

From *intellectus verus/falsus* to the *dictum propositionis*:
The Semantics of Peter Abelard and his Circle

I

In his commentary on Aristotle’s *Peri hermeneias*,¹ Abelard distinguishes the form of an expression² (*oratio*) from what it says, that is, its content. The content of an expression is its understanding (*intellectus*). This distinction is surely the most well-known and central idea in Abelard’s commentary. It provides him with the opportunity to distinguish statements (*enuntiationes*) from other kinds of expressions without implying a difference in their content, since the ability of a statement to signify something true or false (*verum vel falsum*)³ cannot be found in its content. More precisely, Abelard distinguishes statements both from complete expressions (*orationes perfectae*) that are not statements but rather questions, requests, commands, *etc.* and from incomplete expressions, that is, mere word strings (*orationes imperfectae*), such as *homo albus*. These kinds of expressions, according to Abelard, do not differ in the understanding they present but in the way they present it.

The reasoning that leads Abelard to this thesis can be found in the prologue of his commentary on Aristotle’s *Peri hermeneias*. Here Abelard describes the subject of the work he is going to comment on, namely *voces significativae ad placitum per se* (307.12–13). Those conventionally meaningful utterances are single words (*dictiones*), like nouns or verbs, and ex-

¹ The text of Abelard’s commentary on Aristotle’s *Peri hermeneias* was published from the Milan manuscript in Geyer [1927]. Minio-Paluello [1958] published some additions and corrections to Geyer’s edition based on the Berlin manuscript. We are preparing a new and complete edition of the full text for the *Corpus christianorum* series, to appear shortly; we give references to the page and line number of Geyer [1927], but we supply our own version of Abelard’s text, which differs in some cases from Geyer. Citations from Aristotle are given by Bekker number for the Greek text and the equivalent page and line number for Boethius’s Latin translation as given in *Aristoteles latinus* (abbreviated AL) in Minio-Paluello [1965].

² We use ‘expression’ to pick out strings of more than one word which are in grammatical agreement. A single word is not an *oratio* but a *dictio*—in our terminology, not an expression but merely a word.

³ That a statement is an expression signifying something true or false is implied by Aristotle, who said that “not every expression is a statement, but only those in which there is truth or falsity” (*Peri hermeneias* 17^a2–3), and stated explicitly in Boethius, *De topicis differentiis* 1174B (*oratio significans verum falsumve*). See also 375.29–32.

pressions (*orationes*), that is to say strings of words that are not only juxtaposed but related to one another (307.9–10).

His main purpose in dealing with linguistic signs is to examine the simple (categorical) statement (*enuntiatio*). It consists minimally, according to Aristotle, of a noun and a verb; one noun and one verb are sufficient to compose one simple statement. Nouns and verbs are dealt with in order to examine statements (307.17–23).

Now according to Abelard, nouns and verbs signify in two different ways (307.26–30):

Nomina enim et verba duplicem significationem habent, unam quidem de rebus, alteram de intellectibus. Res enim significant constituendo intellectus ad eas pertinentes, hoc est naturam aliquam earum vel proprietatem attendentes.

This distinction and way in which the distinct parts are related to one another is plausible. Abelard’s use of it, however, is remarkable. He does not stress the difference between the singularity of each thing and the universal meaning of words, but rather puts the emphasis on another difference, which is complementary to the first one. Words never capture a thing as a whole in its complexity. Instead, they draw attention to some peculiarity or distinctive property of the signified thing.

Abelard links his semantical distinction between the signification of things and the signification of understandings (*significatio rerum/intellectuum*) to the following thesis: since nouns and verbs are considered in order to examine statements, because the latter consists of them, only the signification of understandings is relevant. The signification of things can be neglected or is at best of secondary interest (308.19–22):

Cum autem nomina et verba tam res quam intellectus significant, sicut diximus, recte hic de eis agitur non secundum significationem rerum, sed intellectuum, ubi videlicet de eis intenditur propter constitutionem propositionis.

To establish this claim, which is not at all self-evident, he offers the following three arguments:⁴

1. The difference between nouns and verbs can only be discovered by considering what is to be understood. In particular, the difference cannot be discovered by considering the signified things, since the same things can be signified by nouns and by verbs. Thus, the noun “running” and the conjugated verb “runs” signify the same thing. “Running” and “runs,” however, capture the same idea in two different ways which

⁴ Abelard also has reasons of symmetry for this claim. Just as Aristotle’s *Categories* is devoted to words insofar as they signify things, so his *Peri hermeneias* is devoted to words in their other capacity, namely signifying understandings (309.14–19; cfr. 111.8–11).

vary the understanding: *Sed diversus modus concipiendi variat intellectum, quia hic in essentia cursus ostenditur, ibi in adiacentia, hic cum discretione temporis, ibi sine discretione temporis* (308.23–33).

2. To understand a statement means to understand the parts of it and to combine these understandings with one another. One cannot go further, however, and connect the signification of things possessed by each part of the statement to a single signification of the thing possessed by the statement as a whole, since there is no thing that underlies the statement: *Res autem propositionis, cum nullam habeat propositio rem subiectam, ex rebus vocabulorum non consistit* (308.34–40).
3. Things signified by words like ‘rose’ or ‘lily’ pass away. But one can understand these words even though there might be no thing signified by them. It is possible to make and to understand statements about roses in their complete absence (*e. g.* in Winter). If one is concerned with statements, one should deal with what is constantly signified and not with things which are only temporarily signified and transitory (309.1–13).

The second argument is especially open to challenge. What lies behind the crucial statement *propositio nullam habet rem subiectam*, which the argument depends on? Abelard’s second and third arguments imply a further problem. One does not only want to understand statements, but also to decide whether they are true or false. Therefore Abelard must go further. It is not sufficient to talk only about the signification of understandings. He must also create something analogous to the capacity of words to signify things that applies to statements.

In his second excursus, while commenting on the first chapter of the *Peri hermeneias*, Abelard is concerned with this problem. Earlier, he interrupted his exposition of Aristotle’s text to introduce a first excursus (312.33–318.35) in which he distinguishes perception (*sensus*), imagination (*imaginatio*), and understanding (*intellectus*), and explains their relationship. Returning to his exposition of the text, he equates the “passions of the soul” Aristotle is talking about with understandings. It turns out that all utterances in a language signify understandings (319.11–14):⁵

earum passionum quae sunt in anima, id est intellectuum. Quae ideo passiones

⁵ Abelard repeatedly explains matters this way: *animi passiones, id est intellectus* (312.15–16); *passionum animae, id est intellectuum* (312.22); *animi passiones quae intellectus sunt* (319.3–4); *passiones animae, hoc est intellectus* (320.40); *de passionibus animae, id est intellectibus* (322.30). This interpretation of ‘passio’ will be decisive when Abelard shows against Andronicus that the *Peri hermeneias* is an authentic work of Aristotle (323.4–16). See also 319.16–21; 321.21–22; 325.10–11; 331.21–22.

dicuntur esse, quia dum aliquid intelligimus quandam passionem animus habet, dum se ad rem coartat.

Abelard's interpretation is plausible, but, as will be demonstrated later, there is some opposition to it. Nevertheless, this first excursus lays the groundwork for the next.

Abelard interrupts his exposition for a second time when he is commenting on Aristotle's distinction between those understandings which are neither true nor false and those which must be either true or false (16^a9–11 = AL 5.11–14). His aim in this second excursus (325.12–331.11) is to clarify formal distinctions between different kinds of understandings.⁶

All utterances in a language signify understandings. When one understands a single word, for example 'man', one has a simple (*simplex*) understanding. When one understands an expression, one has a composite (*compositus*) understanding. The example Abelard uses is well-chosen: as an example for a string of words that are connected, an expression, he takes the definiens of 'man': 'rational mortal animal' (*animal rationale mortale*). In presenting these examples he shows that a simple understanding does not indicate the understanding of something simple. Rather the act of understanding is designated as either 'simple' or 'composite'. In the case of a simple understanding, such as the understanding of 'man', the content is grasped at once; in case of a composite understanding, such as the understanding of 'rational mortal animal', several words are grasped and these understandings are attached to one another to form one composite understanding.

Distinguishing between sound (*sanus*) and empty (*cassus*) understandings, Abelard asks whether a word or an expression signifies not only an understanding but also a thing. It might happen that even if each word in an expression signifies a thing, the expression as a whole does not.

In any case, the distinction between 'true' and 'false' is not applicable to simple understandings. However, as shown by the examples given so far, not all composite understandings are either true or false. To which composite understandings is 'true or false' applicable? One obvious suggestion is to distinguish different kinds of expressions according to the specific understandings they signify, that is, to connect the content of the expression with its form.

As mentioned above, though, Abelard rejects this suggestion. The strings of words that have been considered so far are semantically well-

⁶ See Jacobi [1981] for further information about these distinctions and for exact references.

formed, but they are nevertheless incomplete expressions; sentences alone are complete expressions. There is only one kind of sentence to which ‘true or false’ is applicable, namely statements. The distinction between complete and incomplete expressions, according to the suggestion at hand, should be a distinction between different forms of understandings. But this, according to Abelard, is impossible, since the understanding of ‘a running man’ is exactly the same as the understanding of ‘A man runs’. In both cases the same partial understandings are attached to one another in the same way. Nor does it help to restrict our attention to complete expressions. Commands, wishes, questions, and statements are different forms of complete expressions, and, according to Abelard, may have precisely the same content: the command ‘Run!’ (said to a man), the wish ‘If only a man were running!’, the question ‘Is a man running?’, and the statement ‘A man is running’ involve the same understandings. But commands, wishes, and questions are neither true nor false. Yet if the statement—which is necessarily either true or false—cannot be distinguished with respect to understandings from non-statements, be they incomplete expressions or those complete expressions to which ‘true or false’ is not applicable, how then can it be singled out?

Abelard proposes a novel solution. He analyses the statement ‘Socrates sits’ into an act of assertion paired with an assertible content, as though it were ‘It is true that Socrates sits’. ‘That Socrates sits’ and ‘Socrates sits’ are identical with respect to the understanding. ‘That Socrates sits’ can be asserted—one just has to add ‘It is true’ or ‘I assert’ to it—but it is not itself a statement. A ‘that’-clause is at best part of a statement. Even commands, wishes, or questions might be analyzed in such a way that the ordered/desired/queried content is separated into a whether-clause or a that-clause. For example, the wish expressed by ‘If only Socrates were sitting!’ can be stated as ‘I wish that Socrates were sitting!’: a combination of the desired content (that Socrates sits) with the speaker’s stance (‘I wish. . .’). What these forms of complete expressions make explicit is the act of the speaker or the thinker with respect to their content (‘that. . .’). The speaker declares himself on the content of the expression. In a statement this act is an assertion (327.18–21):

Ad quod respondemus quod in definitione propositionis ‘significare verum vel falsum’ [Boethius, *De diff. top.* PL 64 1174C] non secundum intellectum accipiendum est, sed secundum dicta propositionum, id est enuntiando proponere id quod est in re vel non est in re.

What makes a complete expression a statement is that, in addition to its content (presented by ‘that’), it has the *modus enuntiandi* (327.25–26)—it

presents a content in a declarative way, as opposed to, say, the *modus interrogandi* (cfr. 327.27–35). This allows for uniformity of content across distinct modes of presentation while maintaining the uniqueness of statements among other types of complete expressions.

II

Abelard's semantic ideas were opposed even in his own circle and alternative theories were proposed. An extraordinary text bears witness to this alternative. We shall refer to it by its incipit as the *Glossae 'doctrinae sermonum'*, or GDS for short.⁷ It is a complete commentary on Aristotle's *Peri hermeneias*, and, like Abelard's commentary, it includes detailed literal exegesis of Aristotle's text as well as digressions that take up relevant problems. These are not understood to be different enterprises. Instead, the careful explanation of Aristotle is part of the project of developing philosophically adequate views in semantics. Questions are raised, objections examined, arguments proposed, alternative interpretations canvassed—all in the course of explaining Aristotle's meaning and methods.

The two works share more than a common structure and design. One is the parent of the other. GDS includes (a) literal quotation of Abelard's commentary, sometimes extensive, but typically without acknowledgment; (b) judicious pastiche of Abelard's text, drawing material from different passages, usually organized differently, with a greater or lesser degree of exactness in the citations; (c) selective paraphrase, more or less close, of Abelard's commentary, sometimes simplifying his grammar, or his reasoning, or both; (d) independent reports of Abelard's views, often accompanied by an exposition of his reasons or arguments.⁸

Yet GDS also includes much original material, both in its literal exegesis of Aristotle and in its digressions. Abelard's commentary is used extensively but not indiscriminately. There are discussions of contemporary ideas and positions introduced by *Dicunt quidam* (experts, of course, to be taken

⁷ The text of GDS is found in V = MS Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale cod. lat. 15015 ff. 180ra01–199ra46. Marenbon [1993] lists GDS as 'H15' in his working catalogue; see the entry there for information about the scholarly literature. We are preparing a complete edition for the *Corpus christianorum* series to accompany our edition of Abelard's commentary. All references here are to the manuscript. Excerpts from the manuscript have been published in De Rijk [1962] 113–116, 613–615 and in De Rijk [1966] 47–48; the latter includes several passages that will also be discussed here.

⁸ The features (a)–(d) are typical of glosses produced by philosophically inclined members of Abelard's circle. See, for example, the *Glossae secundum uocales* (listed as 'P11' in Marenbon [1993]) and the *Glossae super Categorias* (listed as 'C8').

seriously). Sometimes in the text one can read *Dicit magister P.*, clearly identifiable as Abelard.⁹ Likewise, the opinions introduced by *quidam* can often be found in Abelard's commentary, and frequently the author of GDS reports only one position—there is no *alii autem dicunt* following the *quidam dicunt*. He rarely agrees with the reported opinion. In most cases, he criticizes it, often using severe words: *nulla ratio est* (181vb27–28). He opposes his own opinion to it: *nos autem dicimus* (181vb32). The author of GDS is thoroughly familiar with Abelard's work. At times he adopts Abelard's views. At other times he works out his own position, almost always doing so by wrestling with Abelard's theories and arguments. In short, our author has an 'Abelard-soaked' approach to philosophy.

Here is an admittedly speculative reconstruction of what might have been the case. We think the author of GDS studied under Abelard, from whom he received the most important part of his philosophical training. When he could no longer continue his studies with Abelard, he was allowed to copy the manuscript Abelard was using in his lectures. Now he himself gives lectures on the *Peri hermeneias*, perhaps some years later. He doesn't set great store in being thought of as a student of Abelard. Perhaps it wasn't safe to do so; Abelard's notoriety was a two-edged sword.¹⁰ But the author of GDS does set great store in being thought of as an independent teacher in logic—independent especially of *Magister Petrus*!

Now the author of GDS rarely makes a show of his independence over matters of literal exegesis. It is not as an expositor of Aristotle that he finds fault with Abelard. Instead, his disagreements are systematic and philosophical in nature. For the most part this corresponds to the two structural aims of the commentaries mentioned above, so that when the author of GDS takes excerpts from Abelard without indicating it, he goes back to Abelard's expository passages, but when he criticizes Abelard's ideas, he refers to the excurses. Not to all of them, of course; the author of GDS is not interested

⁹ Apart from Aristotle and Boethius, the authority most often named in GDS is Abelard, no fewer than fourteen times (always as '*m. p.*'): 181vb18, 182va44, 183rb03, 183va44, 187ra22, 187ra51, 187va48, 187vb43, 189ra18, 192va18, 193ra02, 195va19, 196va13, 196va30. (Abelard also appears in examples at 187vb35 and 198va29–31.) Among contemporaries, Alberic of Paris is named twice (as '*m. a.*'), at 192va20 and 195ra48 (also appearing in an example at 188va28–29), and Robert of Paris is named once (as '*m. ro. parisiensem*') at 193va38. The only other names that appear are classical writers mentioned by Boethius in his commentary.

¹⁰ There may be a bitter irony here: just as Abelard had to distance himself from his former teacher Roscelin to avoid the obloquy that fell on him, so too perhaps Abelard's students had to disavow—or at least not publicly avow—the teacher from whom they had learned so much.

in all subjects that are discussed in the *Peri hermeneias* and in Abelard's commentary. For instance, he is not interested at all in the discussion of the copula, a matter of deep concern for Abelard in his commentary on chapter 3 of the *Peri hermeneias*.¹¹ On the other hand Abelard's thesis outlined above, where he separates the form and the content of an expression, is of great interest to him.

There can be no doubt that Abelard was a distinguished teacher of logic and a striking philosopher. The author of GDS was likewise an expert. His opposition to Abelard is consistent and thoroughgoing. It is instructive to compare his ideas on the form and content of an expression with those put forward by Abelard. Which logical or semantic theories seemed to him unacceptable? Which theories did he propose as alternatives? What are their presuppositions?

III

Abelard bases his theory about the distinction between the form and content of an expression on his theory of understandings, as developed in the first excursus while commenting on the first chapter of the *Peri hermeneias* (312.33–318.35). The author of GDS used material from this first excursus extensively (181ra1–181va46). He also knows Abelard's second excursus, where Abelard develops his distinction between different kinds of understandings, as noted. But he does not agree with Abelard that incomplete expressions and different kinds of complete expressions signify the same understanding. He argues strongly for his own theory as an alternative to Abelard's view. On a closer look, however, one realizes that there is a false quotation from Abelard in an important detail. Our author did not understand Abelard perfectly. This leads to a question. Does he propose his theory only since he misrepresents Abelard's thought? Or is his theory an instructive alternative to Abelard worth considering independent of the misunderstanding? To do justice to the author of GDS let us first discuss his theory and afterwards his dispute with Abelard.

The author of GDS does not agree with Abelard's identifying the "passions of the soul" Aristotle is talking about with 'understandings' (319.11–14, quoted above). Though understandings are passions of the soul, not all passions of the soul are understandings, and some passions that are not

¹¹ However, he stresses Abelard's idea of taking the copula *est* as syncategorematic (361.30–36, 360.02–22, 390.11–393.37; see Jacobi [1985]), transforming Abelard's own tentative considerations into a doctrine; see for instance 185vb40–47. For the most part, though, the author of GDS is not particularly interested in exploring the semantic role of the copula (unlike Abelard!).

understandings may have a semantic role to play. Not all meaningful utterances pick out understandings (181vb6–8):

‘Passionum’ vero notas esse commodius dicit quam si diceret ‘intellectuum’. Non enim omnes voces significativae intellectuum sunt notae, sed quaedam intellectus, ut dictiones et enuntiationes. . .

Some *voces significativae ad placitum* signify passions of the soul but not understandings, namely complete expressions such as questions, requests, commands, and the like, that aren’t statements (181vb8–12):

. . . quaedam vero alias notant animae passiones, ut imperativa oratio imperationem, deprecativa deprecationem, et caetera huiusmodi; huiusmodi enim orationes, etsi perfectae sint, nullos tamen intellectus significant, quia neque veros neque falsos, sed illae quae tantum compositionis et divisionis, id est negationis et affirmationis sunt; nec intellectus sine vero vel falso.

Moreover, the author of GDS clearly rejects the idea that these expressions signify incomplete understandings (*intellectus imperfecti*) when he continues (181vb12–18):

Qui autem imperfecti sunt a nominibus vel verbis vel imperfectis orationibus significantur. . . Cum igitur orationes praedictae perfectae sint, non possunt intellectus significare imperfectos, cum nihil imperfectum eis significetur; sed nec perfectos¹² significare possunt, quia huiusmodi intellectus a solis enuntiationibus significari habent, quibus tantum convenit verum vel falsum significare.

Thus expressions that aren’t statements do not signify understandings: they signify neither complete understandings (since ‘true or false’ isn’t applicable to them) nor incomplete understandings (since only incomplete expressions signify incomplete understandings).

The author of GDS thus draws the following distinction. A meaningful utterance signifies either an understanding or another kind of passion of the soul. A single word or an incomplete expression signifies an incomplete understanding. Only a statement signifies a complete understanding. Now a statement is a complete expression, but it isn’t the only kind. Other kinds of complete expressions are commands, requests, and the like. They do not signify an understanding but rather some other passion of the soul.

The crucial point to this alternative semantic theory is its intention to unite the ‘true or false’ criterion with (complete) understandings and statements. Only those passions of the soul that might be true or false are understandings (cf. *nec intellectus sine vero vel falso* 181vb11–12). These understandings can only be signified by statements (*huiusmodi intellectus a solis enuntiationibus significari habent, quibus tantum convenit verum vel falsum significare*, 181vb16–18). Other expressions signify either different kinds of passions of the soul or incomplete understandings.

¹² *perfectos*] *veros* V.

Expressions designating an incomplete understanding can also signify things. The author of GDS agrees with Abelard that complete expressions designating a complete understanding do not have an underlying thing. However, it is possible for them to signify what happens to a thing (*eventus rerum*) and that something is or is not (186ra16–20):

Sed orationum quaedam sunt rerum significativae, ut imperfectae, quaedam vero non, ut perfectae. Unde orationes imperfectae habent subici vel praedicari: dicitur enim ‘Socrates est albus homo’ sicut ‘Socrates est homo’. Perfectae vero orationes neque subici neque praedicari habent. Non enim aliquam rem subiectam habent sed eventus rerum significant, <id est> aliquid esse vel non esse.

Thus the author of GDS holds the following pair of theses:

- (A) Understandings are strictly linked with expressions to which ‘true or false’ is applicable.

Abelard avoids the link proposed here in (A) since he wants to separate the comprehensible content from the variety of forms of expressions.

- (B) Understandings are classified into complete and incomplete understandings.

Abelard avoids this classification since he wants to identify the comprehensible content of incomplete expressions with the content of the corresponding complete expressions.

But (A) is not formulated exactly if one takes (B) into account. The point made in (A) must refer to complete understandings, since if understandings could only be found in expressions to which ‘true or false’ is applicable, that is to say only in a subclass of complete expressions, then incomplete expressions could not signify understandings at all. The author of GDS, however, insists that incomplete expressions signify incomplete understandings. To understand (A) correctly therefore presupposes the acceptance of (B). We may thus replace (A) with the following thesis:

- (A*) Complete understandings are strictly linked with expressions to which ‘true or false’ is applicable.

Perhaps the author of GDS was unaware of the logical dependence of (A) on (B), since he discusses (A) before he discusses (B). We follow his order of presentation in our discussion.¹³

The author of GDS begins with (A)/(A*)—that is, with the elaboration of different types of complete expressions and their relationship to understandings. It is hardly surprising that he tries to reserve the concept of understanding for statements. Though requests and the like signify passions of the soul, they do not signify understandings. He illustrates this with ‘*Uti-*

¹³ The author of GDS expounds Abelard’s view in 181vb18–32 before turning to his own theses. We postpone our discussion of his exposition to IV.

nam legerem!'. In this case the will of the speaker (*i. e.* his *passio animi*) is signified. An understanding, however, to which 'true or false' is applicable is not signified. This is in contrast to '*Volo legere*', where an understanding is signified, a claim justified by reference to Priscian (181vb32–49):

Nos autem dicimus orationes imperativas vel deprecativas et huiusmodi nullatenus verum vel falsum significare, sed tantum quasdam animi passiones constituere, non verum vel falsum intellectum concedimus. Qui enim dicit 'Utinam legerem!' nulum animi intellectum sed solam¹⁴ animi voluntatem manifestat; in auditore tamen verum generat intellectum; ex verbis enim eius concipit auditor illum velle legere. Unde ista oratio "Utinam legerem!" solius voluntatis et non intellectus nota est, ista vero "Volo legere" intellectus nota est. Intellectus enim proferentis demonstrat et significat—eundem tamen intellectum utraque in auditore constituit. Similiter cum puer petit panem sibi dari, dicens "Da mihi panem!", non ad intellectum quem habeat manifestandum, cum non intelligit se hoc velle, tali utitur voce sed potius ad illum¹⁵ animae affectum indicandum. Constituit tamen vox illa verum vel falsum intellectum in animo auditoris. Intelligit enim qui audit ipsum imperare panem sibi dari. Significant igitur huiusmodi orationes non intellectus sed quosdam animi affectus. Unde dicit Priscianus [Institutiones grammaticae I 421.17]: "Modi sunt inclinationes animi, varios eius affectus indicantes." Sicut enim diversi¹⁶ sunt animi affectus, sic ad illorum¹⁷ designationes diversae sunt orationes: imperativa ad imperationem, optativa ad optationem, et sic de caeteris.

Another aspect of the theory becomes thereby clear. The theory has to distinguish between the speaker and the listener, since even if one who makes a request is signifying a passion of the soul and not an understanding, the listener will nevertheless have an understanding, namely an understanding that the speaker wants something, as noted.¹⁸ As far as the speaker is concerned, complete expressions that aren't statements are on a par with the cries of brute animals (182ra1–6):

Ex latratu enim canis qui audit canem iratum eum intelligit, non tamen vox illa an-

¹⁴ *solam*] De Rijk [1966] 47; *illam* V.

¹⁵ *illum*] *alium* V = De Rijk [1966] 48.

¹⁶ *diversi*] De Rijk [1966] 48; *diversa* V.

¹⁷ *illorum*] *aliorum* V = De Rijk [1966] 48.

¹⁸ A crucial feature of this theory is the way it capitalizes on the difference between speaker and listener, worked out in 182ra6–20; the problem of false statements and correct understandings (182vb23–33) seems to be original in GDS, though perhaps inspired by Boethius. In general, the author of GDS has a lively sense of the context-dependence of semantics. In 185vb14–15 he argues that the understanding constituted by a word is taken *ex demonstratione* in the circumstances of its utterance; in 186ra24–48 he argues that indexical statements such as *ego lego*, and hence non-indexical statements such as *lego librum*, require a context for the evaluation of their semantic content: *Sed illud falsum vel illud verum non ex se sed ex proferentis significat demonstratione* (186ra46–47).

imalis¹⁹ intellectus nomen est, cum animal proferens vocem nullum habeat intellectum; similiter dicimus quod nec veri nec falsi intellectus ab imperfectis significantur orationibus. Solius enim affirmationis sunt huiusmodi intellectus quarum est verum vel falsum significare.

A person issues an order if he wants someone to obey him, just as a dog barks in case it is angry. On the other hand the listener has a complete understanding—both of the commander’s will and of the dog’s anger (cf. 186va53–186vb3).

In 182va42 the author of GDS begins to elaborate (B). After reporting Abelard’s view (182va44–182vb5), he says that incomplete expressions don’t signify any true or false understanding (182vb5–11). He doesn’t say what they do signify, but, with respect to Aristotle’s text (16a9–11 = AL 5.11–14), he explicitly points out that incomplete expressions do signify an understanding (182vb14–21).²⁰ He returns to the problem of complete and incomplete expressions after commencing his commentary on chapter 5 of the *Peri hermeneias*,²¹ which he begins with *sed notandum quod quidam* (186va40). After citing Abelard’s position once more he continues the explanation he began earlier (186va47–53):

Nobis vero non placet perfectam et imperfectam <scil. orationem> eundem significare intellectum. Alterius enim intellectus nota est ‘Socrates legit’ et ‘Socrates legens’. Omnes enim illas orationes perfectas vocamus quae in auditore perfectum constituunt intellectum. Cum enim dico ‘Socrates legit’ in animo audientium perfectum genero intellectum; cum autem dico ‘Socrates legens’, nullum capit auditor perfectum intellectum, quare non est oratio perfecta.

The difference among expressions is reflected in the difference among understandings.

The semantical import of this discussion in GDS is to isolate the distinctive character of the statement. On the one hand, statements are to be distinguished from non-declarative complete expressions that are not statements (commands, wishes, and the like)—this is the subject of (A)/(A*); the difference is explained as a difference between *intellectus* and *passiones*. On the other hand, statements (such as *Homo currit*) are to be distinguished from declarative incomplete expressions (such as *homo currens*)—this is the subject of (B); the difference is explained as a difference between *intellectus perfecti* and *intellectus imperfecti*. The theses are distinct parts of a com-

¹⁹ *animalis*] *alius* V.

²⁰ See also 183ra3–5 and 186rb29f.

²¹ 17^a2 = AL 8.8 (*Enuntiativa vero non omnis...*) It is another mark of the close similarity between GDS and Abelard’s commentary on Aristotle’s *Peri hermeneias* that each takes this text to signal the start of chapter 5, rather than the more traditional beginning *Est autem una prima oratio enuntiativa affirmatio* (17^a8 = AL 8.13).

mon project, one that Abelard as well as his former student addresses. But they do not agree.

IV

The author of GDS elaborates (A)/(A*) and (B) in direct opposition to Abelard's position, which he is careful to state before proposing his own theses. However, as mentioned above, there is a mistake in his description of Abelard's position. Whether it is a mistake that vitiates his account remains to be seen.

After outlining his two theses (181vb6–18), and before considering (A), the author of GDS reports Abelard's statement that the understandable content of different forms of expressions might be the same. There is no doubt that Abelard is his target: he prefaces his remarks with the words *dicit tamen Magister P.* Abelard is correctly portrayed as having said that requests, commands, and statements might have the same content, but the author of GDS is mistaken, however, in claiming that Abelard said that these different forms of expression signify the same *verum vel falsum* (181vb18–23).²²

Dicit tamen Magister P. idem verum vel falsum et eundem significari intellectum a deprecativis et imperativis orationibus et consimilibus, et ab enuntiationibus—ut idem intellectus significatur ab ista 'Volo legere' et 'Utinam legerem'. Alteram tamen concedit propositionem esse, scilicet 'Volo legere', quia verum significat et enuntiat, altera <m> non, scilicet 'Utinam legerem!', quia licet verum vel falsum significet, non tamen enuntiat, enuntiare enim non potest nisi affirmando vel negando.

Abelard did not claim commands and the like to have a true or false content. Yet the author of GDS represents him as having done so. How could such a careful student of Abelard have come to misrepresent Abelard so seriously?

His reasoning seems to be as follows. Abelard clearly says that commands and other non-declarative complete expressions have the same understanding as statements. The author of GDS is of the opinion that an integral part of the understanding of statements is that it presents something as true or false—a version of (A*). But if a command (say) has the same understanding as a statement, and an integral part of that understanding is that it presents something as true or false, then it seems as though the understanding of the command will present something as true or false. This result holds for all complete expressions. Hence the author of GDS puts the conclusion he has drawn here into Abelard's mouth. His doing

²² Despite the anti-Abelardian slant of the passage, the reason given at the end in the words *enuntiare enim non potest nisi affirmando vel negando* is a verbatim quote from Abelard (327.21–22).

so depends on taking Abelard to endorse his own thesis (A*), connecting complete understandings and the possibility of applying ‘true or false’; he couldn’t imagine Abelard not accepting this connection.

Yet the author of GDS recognizes that Abelard must, in line with Aristotle, draw a distinction between statements and non-statements in terms of their truth and falsity. He finds in Abelard’s text a semantic distinction between signifying (*significare*) and stating (*enuntiare*), and therefore ascribes to Abelard the view that in all kinds of expressions something true or false is signified, but only a statement declares or states it. Small wonder he wasn’t satisfied with this idea! After all, how can an expression signify a truth or falsehood (*verum vel falsum significare*) without stating it as well? The author of GDS is correct in having much trouble with this distinction (*nulla ratio est*) (181vb23–29).

Of course, Abelard never said that a command signifies but does not state something true or false. Despite this misrepresentation, however, the author of GDS has grasped an important point. According to Abelard, different forms of expression may have identical content (and indeed the same understandings), but what makes a form of an expression a statement—and hence susceptible to ‘true or false’—is that its content is put forward with the *modus enuntiandi*. But then what makes a form of expression able to be assessed for its truth or falsity is not a matter of what is said, or not merely a matter of what is said, but also depends on how it is said. The author of GDS sees no reason for this. Why should the mode of presentation of some content be relevant to its truth or falsity? What is distinctive about the *modus enuntiandi* that it alone can present its content in the true-or-false way? The author of GDS is right to be dissatisfied. In light of such concerns, Abelard’s position begins to look suspiciously *ad hoc*.

The situation is similar in the case of (B). Even though there are two passages where our author reports Abelard correctly (181vb29–32 and 186va40–47), in a third passage, one where he explains his own thesis, he significantly misrepresents Abelard. He imputes to Abelard the view that ‘white man’ and ‘A man is white’ signify the same truth or falsehood (182va44–182vb4):²³

Dicit tamen magister P. imperfectas orationes ab enuntiationibus intellectu non discrepare. Asserit namque eundem intellectum ab ista oratione ‘homo albus’ significari qui ab ista ‘homo est albus’, et idem verum vel falsum, nec tamen hanc ‘homo albus’ propositionem concedit, quia nihil enuntiando proponit; nulla enim imperfecta oratio affirmat vel negat. Enuntiare autem non potest nisi affirmando vel negando.

²³ Again the reason given at the end, *nihil enuntiando... negando*, is a quote from Abelard (327.21–23), only slightly rearranged.

Analogously to the preceding case, Abelard did not claim incomplete expressions to be true or false, although the author of GDS represents him as having done so. The reasoning is the same as before, namely that truth and falsehood are an integral part of their understanding. If an incomplete and a complete expression signify the same truth or falsehood, why shouldn't the incomplete expression likewise state what the complete expression states? The author of GDS once more sees no reason for it.

The same problem found in the presentation of (A) is behind the mistaken account of (B). But again the author of GDS has found a weakness in Abelard's position. It seems clear that Abelard owes us an account of what he means by the *modus enuntiandi*, and how important semantic distinctions, such as the difference between expressions that make statements and those that fail to do so, can ride on it—to say nothing of how they are relevant to raising the question of truth or falsehood.

The debate between Abelard and his former student over these semantical issues is complex and difficult. There is justice on both sides. But an important piece of the puzzle is still missing.

V

The author of GDS attributes theses to Abelard he never has held. Yet Abelard does make free use of the terminology behind the theses. Abelard opens his excursus on understandings by an enumeration of formal distinctions he has to investigate. There we find the distinction—besides *intellectus simplex/compositus*,²⁴ *intellectus sanus/cassus*, and others that need not be mentioned here—between *intellectus verus/falsus* (325.15).

Now it is striking that all these distinctions are discussed separately except for *intellectus verus/falsus*. When he comes to this distinction Abelard merely says (326.37–327.1):²⁵

Nam nec omnis intellectus sanus 'verus' proprie dicitur nec omnis cassus 'falsus'.

²⁴ The author of GDS rejects this distinction, and in 183rb5–183va5 he gives reasons for the rejection of composite understandings—for instance, he points out that understandings are transitory and do not exist simultaneously to literally constitute a composite understanding; we could then have the seeming paradox of a true composite understanding made up of false constituent understandings; and the like. Instead, the author of GDS maintains that both the parts of expressions and expressions themselves signify simple understandings.

²⁵ The author of GDS introduces the distinction between *sanus/cassus* and *verus/falsus* in 182rb30–182va8 (almost verbatim from Abelard) and in 182va22–42 (largely following Abelard), though he interprets true and false understandings in a somewhat different fashion (as will be discussed below).

Verus enim vel falsus esse non potest intellectus nisi sit compositus, ut sunt propositionum intellectus vel fortasse quarundam aliarum orationum etiam imperfectarum.

As far as the distinctions between *intellectus sanus/cassus* and *intellectus verus/falsus* are concerned, it is obvious that the understanding corresponding to a single word, which might be sound or empty, cannot be true or false. But who would maintain such a claim? The real problem of how a distinction could be drawn between statements (*'Socrates currit'*), other complete expressions (*'Utinam Socrates curreret!'*), and incomplete expressions (*'Socrates currens'*) with respect to their specific understandings is not thereby solved. According to Abelard in this passage, there is only one requirement to having a true or false understanding, namely that the expression be composite. It is a necessary but not a sufficient condition. More needs to be said to account for the difference.

In an objection given shortly after the explanation just described, Abelard attacks exactly this difficulty (327.14–17):

Sed opponitur quod, si 'homo currens' vel 'homo albus' intellectum verum vel falsum significant sicut propositio, tota eis definitio propositionis convenit, quod sit scilicet oratio verum vel falsum significans, unde eas oportet esse propositiones, cum tamen sint imperfectae orationes.

The objection raised here is of a piece with the problems discussed in IV above. It stems from combining (A*) with the claim that complete and incomplete expressions have the same understanding. Abelard replies as follows (327.18–21):

Ad quod respondemus quod in definitione propositionis 'significare verum vel falsum' non secundum intellectum accipiendum est, sed secundum dicta propositionum, id est enuntiando proponere id quod est in re vel non est in re.

Abelard here separates the signification of something true or false from understandings—that is to say, he rejects (A*)—and for the first time he introduces the *dictum propositionis*, the missing piece of the puzzle. Complete expressions that are capable of truth and falsity are distinctive in virtue of the fact that they propose what is or is not the case in a statement-making way. We refer the question of their truth or falsity not to understandings at all but to their dicta. Abelard then takes up the very problems that induce the author of GDS to work out his own theory, as though directly addressing the criticisms raised in IV, and resolves them by mobilizing the difference between the *intellectus propositionis* and the *dictum propositionis*.²⁶

²⁶ Abelard writes in 327.27-41: "Sed nec a ceteris perfectis orationibus enuntiatio diversa est intellectu. Cum enim audio 'O Petre!' intelligo me vocari ab illo, sicut si dicerem 'Ego vocor ab illo,' vel cum dico 'Utinam rex veniret!' idem est intellectus ac si dicerem 'Volo regem venire in hanc villam' et cum dico imperando vel deprecando

Abelard's mention of the *dictum propositionis* in the passage cited above, though, is exceedingly brief. There is only this single remark. He underscores its importance but does not explain the *dictum* any further. Later, while commenting on chapter 4 of the *Peri hermeneias*, Abelard adds an excursus discussing the *dictum* at length (365.13–370.22). But there he is concerned with questions about its ontological status; its role as putative subject or predicate in different statements; how it can be a vehicle for necessity and possibility; how it explains the kinds of opposition found among propositions; and the like. There is no mention of true or false understandings and no account of how the *dictum* overcomes the difficulties it was designed to address.

Abelard returns to this issue elsewhere in his *Logica ingredientibus*, specifically referring to the passage cited above in which he introduces the *dictum propositionis*. In his commentary on Boethius's *De topicis differentiis*, Abelard takes up Boethius's definition of a proposition as an expression signifying something true or false (*De topicis differentiis* 1174B: *propositio est oratio verum falsumve significans*), where he writes (225.22–29 and 226.15–30):²⁷

‘Verum’ quippe ac ‘falsum’ tripliciter accipiuntur: modo enim nomina sunt propositionum, secundum quod dicitur propositio vera vel falsa; modo nomina intellectuum, unde intellectuum alium verum dicimus, alium falsum; modo etiam nomina eorum quae dicuntur a propositionibus, iuxta quod dicimus hanc propositionem dicere verum, illam autem falsum—hoc est proponere²⁸ talequid quod in re est vel quod in re non est [...] De duabus autem posterioribus significationibus ‘verum’ vel ‘falsum’ quaeritur quae in definitione propositionis accipiendae sint. Sed si dicamus ‘verum’ vel ‘falsum’ nomina esse intellectuum, cum dicitur ‘significans verum vel falsum’—ac si dicatur ‘significativa veri vel falsi intellectus’—profecto tota definitio

‘Adesto Petre!’ innuitur quod impero vel deprecor eum adesse. Similiter cum dicitur interrogando ‘Socrates venit?’ ostendo me interrogare quod venit, et eundem intellectum semper tenet ‘Socrates venit,’ sive interrogative dicatur sive non, sicut in *Topicis* ostendemus [Dal Pra 225.4–227.10]. Simples quoque dictiones tantundem saepe ostendunt quantum perfectae orationes. Si enim dicam ‘Papae!’ vel ‘Heu!’ ostendo me admirari vel dolere, sicut si dicerem ‘Admiror’ vel ‘Doleo.’ Iste tamen simplex est intellectus, qui dictionis est, ille compositus, qui est orationis, et cum orationes enuntiantur, interiectiones vel quaelibet simplices dictiones enuntians nil proponunt. Unde ex modo proponendi enuntiationes sive propositiones maxime dicuntur.” These are the problems canvassed by the author of GDS in his discussion of (A) and (B).

²⁷ Abelard's commentary on Boethius's *De topicis differentiis* has been edited in Dal Pra [1969] from the manuscript M = MS Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale cod. lat. 7493 ff. 168r–184r; we give references to the page and line number of his edition, but we supply our own version of Abelard's text directly from the manuscript (all variants noted).

²⁸ *proponere*] *propositione* M = Dal Pra.

propositionis²⁹ multis imperfectis orationibus convenit, veluti ista: ‘homo currens’ vel ‘hominem currere’, quae alium intellectum non habent quam ‘homo currit’, de quo plenius super *Perihermenias* egimus, ubi etiam ostendimus propositionem ‘veram’ vel ‘falsam’ magis debere dici secundum sensum suum quam secundum conceptionem sui intellectus. Similiter hoc loco ‘significare verum vel falsum’ magis accipi convenit secundum dictum propositionis quam secundum intellectum, ac si diceremus ‘enuntians talequid quod in re est vel in re non est’, nam quod in re est vel quod non est propositionibus ponimus. . .

Given that complete and incomplete expressions have the same understanding, Abelard asserts, and taking the definition of the proposition to refer to understandings, there would be no way to block the conclusion that incomplete expressions are themselves propositions; we must therefore take the definition as referring to what propositions say rather than to their understandings.

The argument is the same one put forward in the commentary on the *Peri hermenias*, couched in a more general framework. Abelard’s explicit appeal to the latter as further confirmation (*ubi etiam ostendimus. . .*) is therefore disingenuous. Yet at the end of this passage he offers a clue: the semantic relation at work here is that of stating, which does not apply to understandings at all but to a new and distinct item, namely the *dictum*. Abelard expands on this suggestion in replying to two objections (226.35–227.10):

Sed dicitur quod si per “significare” ‘enuntiare’ accipimus, superfluit “verum vel falsum” quod supponitur; quippe omnis oratio enuntiativa est propositio—

Atque respondemus quod “significare” per se acceptum pro ‘enuntiare’ non solet accipi, nisi supponatur “verum vel falsum” vel tale aliquid quod solius propositionis sit, sicut illud in secundo *Perihermeniarum* quod “affirmatio est significativa aliquid de aliquo”, id est enuntians affirmando aliquid de aliquo.

Si quis etiam quaerat quare in designatione intellectuum³⁰ non accipimus “verum vel falsum” postquam³¹ subintelligimus ‘enuntiare’—

Profecto omnino quia licet propositio intellectum significat hunc, tamen quia ipsum non dicit, enuntians non proponit.³²

The ‘true or false’ criterion is associated only with propositions, and, Abelard asserts, is intimately bound up with making a statement. Although a proposition signifies its understanding, it does not present it in a statement-making way. Instead, doing so is entirely a matter of what the proposition says—its *dictum*.

²⁹ *propositionis*] + *definitio* M (following Dal Pra’s excision).

³⁰ *intellectuum*] *intellectum* M = Dal Pra.

³¹ *postquam*] *priusquam* Dal Pra (!).

³² *proponit*] *ponit* Dal Pra.

Abelard's response to the difficulties over true and false understandings sketched in IV, then, has two elements. First, Abelard postulates a semantic relation of 'stating' (*enuntiare*) distinct from the semantic relation of signifying. This allows him to maintain that statements indeed have the same signification as other complete and incomplete expressions while leaving room for his denial that the latter are thereby propositional in character. Second, Abelard postulates a special object for this semantic relation, namely the *dictum propositionis*. This allows him to identify what is distinctive about statements without making understandings somehow susceptible to assessments of truth and falsehood. The semantic relations of stating/signifying differ intrinsically as well as by their objects.

Abelard thus holds that expressions signify their understandings, and that the same understanding can be signified by an incomplete expression, a non-declarative complete expression, and a proposition. Propositions, in addition, say something. They propose what is or is not the case. This is something propositions do above and beyond what they have in common with other expressions. Hence it requires a new semantic relation. Furthermore, propositions state how things are. And 'how things are'—what it is that a proposition states—is neither itself a thing (stating is not referring) nor an understanding (stating is not signifying). It is rather the new object of the new semantic relation, namely what is said by the proposition, its *dictum propositionis*.

Much remains to clarify in this account. Yet even so we can see how the introduction of the *dictum propositionis* is motivated by the difficulties surrounding true and false understandings.³³ Abelard's doctrine addresses the points attacked by the author of GDS and provides a systematic answer to a fundamental problem in semantics. Unfortunately, all is not as simple as it seems at first.

VI

Abelard clearly states in all of the passages we have been considering

³³ We do not mean to deny that Abelard uses the *dictum propositionis* in many other roles in his semantics, philosophy of logic, and metaphysics. But the fact remains that he introduces it in the context of true and false understandings, and, when he summarizes his doctrine in his commentary on Boethius's *De topicis differentiis*, he concentrates on these aspects again. Whatever we may think of the relative philosophical value of the various motivations the theory of the *dictum propositionis* may have had, from identifying logical content across grammatically distinct sentences to providing a vehicle for modal operators, Abelard himself takes it in the first instance to address the difficulties with true and false understandings.

that ‘true or false’ is not to be used as a distinction among understandings. In the case of single words we speak of understandings being sound or empty rather than true or false. Talk of truth or falsity is out of place in the case of incomplete expressions and non-declarative complete expressions, as Abelard repeatedly emphasizes; if they were susceptible to truth and falsity they would be propositions. Yet in the case of complete declarative expressions the *dictum propositionis* is the vehicle of truth and falsity, not the associated understanding, and to speak of its associated understanding as true or false would be a mistake, since the selfsame understanding can also be associated with non-declarative expressions. There is no philosophical work left for the notion of true and false understandings to do.

Therefore, after Abelard introduced the *dictum propositionis*, all mention of *intellectus verus/falsus* could, and indeed should, have been dropped. There is no need for a *dictum propositionis* if one accepts the concept of true or false understandings, and conversely.³⁴ Each makes the other unnecessary.

Yet Abelard freely talks about true and false understandings after introducing the *dictum propositionis* in 327.18–21 (cited above). Parts of his commentary on Aristotle’s *Peri hermeneias* can hardly be worked through without using the formula ‘*intellectus verus/falsus*’. For example, Abelard argues in 328.18–329.28 that understandings should be called true or false not in line with the conception or disposition of mental images but according to the *attentiones animi*. Here true and false understandings play a theoretical role in the analysis—Abelard’s use of the formula is neither casual nor loose, but integral to the point under discussion. Furthermore, passages like this one can easily be found in his work, despite the fact that the introduction of the *dictum propositionis* should have made any mention of true or false understandings otiose.

Yet this is only true of parts of his work. For, in the main, Abelard lays out his theory of the *dictum propositionis* not in the literal exegesis of Aristotle’s text but in the independent excurses he adds to it. For example, in the excursus to his commentary on *Peri hermeneias* 4, Abelard argues

³⁴ This point has escaped hitherto existing interpretations, which do no more than report Abelard’s distinctions. See for example Jolivet [1969] 373: “Une intellection saine, comme une vide, peut être simple ou composée. En revanche seule une intellection composée peut être dite vraie ou fausse: telles les intellections des propositions. Nous débouchons alors, non seulement sur la logique, mais aussi sur la question du sens des propositions, traitée ailleurs.” See also Jacobi [1981] 64–68, which speaks of “wahre und falsche Verständnisse,” although in 68–73 he shows that there cannot be any true or false understandings.

carefully and imaginatively in favor of his theory of the *dictum*. He knows how unusual it must be for those who attend his lectures. He distinguishes between the signification of understandings and the signification of what is said to be the case (*dictum propositionis*). Most importantly, the formula *intellectus verus/falsus* doesn't appear even once. The same is true of his commentary on *Peri hermeneias* 5.³⁵ By the same token, in speaking of true and false understandings while commenting on Aristotle, he speaks much less often of the *dictum propositionis*. The two accounts coexist uneasily in Abelard's writings, the former at home in the commentary and the latter in the excurses. When the two accounts appear together, as they sometimes do, they are not well integrated.³⁶

One hypothesis that would explain the state of Abelard's text is a 'layered' account of the composition of his work, a view that is independently plausible.³⁷ On this hypothesis, Abelard developed his theory of the *dictum propositionis* after the composition of his basic commentary (the literal exegesis of Aristotle), and perhaps even after some of the other excurses had been composed and inserted into the text. If so, then Abelard may

³⁵ In 373.4-5 Abelard describes the identity of understandings associated with complete and incomplete expressions by *eundem* and not by *verum/falsum* as in 327.20; this suggests that he is aware of the implications of his shift to the *dictum propositionis*. Cfr. 374.25-26.

³⁶ There is one remarkable passage in which Abelard seems to contradict everything he has said about the *dictum propositionis* (375.33-35): "Nam quantum ad intellectum sive ad dictum saepe non differunt perfecta oratio et imperfecta, ut 'Socratem currere' et 'Socrates currit', sed magis in eo quod haec enuntiat, id est affirmat vel negat, illa non." Incomplete expressions ought not have a *dictum* at all! Other passages in which the two accounts are juxtaposed are perhaps misleading but able to be construed in line with Abelard's professed views. For example, in explaining how a proposition is multiple, Abelard writes (381.23-25): "PLURES AUTEM, id est multiplex, est propositio, QUAE similiter de uno, id est per unam materiam enuntiationis, PLURA significat, sive quantum ad dicta propositionum sive quantum ad intellectum." The choice between understandings and *dicta* posed at the end of this passage only makes sense if we take Abelard to be using 'signify' in a wide sense, one that includes 'generating an understanding' (signification proper) as well as 'stating'. Abelard's usage is sufficiently loose and fluid that this is at least plausible. There is, of course, the larger question of how understandings and *dicta* are connected to one another—see De Rijk [1982], one of the few articles to address the issue.

³⁷ Abelard composed his theological works in this fashion; it is not unreasonable to think that he did the same for his logical works. See Jacobi/Strub [1995], which argues for this claim in the specific case of Abelard's commentary on Aristotle's *Peri hermeneias*. Abelard's text, then, is not a fixed object; it is likely to have been the subject of constant revision and rewriting. There are interesting consequences for the project of dating Abelard's works.

well not have made all the corrections needed to bring the rest of his text into line with his new ideas, though he did make some adjustments. The passage where Abelard substitutes ‘*dictum propositionis*’ for ‘true or false understanding’ (namely 327.14–41) may be such a later adjustment. We can then write off the persistence of the formula *intellectus verus/falsus* as a relic of an earlier stage of Abelard’s thinking, one that for some unknown reason was never fully revised out of the text.

This hypothesis can also explain the ‘mistakes’ made by the author of GDS, canvassed in IV. While the author of GDS seems to have been familiar with most or all of Abelard’s literal exegesis of Aristotle, the same cannot be said for Abelard’s excurses. (He shows no signs of being acquainted with Abelard’s excursus in chapter 4 on the *dictum*, for example.³⁸) Perhaps he only had some of the ‘layers’ in his own manuscript of Abelard, wherein we find true or false understandings not yet being partly corrected by ‘*dictum propostionis*’. This text would raise all the difficulties that motivated Abelard to introduce the *dictum propositionis*, and the author of GDS would be quite right to highlight them, though in ignorance of Abelard’s later theory he solves the problems in his own individual way, as we have seen.

These general considerations receive particular support in the case of the passage where Abelard introduces the *dictum propositionis* (327.18–21). The author of GDS is intimately familiar with this passage. In the very next sentence Abelard writes (327.21–23):

Enuntiare autem non possumus nisi affirmando vel negando, nulla autem imperfecta oratio affirmat vel negat atque ideo nil enuntiando proponit.

The author of GDS refers not once but twice to this remark, once at 181vb23 (cited above) and once at 182vb04 (also cited above), it being one of the few places Abelard tries to spell out what it is to make a statement (*enuntiare*). But the author of GDS makes no mention of the *dictum propositionis* here—or anywhere else, for that matter.³⁹ If his manuscript included a remark about the *dictum* at all, its importance was not highlighted. Surely he did

³⁸ The author of GDS directly cites Abelard’s excurses on *Peri hermeneias* Chapter 1 and Chapter 6; he seems not be aware of any excurses on Chapters 2–5. The author of GDS is also familiar with the doctrine expressed in Abelard’s excurses on Chapter 7 and Chapter 9, but not Abelard’s exact wording.

³⁹ The author of GDS does not have the same reticence about the *status*—interesting in light of contemporary attempts to link *status* and *dictum* (see for example Tweedale [1976]). He cites with approval Abelard’s characterization of a sound understanding as one “in accord with the *status* of the thing” (182rb34–36, 182va04, 182va36–40), and even goes so far as to say *status enim efficiunt veritatem et falsitatem propositionum* (197rb08).

not know Abelard's detailed discussion of the *dictum* in the excursus to chapter 4.

This fact should give us pause. How could it happen that one of Abelard's close followers, a member of his philosophical circle, should be so clearly ignorant of such an important and distinctive view of Abelard's? It is not that he disagrees with Abelard over the *dictum*. Rather, he is completely unaware of the theory, though he has a sharp awareness of the problems that would prompt Abelard to develop it.

A natural suggestion, in keeping with the developmental hypothesis sketched above, is that the author of GDS was affiliated with Abelard at a relatively early stage of Abelard's philosophical thinking, and that he composed GDS before Abelard developed the theory of the *dictum propositionis* (or at any rate before hearing about it). The problems over true and false understandings and explaining the distinctive character of statements would have been problems debated in Abelard's circle; the master and the student each came to resolve the problems independently, and, as it turned out, in diametrically opposed ways.⁴⁰

Another member of Abelard's circle provides some negative evidence here: William of Lucca, whose *Summa dialecticae artis* dates from the latter part of the twelfth century, well after Abelard's death.⁴¹ William is also a devoted follower of Abelard—so much so that he refers to him simply as “the Philosopher” (*Philosophus*), a distinction usually reserved for Aristotle. Yet like the author of GDS, William is completely unaware of the *dictum propositionis*. It is not so much as mentioned in the whole of the *Summa dialecticae artis*.⁴² Furthermore, when William turns to the senses of ‘true’ and ‘false’ in §5.22, he offers only two alternatives: they are

⁴⁰ This suggestion is stronger than it needs to be. The author of GDS wrote in ignorance of Abelard's views, but the converse need not hold. Consider what Abelard says when he returns to his distinction between complete and incomplete expressions and between different forms of complete expressions in a later passage in his commentary on *Peri hermeneias* 5 (373.1–6): “Nos autem perfectionem orationis non iuxta perfectionem significationis pensamus, quod videlicet significativum huius perfectum est, illius imperfectum. Nam ‘Socratem legere’ quae imperfecta est idem penitus significat quod ‘Socrates legit’ et ‘Socrates currens’ eundem habet intellectum quem ‘Socrates currit’ et per se etiam dicta eandem animi conceptionem facit quam ‘Socrates currit’...” This looks like an objection to the views held by the author of GDS!

⁴¹ William of Lucca's *Summa dialecticae artis* has been edited in Pozzi [1975]; all references are to this edition.

⁴² The only possible mention of dicta occurs in §§8.29–33, where William takes up the question of what an argument is. He considers the proposals that arguments are propositions, that they are the understandings associated with propositions, that they are (somehow) ‘things themselves’, and that they are *hypotheticarum propositionum dicta*.

proper names either of understandings or of states of affairs (*eventus propositionum*), though sometimes they are transferred to propositions in virtue of the truth or falsity of their associated understandings. But William is writing at a late enough date to be fully acquainted with Abelard's mature theory. Why is there no mention of the *dictum propositionis*?⁴³

VII

An alternative hypothesis that would account for (most of) the facts extends the developmental idea. It could be that Abelard, having devised the *dictum propositionis*, came to repudiate it—perhaps under the weight of the philosophical difficulties brought in its train, *e. g.* questions about its ontological status.⁴⁴ His 'mature theory', if indeed he came to a settled view, might dispense with the *dictum*. That would explain why neither the author of GDS nor William of Lucca mention it. On this score, it is perhaps enlightening to note that the latter two authors share a common terminology: each speaks of *documentum* and the *eventus propositionum*, perhaps a clue to Abelard's own view.⁴⁵ It may also be worthwhile to note that Abelard experiments with different terminology in his *Dialectica*—whether this be an earlier composition, a later one, or simultaneous—where he speaks of the *essentiae/exsistentiae rerum* rather than of *dicta propositionum*.

This is but one hypothesis among many. Another is that Abelard came to formulate his theory of the *dictum propositionis* very late in his

But it is clear from §8.31 that by the latter he means no more than the propositions that enter into the antecedent and the consequent of the consequence representing an argument. (In any event William rejects all the suggestions, concluding in §8.33 that arguments consist only in words.) There are no other uses of the term in his work.

⁴³ What of the two other works clearly produced in Abelard's circle (mentioned in note 8 above)? The *Glossae secundum uocales* has no mention of the *dictum propositionis*. Nor have we yet found it in a preliminary examination of one of the manuscripts of the *Glossae super Categorias*, though this is by no means conclusive.

⁴⁴ See Nuchelmans [1973], Tweedale [1976], and de Libera [1981] for discussion of the philosophical problems posed by the theory of the *dictum propositionis*.

⁴⁵ The author of GDS speaks of propositions related to documenta in four passages: at 180va26 (*documentum fieret*), 182vb 09–11 (*facere documentum*), and 186va45/47 (*ad documentum faciendum / ad aliquod documentum faciendum*). In each case such propositions acquaint us with the way things turn out in the world—the *eventus rerum*. What an expression signifies cannot be described in terms like *res*; what an *oratio* signifies is no *res* but something like a fact, a state of affairs, a way the world is. The juridical use of the phrase (meaning 'to give evidence' or 'to testify') suggests that the author of GDS is thinking of the state of the world as providing evidence that an understanding or a claim about the world is true or false. In short, it seems to perform at least some of the work done by the *dictum propositionis*.

career, perhaps after he was no longer actively teaching—we see fragmented attempts to grapple with something like a *dictum*-theory in the writings of the Montanists, perhaps evidence of Abelard's earliest attempts to grapple with the issue—and that his last, incompletely revised manuscript of the *Logica ingredientibus* did not circulate after Abelard's death (due to his infamous reputation at the hands of Bernard of Clairvaux?), though by a quirk of fate it has come down to us. The author of GDS and William, and indeed all of Abelard's contemporaries, would not have known of the theory he was struggling to develop at the end of his life.

It is too soon to tell which, if any, of these hypotheses is correct; not enough is known about Abelard's circle. Now that the question has been raised, we hope that further research will help clarify these matters. Yet one point seems clear already. Even if Abelard abandoned the *dictum*—the most radical possibility mentioned here—is no sign that he returned to true and false understandings as a way of dealing with the underlying philosophical issues. On the contrary, he and the author of GDS have pursued opposite paths in their attempts to find a solution, and in Abelard's case the path out of his circle has led, at least initially, from *intellectus verus/falsus* to the *dictum propositionis*.

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