Chapter XI of the first part of Ockham's *Summa logicae* presents a doctrine that is deceptively simple. In the preceding chapters (Chs. 4-10), Ockham drew some distinctions that apply to terms of all kinds—spoken, written, and mental ones. Now, in Ch. 11, he turns to a new set of distinctions, ones that apply only to spoken and written terms, not to mental terms.\(^1\) We shall henceforth group spoken and written terms together and speak of them as "conventional" terms, since they signify *ad placitum* whereas concepts or mental terms signify naturally.\(^2\)

Conventional terms, Ockham tells us, may be divided first into terms of first imposition and terms of second imposition. Each alternative may be taken in a broad or a strict sense. Terms of first imposition in the strict sense may be further divided into terms of first intention and terms of second intention. Again, each alternative may be taken in a broad or a strict sense.\(^3\) In Ch. 12 Ockham goes on to discuss first and second intentions themselves, each alternative again in a broad and a strict sense. Whereas terms of first or second intention are conventional terms, first and second intentions themselves are concepts. And although Ockham does not explicitly say so, it appears at first that terms of first intention are meant to be exactly those subordinated to first intentions, and terms of second intention exactly those subordinated to second intentions.\(^4\)

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\(^1\) "Positis divisionibus quae possunt competere tam terminis naturaliter significantibus quam etiam terminis ad placitum institutis, dicendum est de quibusdam divisionibus competentibus terminis ad placitum institutis." (*Summa logicae*, I, II, lines 4-6) All references to the *Summa logicae* will be to the critical edition by Gedeon Gál and Stephen F. Brown, St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: The Franciscan Institute 1974.

\(^2\) See *Summa logicae*, I, 1.


\(^4\) On subordination, see *Summa logicae* I, 3, and my *Ockham's Distinctions between Absolute and Connotative Terms*, in: Vivarium, 13 (1975), 55-76 at p. 57 n. 8.
So far so good. The terminology of first and second imposition and intention is more or less familiar, and at least the main outlines of Ockham’s doctrine are quite clear. Terms of first imposition signify things, whereas terms of second imposition signify conventional terms. Similarly, first intentions signify things, whereas second intentions signify concepts. And finally, terms of first and terms of second intention are presumably subordinated to first and second intentions, respectively. Everyone recognizes that further refinements must be made, but the details seem tedious and unimportant.

When one looks more closely, however, at least three problems emerge. First, it is not so clear after all that Ockham meant terms of first and second intention to be exactly those subordinated to first and second intentions, respectively. For (a) Ockham tells us in Ch. 12 that intentions or concepts are “of two kinds”. The two kinds turn out to be first and second intentions. It seems therefore that every concept is either a first intention or a second intention. Hence, if terms of first and second intention were correlated with the first and second intentions themselves in the way supposed, it would follow that every conventional term is either of first intention or of second intention. But this does not seem to be so. The division in Ch. 11 seems to be such that only terms of first imposition in the strict sense are of first or second intention; other terms are of neither.

Moreover (b) in Ch. 12 Ockham includes mental syncategoremata among first intentions in the broad sense. Hence conventional syncategoremata ought to be included among terms of first intention in the broad sense. But it seems they are not. Conventional syncategoremata are terms of first imposition in the broad sense, and it is terms of first imposition in the strict sense, excluding syncategoremata, that are divided into terms of first and of second intention.

Furthermore (c) in Ch. 12 Ockham says that second intentions are signs of first intentions (and perhaps of other signs as well). Hence

5 *Summa logicae* I, 12, line 44: “Tale autem signum duplex est.”
