The Views of William of Sherwood on Some Semantical Topics and Their Relation to Those of Roger Bacon*

H. A. G. BRAAKHUIS

As is well known, Roger Bacon in his Compendium Studii Theologiae deals with the two semantical problems he considers of primordial importance for metaphysics and logic.1 The positions taken on these problems have accordingly, in his opinion, an effect on every theological or philosophical dispute. The problems are the following: a) can a word signify anything that is univocally common to being and non being (utrum vox possit significare aliquid commune univocum enti et non enti), b) can a word lose its significance (utrum vox possit cadere a sua significacione).

From the beginning of his treatment of the problems Roger makes it unambiguously clear that in his opinion the first of the questions is to be answered in the negative and the second in the affirmative. According to him nouns in principle signify only actual existing things and in case the thing(s) signified by a certain noun were to perish, nothing will be left for that noun to signify. Or if the same noun (i.e. the same combination of sounds) were eventually charged with the new function of signifying those things that once did exist, then the first and the second signification of that noun will have a relation of equivocation.2

* This paper was read, in first draft, at the Second European Symposium for Medieval Logic and Semantics held in Leiden/Nijmegen, November 1974.
1 Fratris Rogeri Bacon Compendium Studii Theologiae ed. H. Rashdall ..., Aberdoniae MCMXI (anast. repr. Farnborough 1966), pp. 52-64.
2 See ibid., p. 54: ... quia omnia nomina que inponimus rebus inponimus ut sunt presentia nobis; p. 59: Ex hac ergo ratione (radice, Rashdall) patet quod non potest homo esse animal nullo homine existente, nec Cesar poterit esse homo: quia nomina huiusmodi significant essencias rerum presentes et actuales, quia non significant (nomen significat, Rashdall) aliquid commune presenti, preterito et futuro; pp. 60-61: quia (scilicet: nomen) non inponebatur nisi sub racione presentis et esse actualis ... et ideo cum periti res, et sic non est, nomen non significabit illud;
p. 61: dicendum est quod vox que significabit rem presentem per inpositionem aliquando non significabit rem illam preteritam sub eadem inposicione; set bene potest inponi ei nova inposicione, licet sit nichil; quia possimus per priva-
The usually defended semantical concepts leading to an answer contrary to the one Roger gives, he treats very sourly and contemptuously. One of these conceptions so firmly rejected by Roger is that of the *esse habituale*:

*Compendium*, p. 55: *sed cum mendacia multiplicatur semper, et iterum fingunt unum esse quod nunquam a philosophia nec a sapientibus fuit inventum nec receptum, et dicunt illud *esse habituale*, et hoc dicunt esse commune presenti, preterito, et futuro, et commune enti actualiter et non enti actualiter.*

If one now looks for a person to whom to ascribe such a conception, the name of William of Sherwood comes easily to mind for in his so-called *Introductiones in logicam* we find exactly this conception of *esse habituale*:  


*.... Cum enim ‘est’ ponitur inter hic extrema ‘homo’, ‘animal’ tamquam medium, dicit habitudinem medium inter hec duo.*

One could also point to other passages in William of Sherwood’s work, where this *esse habituale* is related explicitly to the problem of the empty class.

Thus we read in his *Syncategoremata*, in the section on *est*:

*Syncategoremata*, p. 71: *Sciendum autem quod hoc verbum ‘est’ quandoque accipitur aequivoce; dicit enim quandoque esse actual, quandoque debetur actualiter existenti, quandoque esse habituale quod debetur ci quod in se est natura aliqua et natum est habitualiter esse in aliquo singulari, licet

*acionem entis intelligere non ens; et sicut intelligimus non ens, sic possumus dare nomen, set nova erit inposicio, et equivoce respectu prioris significati (signati, Rashdall)*.

These last sentences show that of course Roger Bacon allows signification of non beings too.


4 See Sten Ebbesen & Jan Pinborg, *ibidem*, p. 44 (94), who regarding this conception of *esse habituale* point to William of Sherwood and refer to the passage of his *Introductiones* cited here.
