

individual, since it is acquired by abstraction, meaning that I attend only to the nuclear tropes, leaving aside the accidental ones. And even though each human being has its own particular nuclear tropes, they resemble each other enough to enable us to form an understanding that pertains to all human beings. An advantage of Simons' theory over Campbell and Williams' clearly appears here: whereas the latter do not allow us to distinguish between tropes that are essential and those that are accidents, nuclear trope theory recognizes this distinction.

This construal of Abelard's view of nature is helpful in that it addresses one of the problems with the modal conception of 'nature' and, therefore, can adequately supplement it. Remember that the solution presented in Chapter 4 did not explain how we could recognize which behaviors were part of a thing's nature solely on the basis of their observed regularity among members of a given kind, since it provided no way to differentiate between accidental similarities and the ones that do reveal membership in a given kind. The nuclear trope construal allows us to do so. Indeed, as we have seen, Abelard tends to use nature in a strict sense to refer to forms, but not all of them: accidents are forms but not part of a thing's nature, whereas *differentiae* are. Thus, a parallel could be drawn between *differentiae* and nuclear tropes. Since the tropes that constitute the nucleus are characterized by the fact that their destruction brings about the corruption of the substance as a whole, we now have a clear criterion to distinguish what is part of a thing's nature and what isn't. In turn, genuine natural kinds will be the ones which are based on particular *differentiae*, which resemble each other and are found in all of the members of a given kind.

One worry for this construal is that Abelard seems closer to the Aristotelian model described by Simons, as he admits the existence of a substratum: as Marenbon explains, Abelard

thinks that individual substances are made of body, to which *differentiae* are then added.[160] However, even though this suggests that the analogy with Simons' theory has its limits, it does not prevent it from casting more light on how Abelard's intended solution to the '*homo intelligitur*' problem is supposed to work. In any case, the goal of this section is not to see just to what extent Abelard's theory is reminiscent of Simons', but to see how the latter can provide a helpful way to think about Abelard's solution.

Conclusion

In summary, Abelard's philosophy displays some features that suggest a fruitful comparison with contemporary trope theory. Indeed, he endorses nominalism about universals by explicitly claiming that all things that exist are particular,[161] which implies that properties are, on his view, particulars too. In contemporary terms, he accepts tropes in his ontology. This point is, as Marenbon rightly notes,[162] not contentious, and in itself it is not an especially illuminating way of thinking about Abelard's ontology. The important question is whether drawing a parallel with contemporary trope theory offers any useful insight with regards to interpreting his solution to the '*homo intelligitur*' problem. In this chapter, I have shown how understanding Abelard's forms as tropes through the lens of Peter Simons' nuclear trope theory helps us to better understand how the modal conception of nature can solve the problem. To sum up, the '*homo intelligitur*' problem consists in determining what is understood with 'man' is understood; Abelard's own answer is that it is human nature that is understood, that universal understandings attend to natures. In Chapter 4, I proposed that this notion of nature be interpreted in a "broad" sense, as referring to the behaviors that a certain thing exhibits which are typical of the things belonging to the same species.

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[160] See Marenbon (2008) p. 97 & Marenbon (1997) pp. 124-125
[161] This view could also be described as ontological particularism.
[162] See Marenbon (2013) p. 181

Understanding 'man', according to this reading, would mean attending to the behaviors of a thing which are typical of its species. This broad sense of nature is reducible to a stricter sense, whereby 'nature' refers to the specific forms of a thing. As such, attending to a thing's behaviors provides knowledge by proxy of the forms it possesses. However, one important worry with this solution is that not all behavioral regularities necessarily indicate belonging to the same species. This is where the analogy with Peter Simons' trope theory comes in. It explains the difference between essential tropes (for Abelard, *differentiae*) and accidental tropes, and provides a way to distinguish one from the other. Since essential tropes stand in a relation of mutual foundation to form the "nucleus" of a substance, destroying one of these tropes entails the corruption of the substance. This is not true of accidents. It provides the metaphysical underpinnings for the modal understanding of *status* to work as a solution for the '*homo intelligitur*' problems and helps in presenting a plausible reconstruction of Abelard's reasoning in terms that are more familiar to us.

Conclusion

As a nominalist, Abelard is faced with a problem. He must explain how we are able to have sound understandings of universals (such as genera and species) when there are no universal objects that correspond to them, only individuals. This is the general idea behind what I have called the '*homo intelligitur*' problem: what is understood when we have an understanding of 'man?' His answer, as we have seen, was that human nature is understood through such an understanding (and it can be inferred that, in general, universal understandings are of natures). However, earlier in the *Treatise*, he explicitly claims that natures are nothing above and beyond the individuals they belong to, that they are "exactly the same essentially." Therefore, it seems that natures can hardly solve the problem where individuals fail too. The goal of this thesis was to provide a plausible interpretation of how Abelard's solution could work. A good solution needs to answer two questions: (1) What is a nature? and (2) By what relationship between mind and natures are universal understandings judged sound or empty?

Whereas Chapter 1 stated the problem and its terms, Chapter 2 through 5 explored two different ways to understand Abelard's solution: the first one is based on notions found in his *Logica 'Ingredientibus'*, and the second one draws upon contemporary philosophy. In Chapter 2, I discussed how treating 'nature' as a synonym for '*status*' could shed light on the problem. Indeed, *status* are part of the world without being *res*, and Abelard speaks of natures in terms that resemble how he speaks of *status*. If universal understandings are about natures and natures are *status*, we have found a way to answer question (1) without postulating universal entities. As for question (2), Abelard considers that we understand natures by attending to [*attendere*] them. In summary, the *status* solution amounts to saying that, in the end, universal understandings attend to the *status* of things. Chapter 3 builds upon this solution by adding to it the notion of divine 'common

conceptions', which Abelard borrows from Priscian. These conceptions are, so to speak, the blueprints in God's mind, according to which he created all of the things that populate the world. As such, *status* stem from these conceptions. This explains why there are only *status* of genuine natural kinds, but also provides a solid foundation for knowledge, by ultimately linking it to divine ideas. As was noted, this is consistent with Abelard's remarks at the beginning of *De Intellectibus*, where he speaks of the limitations of human knowledge, stating that a full grasp (or *intelligentia*) of the things that populate the world can only be attained by God, or by human beings through divine revelation. Since understanding *status* is construed as a way of understanding divine common conceptions not directly but through their effects, it makes sense of what Abelard says in these passages while retaining the possibility of having sound understandings of genera and species, even if said understandings will never provide perfect knowledge of things.

Whereas in Chapter 2 and 3 I built a solution by equating the notion of 'nature' with the notion of '*status*', Chapters 4 and 5 take another route. In Chapter 4, I proposed, drawing on Peter King's remarks in the *Cambridge Companion to Abelard*, that the notion of 'nature' could be interpreted in a modal sense, as referring to the way certain things behave in virtue of belonging to a given genus or species. It allows us to answer the question of what is understood when we understand 'man' in the following way: when 'man' is understood, we thereby attend (still through the relation of *attentio* presented in Chapter 2) to human nature, which means that we attend to the typical way human beings act in virtue of being human. We know which behaviors are typical by observing the natural world and progressively noticing these patterns. However, we are left with no way to determine if the observed regularities are indeed indicative of belonging to a same genus or species. Abelard recognizes the existence of two types of forms, which are, in his ontology, particular: accidents, and *differentiae*. Given how close this notion of 'form' is to our

contemporary notion of 'trope,' Chapter 5 explores how an analogy with Peter Simons' nuclear trope theory can help us better understand what natures are, metaphysically speaking. On his view, individuals are constituted of both a nucleus of essential tropes, which form a Husserlian foundational system, and of accidental tropes, which depend on the nucleus for their existence but can come and go without the destruction of the subject. I argued that a thing's nature, for Abelard, consists of its *differentiae*, which can be compared to Simons' nuclear tropes. They are recognizable because their destruction entails the corruption of the substance. Therefore, we can distinguish between the behaviors that indicate belonging in a species and those that do not: behaviors typical of members of a species stem from *differentiae*, which cannot be destroyed lest the substance be destroyed too. In summary, understanding a man amounts to attending to its behaviors typical of human beings in general, given that those behaviors stem from its having a particular *differentia* of 'rationality.'

In this thesis, I have provided two possible construals of how Abelard's solution to the '*homo intelligitur*' problem is supposed to work. I believe that both are valuable for different reasons, but also subject to some difficulties. The first solution, which involves treating 'nature' as synonymous with '*status*' and treats *status* as stemming from divine common conceptions, has the main advantage of only involving elements found in Abelard's work. Therefore, it offers a way to link in an interesting way the positions defended in *Logica 'Ingredientibus'* with *Tractatus de Intellectibus*. However, a problem with this construal is precisely that it involves a certain interpretation of how Abelard's though evolved over time, which is subject to debate, as was stated in Chapters 2 and 3. Moreover, it does not explain how we can have epistemic access to *status*. Additionally, the definition of sound understandings requires such understandings to attend to *things* as they really are, and *status* are not things. One could argue that, if natures are identical to

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individuals and if natures are identical to *status*, then *status* and individuals are one and the same thing, but it is hard to see how the problem is solved if one takes this route.

The solution presented in Chapters 4 and 5 avoids this last issue by treating 'nature' as referring to behaviors which are the observable manifestations of a thing's having certain particular *differentiae*, which, in a way similar to Peter Simons' nuclear tropes, constitute the essence of individual beings. Therefore, through an understanding of 'man,' we attend to human nature, which is nothing above and beyond particular human beings: they each have a form of 'rationality' and, as a result, we can observe that they behave in certain typically human ways. This construal of Abelard's solution is particularly appealing, because it is intuitive and economical. Plus, since it does not borrow technical notions from previous works, it does not rest on any given interpretation of the evolution of Abelard's thought. Instead of equating 'nature' with another concept, it focuses on the meaning of the notion of 'nature' in itself. However, this construal is not without its own problems. Indeed, it relies on the idea that there are typical patterns of behavior, but it remains unclear what ontological status Abelard would have given to regularities, behaviors, and so on. Presumably, they would not qualify as things in his ontology, but the question of how to understand these notions in his framework remains open.

By proposing these two interpretations of Abelard's solution to the '*homo intelligitur*' problem, I hope that I have shed more light on his concept of nature, as it is obscure, yet plays a central role in his theory of universal understandings as presented in *De Intellectibus*. Abelard is usually thought of as a more critical thinker, who is mostly concerned with refuting his opponents and who formulates his own theories as a response to them. This explains why there are many inconsistencies in Abelard's thought, as he is not really a systematic thinker. However, in *De Intellectibus*, he seems to be doing something different. Indeed, he establishes his own theory of

understandings, and lays the groundworks for what seems to be his psychology. Unfortunately, as was stated in Chapter 1, *De Intellectibus* seems to have been part of a larger treatise, perhaps his *Grammatica*, which is now lost. Most of the literature concentrates on the *Logica 'Ingredientibus'* and other commentaries, only referring to the *De Intellectibus* when it helps to fill some gaps in our understanding of these earlier writings. However, if I am correct in characterizing the *De Intellectibus* as an attempt at a more systematic theory of understanding, studies that focus on the specificities of this treatise are key in understanding Abelard's thought and, perhaps, in changing our perception of him as nothing more than a critical thinker.

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