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MENTALISM WITHOUT PSYCHOLOGISM
ABELARD'S *dicta* AS OBJECTIVE, MENTAL ENTITIES

The debate about what Abelard's *dicta propositionum* – “what propositions say” – are, if anything, is a long and rich one.¹ In this paper, I consider an option that, as far as I can tell, is almost a newcomer on the stage² and, to some extent at least, a quite iconoclastic one. The hypothesis is that *dicta* are mental, yet objective entities. That view has its roots in the simple intuition that the technical term

1. A severe selection of recent studies on the topic includes K. Jacobi - P. King - C. Strub, *From Intellectus Verus / Falsus to the Dictum Propositionis: The Semantics of Peter Abelard and His Circle*, « Vivarium », 34 (1996), 15-40; A. de Libera, *L'art des généralités*, Aubier, Paris 1999; K. Guilfooy, *Peter Abelard's Two Theories of the Proposition*, in A. Maierù - L. Valente (cur.), *Medieval Theories of Assertive and Non-Assertive Language*, Olschki, Firenze 2004, 35-57; J. Marenbon, *Dicta, Assertion and Speech Acts: Abelard and some Modern Interpreters*, in Maierù-Valente (cur.), *Medieval Theories of Assertive and Non-Assertive Language*, 59-80; I. Rosier-Catach, *Les discussions sur le signifié propositionnel chez Abélard et ses contemporains*, in Maierù-Valente (cur.), *Medieval Theories of Assertive and Non-Assertive Language*, 1-34; M. Lenz, *Peculiar Perfection: Peter Abelard on Propositional Attitudes*, « J. Hist. Philos. », 43 (2005), 377-386; P. King, *Abelard on Mental Language*, « Amer. cathol. philos. Quart. », 81 (2007), 169-187; C. Martin, *Imposition and essence: what's new in Abaelard's theory of meaning?*, in T. Shimizu - C. Burnett (cur.), *The word in medieval logic, theology and psychology*, Brepols, Turnhout 2009, 183-223; I. Rosier-Catach, *Understandings as attending. Semantics, Psychology and Ontology in Peter Abelard*, in J. Pelletier - M. Roques (cur.), *The language of thought in Late Medieval Philosophy*, Springer, Cham 2017, 249-274; C. Tarlazzi, *Abelard Strategies for Non-Things*, (forthcoming); F. Viri, *Arts du langage et noétique: la notion d'attention chez Abélard*, (forthcoming, providing an extensive review of the literature from Jolivet 1969 to the present).

2. A comparable attempt of assessing Abelard's theory is that of Guilfooy, *Peter Abelard's Two Theories (dicta as mental entities)*, but also to Rosier-Catach, *Les discussions*, (dependence of *dicta* with respect to uttered sentences).

'dictum' has to be taken at face value, namely as referring to an item, whatever it is,³ that depends on a proposition. Furthermore, I will argue that such a dependence does not prevent *dicta* from possessing the objectivity Abelard wants them to have. The way to conciliate mental dependence with objectivity will be explained on the basis of a (quasi) contemporary account of states of affairs as mental, objective entities. In terms of ontological commitment, then, the claim is that Abelard's propositional semantics commits him to special mental, objective entities that are precisely what propositions say.

The paper is divided into three main sections. §1 briefly introduces the Abelardian notion of "what propositions say" (*dicta propositionum*) and formulate two series of characteristic claims (functional and ontological ones) about *dicta*; §2 argues for the case of *dicta* being dependent on mental acts and, more precisely, on what Abelard calls the *modus enuntiandi* (the mode of stating); §3 is an attempt to assess *dicta* as products of mental acts; §4, drawing on Carl Stumpf's notion of formation (*Gebilde*), explains how *dicta* can be at the same time dependent of mental acts *and* objective entities.

1. PROPOSITIONS AND WHAT THEY SAY

Formulating a sensible hypothesis about *dicta*⁴ requires, *inter alia*, to be clear about what *dicta* are "of", namely: propositions. A *propositio*, for medieval philosophers, is a declarative sentence token (and not, as it is for contemporary thinkers, the abstract meaning of a declarative sentence). As such, a proposition is intimately linked to the mental life of language users (speakers and hearers). On the one hand, a proposition depends on a speaker's

3. 'Item' is used here in a neutral sense with respect to ontological commitment: an item need not be an entity.

4. The technical term '*dictum*' is absent from the *Dialectica* (1110-1117) and found only in the *Logica Ingredientibus* (c. 1119). However, as Enrico Donato and Federico Viri pointed out to me, there is an isolated occurrence of '*dictum*' in the *Dialectica*, ed. De Rijk, 372¹⁰. In the present paper, I shall ignore that (important) terminological fact, for the theories put forward in the two works (*pace* Guilfooy, *Peter Abelard's Two Theories*) are substantially identical.

mental acts, for it depends on the action of uttering a complex, articulated vocal sound (and that action itself depends on speakers' presentations, intentions, and the like). On the other hand, a proposition, when understood, generates an understanding in the hearer's mind, and such a "generation" is typically identified with its signification: «significare est intellectum constituere» as says the adage.⁵

What is a proposition according to Abelard? With respect to the definition given by Boethius at the beginning of his *De topicis differentiis* (I, 2, i) – «propositio est oratio verum falsumve significans» («a proposition is a sentence signifying something true or false») – Abelard identifies three aspects that a linguistic expression must display in order to be a proposition (those are necessary conditions that, taken together, turn out to be sufficient for "propositionality"):⁶ i) being a complete expression (*oratio perfecta*), where the criterion for completeness is the disposition to manifest or trigger a complete sense (*sensus perfectus*), something that can be achieved only by a well formed expression comprising a conjugated verb, and can thus be assimilated to assertive force;⁷ ii) possessing a special semantic value (propositions alone signify *dicta*);⁸ iii) being a truth-bearer, a property propositions inherit from their special sig-

5. For an overview of medieval theories of meaning, see M. Cameron in J. Marenbon (cur.), *The Oxford Companion to Medieval Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2012, 342–362. For a thorough study of the topic in the 13th-century, see A.M. Mora-Márquez, *The 13th-Century Notion of Signification*, Brill, Leiden 2015. For a recent study of the relation between semantics and noetics in Abelard, see F. Viri, *Arts du langage et noétique. La notion d'attentio chez Abélard*, unpublished post-doctoral thesis of the ÉPHÉ, Paris 2018.

6. The key passages where Abelard discusses Boethius' definition, and thus addresses the issue of what propositionality is are *Dialectica*, ed. De Rijk, 153³³–161² and *Logica 'Ingredientibus', Glosae super Peri hermeneias*, ed. Jacobi-Strub, 132⁷⁴–141²⁹⁵. Henceforth, those two works will be referred to as *Dial.* and *Super Peri herm.*, with page and line numbers in the mentioned editions.

7. Cf. *Dial.*, 149^{20–23}.

8. Cf. *Dial.*, 153³³–156³³; *Super Peri herm.*, 132⁷⁴–133¹⁰⁰. Both nouns and propositions have a twofold signification, and both signify understandings (*intellectus*); nouns and propositions diverge, however, in that what is signified besides understandings are things (*res*) for the former, and *dicta* for the latter. Accordingly, *dicta*, for propositions, are the counterparts of *res*, for nouns, which could explain Abelard's claim that *dicta* are *quasi res propositionum* (like the propositions' things, *Super Peri herm.*, 135¹⁵⁸).

nificate.⁹ Those three features are formal or functional. Turning to the ontology of propositions, one can say that a proposition is a continuous succession of vocal sounds (*voces*), i.e. of spatio-temporal entities in the category of quantity.¹⁰

Having clarified the Abelardian notion of *propositio* from a formal, functional, and ontological point of view, let us turn to our proper object, namely the *dicta propositionum*, or what propositions say. Let me begin with two series of claims about *dicta*: functional claims (F), followed by ontological ones (O). The former list the main systematic roles played by *dicta* in Abelard's propositional semantics, while the latter gather the claims found in Abelard about what kind of item *dicta* are, the crucial point being that of their being an entity or not. In the next sections (§§2 to 4) I will then consider the questions as to i) why and how *dicta* depend on mental acts, ii) what kind of items they are, and iii) what it means for them to be objective.

Functional claims:

(F1) *dicta* are what propositions alone signify.¹¹

9. Cf. *Dial.*, 156.²⁶⁻³. Propositions signify *dicta*, and *dicta* are the primary bearers of truth and falsity, just as they are of modalities (cf. *Super Peri herm.*, 135¹⁵⁹⁻¹⁶⁷).

10. Cf. *Dial.*, 66²⁸-69³¹; Peter Abelard, *Logica 'Ingredientibus', Glosae super Praedicamenta*, ed. Geyer, 174³⁰-176¹⁴. In the following, that latter work will be referred to as *Super Praedicamenta*, with the page and line numbers in the mentioned edition. On that topic, see I. Rosier-Catach, *Vox and oratio in early twelfth century grammar and dialectics*, « Arch. Hist. doctr. litt. M.Â. », 78 (2011), 47-129 (esp. 107-118, where Abelard's position is analysed in detail), as well as A. Grondeux - I. Rosier-Catach, *Sur la nature catégorielle de la vox au 12^e siècle. Trois versions des Glosulae in Priscianum*, « Arch. Hist. doctr. litt. M.Â. », 78 (2011), 259-333.

11. *Super Peri herm.*, 140²⁷⁶⁻²⁹³: « cum propositiones dicta sua proponendo significant, non tamen de eis intellectus constituunt. [...] Unde oportet per propositiones non dicta sua intelligi, sed res in intellectu complexi. Nomen vero ipsius dicti, ut si dicam 'hoc dictum', quendam intellectum et simplicem de dicto constituit, sicut quodlibet nomen de re sua. Unde nomen dicti personalem facere enuntiationem potest, veluti si dicam 'hoc dictum est aliquid' vel 'non est aliquid'. Si vero orationem subiciam, quae dictum continent, sed non de eo intellectum constituat, ut si dicam 'verum est vel possibile est Socratem currere', impersonalis est sensus ». As this passage shows, although *dicta* can be referred to by nominal expressions (such as 'hoc dictum' or an accusative plus infinitive clause), *dicta* can be signified only by propositions (thanks to Enrico Donato for pointing out that passage to me).

- (F2) *dicta* are what propositions say (only assertive sentences have *dicta*).¹²
- (F3) *dicta* (and not understandings or propositions) are the parts of inferences.¹³
- (F4) *dicta* (and not understandings or propositions) are primary truth-bearers.¹⁴
- (F5) *dicta* are related to facts.¹⁵

12. Cf. the passage quoted in the previous footnote.

13. *Dial.*, 155²⁵⁻³⁸: «Ex his itaque manifestum est in consequentiis <per> propositiones de earum intellectibus agendum non esse, sed magis de essentia rerum, hoc modo scilicet ut, si ita est in re quod omnis homo est animal, ita est in re quod 'omnis homo est corpus', et quaecumque eiusdem sunt consequentia, necesse est in re esse, sed non intelligi. Et in hac quidem significatione eorum quae propositiones loquuntur, vera tamen exponitur regula quae ait: posito antecedenti poni quodlibet consequens eius ipsius, hoc est, existente aliqua antecedenti rerum essentia, necesse est existere quamlibet rerum existentiam consequentem ad ipsam. Quae quidem regula de intellectibus propositionum falsa manifeste ex praemissis apparet». *Super Peri herm.*, 133¹⁰³-134¹³⁰: «Cum <quamlibet> consequentiam vel <aliquam> propositionem necessariam dicimus – non in essentia sui quae transitoria est, sed secundum suam significationem –, oportet in significatione eius haberi quod necessarium possumus appellare. At vero nec intellectus propositionis in se necessitatem ullam habet, quod est actio transitoria. Aliud ergo oportet significari a propositione, pro quo necessaria dici possit, veluti, cum istam consequentiam 'si rosa est est flos' veram semper etiam destructis rebus et necessariam concedamus, oportet videri pro quo significato necessaria iudicetur. At vero in rebus nil est necessitatis. [...] Cum itaque propositionem ex significatione necessariam iudicemus nec haec necessitas secundum intellectum sive secundum res accipi possit, oportet aliud ab eis designari. Unde uniuscuiusque propositionis dictum nullam omnino rem neque etiam plures concedimus esse».

14. *Dial.*, 154⁶⁻²⁰: «Sunt igitur verum ac falsum nomina intellectuum, veluti cum dicimus intellectus verus vel falsus, hoc est habitus de eo quod in re est vel non est, quos quidem intellectus in animo audientis prolata propositio generat. [...] Sunt etiam nomina existentiae rei vel non existentiae de quibus ipsa propositio ait ac loquitur, veluti cum dicimus verum est Socratem currere vel falsum, id est: ita est in re quod Socrates currit, vel non est in re. [...] Sunt rursus verum ac falsum nomina propositionum, ut cum dicimus propositio vera vel falsa, id est verum vel falsum intellectum generans, sive proponens id quod est in re vel quod in re non est». *Super Peri herm.*, 135¹⁵⁵⁻¹⁶⁵ (quote below in footnote 15).

15. *Super Peri herm.*, 253²⁵⁸⁻²⁶¹: «Sicut eventus propositionis de praesenti praesens dici potest, ita etiam eventus aliarum, quia sicut praesentialiter modo verum est quod Socrates sedet, ita etiam quod sedit et quod sedebit. Omnis enim propositio vera dicitur quia ita est in re ut proponit».

Ontological claims:

(O1) *dicta* are not things or essences (*res, essentiae*).¹⁶

(O2) *dicta* are not understandings (*intellectus*).¹⁷

(O3) *dicta* are not facts (*eventus*).¹⁸

(O4) *dicta* are not positively nothing.¹⁹

(O5) *dicta* are “like” things (*quasi res*).²⁰

Those two series of claims are meant to reflect the basic tenets of the theory. Provided the list is accurate, and if my hypothesis is to be palatable, what must be shown eventually is that the hypothesis, besides being coherent and well argued for, is not incompatible with each of the functional and ontological claims listed above.

16. *Super Peri herm.*, 132⁹³–133⁹⁸ (quoted above in footnote 11). *Super Peri herm.*, 133¹⁰³–134¹³⁰ (second text quoted above in footnote 13 – the claim is made at the very end of the passage). *Super Peri herm.*, 135¹⁵⁵–165: «Sicut ergo nomina et verba duplicem significationem habent, rerum scilicet vel intellectuum, ita etiam concedimus duplicem esse propositionum, intellectus scilicet compositos ex intellectibus partium, et dicta earum, quae sunt quasi res propositionum, cum tamen nullae penitus essentiae sint. Secundum quae dicta ipsae maxime verae vel falsae iudicantur [...] quia videlicet dicta earum vera sunt vel falsa [...], ut [...] verum est Socratem esse hominem et non esse lapidem [...], hoc est: ita est in re quod est homo et non est lapis».

17. *Super Peri herm.*, 132⁹³–133⁹⁸ (quoted above in footnote 11). *Dial.*, 155²⁵–38 and *Super Peri herm.*, 133¹⁰³–134¹³⁰ (quoted above in footnote 13). *Super Peri herm.*, 135¹⁵⁵–165 (quoted above in footnote 16).

18. Abelard acknowledges that ‘*eventus*’ can refer either to the things themselves that happen, or to *dicta*. In the former case, only some propositions have *eventus* as truth-makers – cf. *Super Peri herm.*, 253²⁵⁸–261 (quoted above in footnote 15), as well as 258³⁷²–373: «Eventus enim proprie dicimus dicta propositionum, quando propositiones ex suis eventibus veras iudicamus» – which entails that some propositions are true *not* in virtue of their *eventus*; since every proposition has a *dictum*, *dicta* and *eventus*, at least in some cases, are different. As a referee rightly pointed out, however, none of the two alleged passages provides conclusive evidence that Abelard actually endorses O3: in the first, the claim, if present at all, is only made implicitly; and the second may simply express a relation rather than a difference holding between *eventus* and *dicta*.

19. *Super Peri herm.*, 139²⁶⁹–272: «Praeterea ‘nil’ affirmative dici non potest de dicto propositionis, ut videlicet dicam affirmative ipsum esse nil, sed negative, non esse aliquid. Quid ergo mirum? Cum dicam impersonaliter ‘contingit Sorcratem currere’ non possum dicere ‘contingit nil’».

20. *Super Peri herm.*, 135¹⁵⁵–165 (quoted above in footnote 16).

2. WHY AND HOW *DICTA* DEPEND ON MENTAL ACTS

If *dicta* are what is said, and if the action of saying can only be made by uttering a proposition, then *dicta* depend on propositions.²¹ Propositions, in turn, are concrete sequences of spoken (or written) words²² uttered by a speaker and, as a rule, heard and understood by a hearer. This raises a problem that has to be settled from the outset: since, strictly speaking, there is no proposition *before* a speaker has completed her utterance, there can be no *dictum* before she has uttered a complete proposition. That, however, does not seem to be the case. For a linguistic expression – an uttered sequence of vocal sounds – is merely what exists “between” a speaker and a hearer, something like an acoustic product or instrument that is designed to *manifest* and *trigger* mental acts (on the side of the speaker in the former case, and on that of the hearer in the latter). As Abelard puts it:

Nouns and verbs are said to signify understandings, be it the understanding of who utters a vocal sound or the one of who hears it. For a vocal sound is said to signify a speaker’s understanding in that it manifests it to the hearer, while it triggers a similar one in the hearer.²³

21. One could still plausibly maintain, however, that there is a sense in which *dicta* are what propositions say, and that there can be *dicta* without there being propositions, namely just in case the relation between a proposition and its *dictum* is a merely semantic or epistemic one, but not an ontological one. Abelard, however, seems to take the relation to be not only a semantic or epistemic one, but also an ontological one – see *Dial.*, 372⁵⁻⁹: «Dicunt enim in eo quod propositio dicit, existentiam propositionis contineri; aliter enim non diceret, nisi fieret. Sed si in eo quod propositio dicit, vim faciant, profecto non inferentiam causae attendunt. Non enim essentia rei ut a propositione designata, prior est veritate propositionis, immo simul cum ea, cum sine ea nullatenus possit consistere». Thanks to Enrico Donato for raising the objection (and suggesting the rejoinder!).

22. In the frame of that study, the difference between spoken and written propositions will be ignored (it is not relevant).

23. *Super Peri herm.*, 18³²⁻⁴⁰: «<Nomina et verba> [i]ntellectus quoque designare dicuntur, sive sit intellectus proferentis vocem sive audientis eam. Nam intellectum proferentis in eo significare vox dicitur, quod ipsum auditori manifestat, dum consimilem in auditore generat». Abelard relies on Priscian here, *Institutiones*, I, 1, ed. Keil, 5⁶⁻⁷.

Thus, as a linguistic expression, the proposition itself is located “between” two analogue cognitive processes, such that the *dictum*’s dependence on the proposition can be considered in both ways, namely: as a dependence on what must happen on the side of the speaker *before* a proposition is uttered, and as a dependence on what may happen on the side of the hearer *after* a proposition is uttered and *if* it is understood. What a speaker intends to say by means of a proposition – and thus, what a proposition *says* – is also what a hearer (possibly) understands.

On such grounds, I take what Abelard says about the formation *and* understanding of a proposition as equally relevant with respect to the question of what *dicta* are, and more precisely, with respect to their dependence on mental acts. Accordingly, the claim that *dicta* depend on propositions is to be understood as follows: strictly speaking, *dicta* depend on a cognitive process (a series of mental acts)²⁴ taking place in a speaker *or* in a hearer, the causal order between proposition and cognitive process being reversed in the latter case. On the side of the speaker, a proposition is an effect, on the side of the hearer, it is a cause. In both cases, however, what a proposition says – its *dictum* – depends on a cognitive process.²⁵

That being said, let us have a closer look at the cognitive processes involved. The key notion here is that of *modus enuntiandi* (mode of stating, which is itself a subclass of the more general *modus proponendi*), for «statements or propositions are called such in the first place in virtue of the mode of stating».²⁶ But what is

24. Another way to put it consists in saying that since *dicta* depend on propositions and propositions themselves depend on mental acts (speaking is an action, and every action depends on a cognitive and volitional process), *dicta* depend on mental acts.

25. Peter Abelard, *De intellectibus*, ed. Patrick Morin, Vrin, Paris 2015, §32: «Sicut enim qui loquitur et dicit ‘homo ambulat’ per plures progreditur significationes, ita qui audit ex singulis dictionibus proprios colligendo intellectus procedit». See also C. Grellard, *Fides sive credulitas. Le problème de l’assentiment chez Abélard, entre logique et psychologie*, «Arch. Hist. doctr. litt. M.A.», 70 (2003), 7-25 (here, 17): «En toute rigueur, le mot entendu engendre la même intellection chez celui qui l’entend que chez celui qui l’a prononcé». I am grateful to Federico Viri for drawing my attention to those passages.

26. *Super Peri herm.*, 56⁷²⁹⁻⁷³⁰: «ex modo proponendi enuntiationes sive propositiones maxime dicuntur». As Enrico Donato and Federico Viri pointed out to

a *modus enuntiandi*? The notion (and the expression) come from Priscian.²⁷ It designates an «inclination of the mind», an inclination that itself «indicates a certain affection of the mind». The mode we are interested in is the indicative one. In contemporary terms, one could read Abelard inspired by Priscian as follows: the indicative mode (the *modus enuntiandi*) is a mental attitude indicating the subject's intention to say something of something else. In short, then, the *modus enuntiandi* is the propositional attitude of "saying that...", a mode that comes in two kinds: affirming and negating.²⁸

Most of the time, Abelard speaks as if linguistic expressions where the subjects of the verb *proponere*, *dicere*, *enuntiare*, *affirmare*, *negare* and the like. However, that is not to be taken at face value, for if a proposition can indeed be said to say or state something, it is only in a derivative way: linguistic expressions inherit their force from mental attitudes of thinking subjects: «propositions follow their understandings». That is made plausible in the *De intellectibus*, where the default topic is by definition mental acts of thinking subjects.²⁹ In §60, one reads:

me, strictly speaking, the *modus proponendi* is not distinctive of propositions, for questions and expressions of desires also have a *modus proponendi* (cf. *Dial.*, 152¹¹⁻¹⁷). Strictly speaking, and in spite of Abelard's somewhat inconsistent use of the technical terminology, what is properly distinctive of propositions is the *modus enuntiandi* (see the first passage quote below, note 27).

27. Priscian, *Institutiones* VIII.63 (ed. Keil, 421¹⁷⁻¹⁹): «Modi sunt diversae inclinationes animi, varios affectus demonstrantes».

28. Several passages go in that direction. See e.g. *Super Peri Herm.*, 55⁷⁰⁶⁻⁷¹¹: «in diffinitione 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. Enuntiare autem non possumus nisi affirmando vel negando, nulla autem imperfecta oratio affirmat vel negat atque nil enuntiando proponit»; as well as 477⁵⁶⁻⁶³: «Et quoniam propositiones contrariae dicendae sunt ex contrario modo proponendi sicut opiniones, id est intellectus, ex contrario modo concipiendi, transfert se ad opiniones, id est ad intellectus, ipsarum propositionum, ut scilicet [...] eas iudicemus, quia scilicet propositiones sequuntur suos intellectus in contrarietate».

29. Cf. *De intellectibus*, §§56-68. For understandings conceived as mental acts, see Peter Abelard, *Glosae super Porphyrium*, ed. Geyer, 20³⁰: «intellectus actio quaedam est animae»; *Super Peri herm.*, 29¹⁰⁴⁻¹⁰⁷: «sensus [...] quaedam vis est et potential animae, intellectus vero actio quaedam est». See also *De intell.*, §14 and 34 where

We call true or false understandings only composed ones, namely composing ones, like those pertaining to affirmation, as well as dividing ones, like those pertaining to negation.³⁰

Thus saying, stating, affirming, negating are fundamentally mental acts (understandings, *intellectus*) of certain kinds. What all understandings, and *only* understandings, have in common is what Abelard calls the «power to deliberate something» (*vis deliberandi aliquid*), a notion he explicates as «the power to consider something according to a certain nature or to one of its properties»³¹ (where ‘to consider’ translates ‘*attendere*’). To consider, in that precise sense, is the distinctive feature of reason, for reason itself is «the power to discriminate, that is, to consider and to deliberate (*potentia attendendi et deliberandi*)».³²

Accordingly, since saying, stating and the like are primarily rational, intellectual mental acts, *attentio* – that is: the power to discriminate and deliberate – must be a crucial element in the analysis of the mode of stating (*modus enuntiandi*) that distinguishes propositions from other kinds of linguistic expressions. But how exactly is that to be understood?

In an intriguing passage of his *Glosses on the Peri hermeneias*, Abelard wonders whether a true proposition can trigger a false understanding. In the argumentation given in favour of his (positive)

Abelard clearly associates *intellectus* and *actio* (*intelligendi*). See also the telling expressions «*intellectus [...] hoc est ipsa animi excogitatio*» (§5), and «*intelligere autem speculari est per rationem*» (§25), which all allude to an *active* intellectual moment.

30. *De intell.*, §60: «*Veros autem vel falsos intellectus dicimus eos solummodo qui compositi sunt; tam componentes, sicut eos qui sunt affirmationis, quam dividentes, sicut eos qui sunt negationis*».

31. *De intell.*, §6: «*Preterea sensus nullam vim deliberandi aliquid habet, hoc est attendendi aliquid secundum aliquam naturam aut proprietatem ipsius*».

32. *Super Peri herm.*, 29⁹⁶⁻⁹⁷.

reply,³³ some details are given regarding the roles played by *attentio* in the formation of a proposition.³⁴

To make a long story short,³⁵ one can say the following. A series of mental acts precedes the utterance of a proposition. First comes the understanding of the categorematic terms, subject and predicate, say *Socrates* and *standing*; then the coupling or joining of the latter with the former, that is to say, the production of a complex, predicative understanding like *standing Socrates*. Such a predicative complex is not yet propositional. What is required, in addition, is an act corresponding to the verb of a proposition, an act responsible at the same time for the assertive force and the temporal reference.³⁶ Such an act is a special act of “temporal considering”. Take the predicative complex *standing Socrates*. When *Socrates* and *sitting* are considered to have been joined *in the past*, the special mental act at stake is the one preceding the utterance of a propo-

33. Cf. *Super Peri herm.*, 56⁷³¹-60⁸⁴². Abelard's reply is positive. But why? To be sure, every proposition manifests and triggers a true understanding: the understanding *meant* by a true proposition is necessarily true because by definition it corresponds to a fact. Yet, that very same understanding *can* be said to be “false” in another sense, namely *not* with respect to what is meant by the proposition, but with respect to the relation between the *time of the mental acts* (and that is always the present, because it is metaphysically impossible to perform an act *not* in the present) and the *time referred to by the verb* of the proposition (that can be the past or the future). In the case of propositions in the past or future tense, the two times do not match, and in that precise sense only, the true understanding necessarily meant by a true proposition can be said to be “false”. Take the true proposition ‘Socrates sat’ expressing and triggering the understanding *U*. *U* is true because of the fact that Socrates did sit in the past; yet *U* can be said to be “false” because it combines presently understandings of things that are not combined presently, namely the understanding of Socrates and of his sitting.

34. As established above, the following description applies in the symmetric case of the understanding of a proposition as well (the constellation of mental acts that precede the utterance of a proposition is analogue to the one that follows it, when it is understood).

35. For a detailed analysis, see F. Viri, *Arts du langage et noétique*, 97-99.

36. Federico Viri suggests a more sophisticated reading, distinguishing acts responsible for the temporal determination, from acts responsible for the assertive force, the argument being that assertion and temporal determination can subsist independently. I have doubts about that point: assertion is achieved by the mental counterpart of a conjugated verb, but conjugation is essentially temporal; ‘considering something as past (or future)’ is, in my view, a shorter way to say: ‘forming a judgement about it’, that is: ‘mentally asserting it to be’ (or ‘to be something’).

sition in the past tense, like ‘Socrates stood’. That reconstruction is based on the following three passages:

For when Socrates sits I hear Socrates stood or will stand, what is said is true, but the understanding is false. For I join the standing to Socrates, and I consider him presently as standing in the past or future, and since neither that standing nor those times, that I simultaneously consider, exist now, the mind’s understanding itself that I presently have does not correspond to the state of the thing.³⁷

One could perhaps more appropriately say that an understanding is not to be judged true or false according to a conception or arrangement of images, but according to the consideration of the mind (*secundum attentionem animi*), that is to say, that the intellect considers something to be the case as it is or is not, or something to have been the case as it was or was not, or something as be the case in the future as it will be or not.³⁸

Thus, the understanding of a proposition consists in three actions, namely the understanding of the parts [i.e. one for the subject, one for the predicate, and] the conjunction or disjunction of the things understood. And it is not inconvenient if that action which is not an understanding, is part of the understanding of the whole proposition.³⁹

It seems then, that (at least) three types of acts are intimately linked to the utterance of a proposition: *simple grasping* (simple

37. *Super Peri herm.*, 56⁷³⁸–57⁷⁴¹: « Cum enim Socrate sedente audio *Socrates stetit* vel *stabit*, verum quidem est, quod dicitur, sed falsa videtur animi conceptio. Coniugo enim stationem Socrati et ut stantem in praeterito vel futuro tempore ipsum praesentialiter attendo, et cum nec ipsa statio sit modo vel tempora illa, quae simul attendo, non concordat cum statu rei ipsa animi conceptio, quam nunc praesentialiter habeo ».

38. *Super Peri herm.*, 57⁷⁵⁰–754: « Illud etiam fortasse convenientius dicetur intellectum neque verum neque falsum iudicari secundum conceptionem vel dispositionem imaginum, sed secundum attentionem animi, quod videlicet ita attendit esse vel non esse, uti est vel non est, vel fuisse vel non, uti fuit vel non, vel fore vel non, uti erit vel non ».

39. *Super Peri herm.*, 78²²⁴–227: « Sunt itaque tres actiones in intellectu propositionis, intellectus scilicet partium, coniunctio vel disiunctio intellectuum rerum. Nec est incongruum si ea actio, quae intellectus non est, sit pars intellectus totius propositionis ».

considering); *joining* (predicative considering); *asserting* (propositional considering).

So far, so good (perhaps). But where are the *dicta* in that picture? Here: there are no *dicta* without something's being said; something's being said is someone's saying it; saying something is, in the first place, asserting it; asserting, in turn, is nothing but "proposing", that is: mentally acting on the mode of stating (or according to the *modus enuntiandi*); as a consequence, *dicta* depend on certain mental acts.⁴⁰

Before going on, a serious objection has to be considered.⁴¹ Abelard is clear that relations among *dicta* are responsible for the necessary truth of certain conditional propositions. In that connection, he talks about inferences (*consequentiae*) being eternally true (*ab aeterno*);⁴² but if *dicta* ontologically depend on propositions, and propositions, as vocal tokens, are not eternal, then *dicta* cannot be the terms of relations that hold *ab aeterno*. This means that if there is no way to conciliate the dependence thesis with the eternity thesis, the hypothesis argued for in this paper has to be discarded. That being said, there might be a way to conciliate the two. To be sure, the move is *not* made by Abelard (which is bad news for the hypothesis). However, one can think of a reply a counterfactual Abelard *could* give to the objection, a reply that would itself be based on counterfactuality. For a conditional proposition, 'being true eternally' does not require the actual, eternal existence of the *dicta* involved; it only means this: *at any instant of time*, and regardless of the actual state of the world at that instant, were some-

40. The following passage of the *De intellectibus* can be adduced in support of the claim (§§25-26): «Omnis itaque qui aliquid existimat, id quod existimat necessario intelligit; non autem e converso. Nec est ulla existimatio, nisi de eo quod propositio dicere habet, hoc est de aliqua rerum vel coniunctione vel divisione. Unde numquam eam sine propositionis intellectu haberi constat». Those lines suggest that what a proposition says depends on the understanding of the proposition. Thanks to Enrico Donato and Federico Viri for pointing out this passage to me.

41. Thanks to Enrico Donato for raising the objection and (again!) for suggesting the rejoinder.

42. Cf. e.g. *Dial.*, 264³⁸ and 279¹⁸; *Super Peri herm.*, 133¹¹⁰⁻¹¹¹.

one to utter the conditional proposition at stake, that proposition would be true.⁴³

3. *Dicta* AS PRODUCTS OF MENTAL ACTS

The tentative explanation offered above of why and how *dicta* depend on mental acts suggests that *dicta* are something like effects or, better, *products* of certain mental acts. Does Abelard's philosophy of mind allow for something like mental acts causing or "producing" some items? A single case – and there might well be others, though I did not make further investigations along that line – might suffice to give a positive answer to that question.

Linguistic meaning is a relational property: something means something else. Proper names are unproblematic in that respect: 'Socrates' means Socrates. But what about common names, like '*homo*', and what about names deprived of reference, like '*chimera*'? Abelard's ontology does not contain non-singular things (as universals would be), nor does it contain non-existent items (like chimeras). Nonetheless, Abelardian semantics requires that names like '*homo*' or '*chimera*' signify an understanding.

Accordingly, one can legitimately wonder what kind of understandings will be signified by such names if the understandings themselves do not (and cannot) have any proper objects (or *res subiectae*, as Abelard puts it). Unlike sense perceptions (*sensus*), understandings can exist without a corporeal object. When there is no corporeal object, the intellect is happy to fabricate (*conficere*) for itself an image on which it can direct and exert its activity.⁴⁴ Those

43. As pointed out by a reviewer, such rejoinder is itself objectionable, for what Abelard means by 'eternally true' is not 'true at all times', but 'true independently of any actual state of affairs'. In reply to that serious objection, one might want to consider the fact that, although propositions, according to Abelard, are not eternal, some of them are eternally true. But how can something be *F* if it does not exist? One way to conciliate the two claims – eternal truth of some propositions and transitory nature of every proposition – would precisely be to go for the counterfactual way suggested above.

44. *Super Porphyrium*, 20²³⁻²⁷: «Intellectus autem sicut nec corporeo indigens instrumento est, ita <nec> necesse est eum subiectum corpus habere in quod mittatur, sed rei similitudine contentus est, quam sibi ipse animus conficit, in quam suae intelligentiae actionem dirigit».

images are products of the intellect – and thus, of mental acts; they are imaginary forms or things and are, as such, neither substances nor accidents.⁴⁵ In his *Logica*, Abelard even says that those images or likenesses (*simulacra*) are absolutely nothing (*nil penitus*) and excludes that the soul itself or the intellect be identified with them.⁴⁶

This short incursion in the semantics of names shows that when the mind is missing a *res subiecta*, it fills the lack by producing an *ad hoc* object that is neither the soul itself, nor one of its parts, nor the intellect itself, but something like a mere cognitive content that is neither a substance nor an accident and can even be said to be absolutely nothing. Provided that is correct, there are two striking similarities between *simulacra* and *dicta*: first, just like the understandings signified by common or empty names are not understandings of any (determinate) things, the understandings signified by propositions are not the understanding of *any* thing that would be signified by the proposition as whole and not by one of its parts; second, *simulacra* and *dicta* play crucial systematic roles without being any of the existing things. So, it seems that *simulacra* and *dicta* are similar kinds of items; but since *simulacra* are products of mental acts, it is likely to consider that *dicta* share that status and thus, that their dependence with respect to the *modus enuntiandi* is analogue to the dependence of *simulacra* with respect to the intellect's power to create objects for itself.⁴⁷

45. *Super Porph.*, 20²⁸⁻³⁶: «Sicut autem sensus non est res sentita [...] sic nec intellectus forma est rei quam concipit [...] forma vero in quam dirigitur, res imaginaria quaedam est et ficta, quam sibi quando vult et qualem vult, animus conficit, [...] quam neque substantiam neque accidens appellare possumus». *Super Peri herm.*, 30¹²¹⁻¹²⁶: «Quippe imaginatio sive intellectus corporea instrumenta non exigent, ut sint, nec tantum sensibilia, verum insensibilia et incorporalia percipiunt, ut animam vel paternitatem, quia per formas quasdam imaginaries quas sibi animus fingit, prout vult, rerum naturas contemplatur, imaginationem saepe sive intellectum retinens».

46. *Super Peri herm.*, 31¹⁴⁷⁻³²¹⁸².

47. *Dicta* and *simulacra* belong to the many “non-things” that play important systematic roles in Abelard's philosophy. Other of those non-things are the *status* shared by members of a same species or genus – for example the “being human” (*esse hominem*) shared by Socrates, Plato, Cicero, etc. – which, as Abelard says, is the common cause of imposition of common names (cf. *Super Porph.*, 20⁷⁻⁸). On Abelard and his strategies for non-things, see Tarlazzi (forthcoming). However, *status* differ from *dicta* and *simulacra* in their belonging to metaphysics and not to semantics or epistemology: even if one were prepared to consider *status* as products of the

It is obvious from what Abelard says of *simulacra* and *dicta* that they are some kind of *items*. But are they also *entities*, i.e. items to be taken ontologically seriously, or not? The question might sound rhetorical for it seems that the answer must be a clear ‘no’: if *x* is absolutely nothing, as Abelard repeatedly says, then *x* is not part of the ontology.

The hypothesis I am arguing for, however, contends that *dicta* are not only items, but also entities, and therefore, that they do have a place in Abelard’s ontology. How can such a claim be defended? I must confess from the outset that I do not have any quotation to provide in which Abelard would unambiguously claim that *dicta* are entities. Nonetheless, I believe that there are reasons to think that apparently radical claims such as ‘*x* is absolutely nothing’ are not to be taken to mean ‘*x* is nothing *at all*’, but rather ‘*x* is absolutely *no thing*’, that is: none of the *things*, that is: none of the items falling under Aristotle’s categories – which perfectly allows for *x* to be an entity, but not a “categorical” one. Does Abelard acknowledge the existence of such non-categorical entities? I am afraid he does not. But is he *committed* to the existence of such entities? I believe he is.

Consider the series of functional and ontological claims (Fs and Os listed above). None of them is incompatible with the view that *dicta* are non-categorical entities. In addition, O₄ explicitly claims that ‘*nil*’ cannot be said *positively* of a *dictum*, which I suggest to read as follows: whereas it is true that a *dictum* is not an *aliquid* (i.e. none of the things or essences), it is false that it is nothing *at all*, otherwise ‘*nil*’ could precisely be *positively* said of a *dictum*. There are, however, other reasons, not directly based on quotations, but rather on what Abelard is doing (and why he is doing it) in his propositional semantics.

divine intellect – and some passages point into that direction (cf. e.g. *Super Porph.*, 22²⁸-24¹³) – *status* are certainly not products of *human* intellects. Moreover, note that there is a link between *status* and *simulacra*: the former are that in virtue of which members of a species are sufficiently similar to motivate a thinking subject to form a confused understanding that is general enough to capture all of them without being the understanding of any of them in particular (cf. *Super Porph.*, 21²⁷-22²⁴).

Let us take for granted that *dicta* are only items one can talk about, but not entities. In such a case, one can legitimately raise the following two related questions:

If *dicta* are nothing at all, why does Abelard dedicate so much thought and energy to talk about them?

If *dicta* are nothing at all, how can they have any explanatory value?

Two arguments can be derived from those questions. From *i*): if *dicta* were nothing at all, it would be sufficient to talk just about propositions, understandings, and things, for precisely, there would be nothing more, and thus nothing more to talk about; but Abelard does talk – and a lot – about *dicta* and the like. From *ii*): if *dicta* were nothing at all, then whatever is to be explained in propositional semantics would be satisfactorily explained by the existence of propositions, understandings, and things; but *dicta* are introduced in order to explain several crucial aspects of propositional semantics – in particular, *dicta* ground the necessity of necessarily true conditional propositions (see F3, above), but nothing at all cannot ground anything. Thus, either Abelard patently violates the principle of parsimony – but no good philosopher would do that – or *dicta* are *not* nothing at all.

Let us make the opposite assumption, then: *dicta* are not only items one can talk about (that is: ontologically non-committal objects of thought or discourse), but also entities (that is: ontologically committal objects of thought or discourse), though non-categorical ones. In that case too, one can legitimately raise a critical question, namely this: if *dicta* are entities, why doesn't Abelard simply say it? The reply I want to suggest is that, clearly, Abelard *does* say it, but not "simply". Abelard develops his highly sophisticated discourse about "what propositions say" *precisely* in order to make it clear for his readers that although *dicta* are none of the things or essences, they nonetheless are special entities, and that, I take it, cannot – or at least, could not, in first decades of the 12th-century – be "simply" said. Were Abelard a Platonist, he could just say – as will the (later) authors of the *Ars Burana* and *Ars Meliduna* – that *dicta* (or *enuntiabilia* and the like) belong to a kind of "third realm"

(or “eleventh category”, the *praedicamentum enuntiabile*).⁴⁸ But Abelard is not a Platonist. What his talk of *dicta* (just like the one of *simulacra*) is pointing at is nothing like Platonic ideas, but rather something that, while being in the mind, is distinct from the the mind itself, from its acts, and from its faculties.⁴⁹

4. *Dicta* AS OBJECTIVE ENTITIES

It seems that we are in need of a (later) model in order to make better sense of what Abelard is saying. The one I will briefly consider in this last (and very short) section is a *much* later one, namely that of Carl Stumpf’s theory of “formations” (*Gebilde*), developed in the first years of the 20th-century in his 1906 *Phenomena and mental functions*.⁵⁰ The reason for this choice is that Stumpf’s formations are precisely the kind of entities we are interested in, for they are mind-dependent, immanent, and distinct from the mind and its acts; furthermore, some formations are the special correlates of propositional acts of judgement; and, above all, they possess a kind of objectivity that is not incompatible with their mind-dependent and immanent character.⁵¹

48. Cf. *Ars Meliduna*, ed. De Rijk, in *Logica Modernorum*, II, 1, 357-359; *Ars Burana*, ed. De Rijk, in *Logica Modernorum*, II.2, 208.

49. Cf. *Super Peri herm.*, 31¹⁴⁷-32¹⁸². In the 13th-century, Aquinas will talk of an *idolum* or *verbum mentis*, and in the next century, the same idea will be at the core of Ockham’s first theory of concepts under the label of *ficta*. Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 85, a. 2, ad 3; Ockham, *Ordinatio*, d. 2, q. 8 (*Opera Theologica*, II, 271-272); d. 27, q. 2 (*Opera Theologica*, IV, 205-206). On those topics, see C. Panaccio, *Ockham on Concepts*, Ashgate, Aldershot 2004; Id., *Aquinas on Intellectual Representation*, in D. Perler (cur.), *Ancient and Medieval Theories of Intentionality*, Brill, Leiden 2001, 185-201.

50. C. Stumpf, *Erscheinungen und psychische Funktionen*, «Abhandlungen der Königlich-Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften», Philosophisch-historische Klasse, Verlag der Königlich Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berlin 1906, 3-40, henceforth quoted as *Erscheinungen*. On that topic, see H. Taieb, *Building Objective Thoughts: Stumpf, Twardowski and the Late Husserl on Psychic Products*, «Arch. Gesch. Philos.», 100 (2018), 336-370.

51. Note that Stumpf is by far not the only candidate for this kind of account of objectivity. As pointed out by one of the referees – to whom I am grateful – other members of the so-called Austro-German tradition such as Twardowski (with his own account of *Gebilde* or formations) and Ingarden (with his account of meaning as a mental product) could have been considered just as well. As for Marty’s account of meaning, also mentioned by the referee, I would resist the suggestion on

According to Stumpf, every mental act that is not a sense-perception (*Wahrnehmung, anschauliche Vorstellung*) has a special correlate he calls a formation (*Gebilde*). The acts at stake are either conceptual presentations (*begriffliche Vorstellungen*) or judgements:

As a complement to what has been said, a consideration must now be added regarding what I would like to call formations of mental acts. Every mental act, besides the fundamental one of perceiving, has a correlate, whose general nature, like the one of the mental act itself, can only be made clear by means of examples.⁵²

Formations are distinct from the acts of presenting (conceptually) and judging, but also from phenomena (*Erscheinungen*), i.e. contents of sense perceptions. There are two kinds of formations: concepts (*Begriffe*) are the correlates of conceptual presentations, states of affairs (*Sachverhalte*) are the correlates of judgements:

Such a third <item> besides phenomenon and mental act is in fact to be distinguished in all other intellectual acts. And so it is in conceptual thought. The grasping of the simplest concepts is a mental act, the concepts themselves, are the correlate of <that mental act>. This is why, in the past, I had already called them formations in that sense. [...] Thirty years ago, Brentano, in his lectures on logic, has already sharply underscored that a special judgement content corresponds to the judgement, <a content> that has to be distinguished from the content of the presentation (of the matter), and that is expressed in that-sentences or in nominalized infinitives. [...] To refer to that special judgement content, I use the expression *state of affairs*.⁵³

All formations – and in particular states of affairs – are *objective* in the sense that the notion of what is given as content in an act of

the ground that while Marty's meaning in the narrow sense (e.g. a state of affairs) is indeed objective, it does not depend in any way on mental activity.

52. *Erscheinungen*, 28 (all translations are mine).

53. *Erscheinungen*, 29. Note that Stumpf is usually credited with having introduced the term '*Sachverhalt*' in the philosophical vocabulary (in an unpublished course of logic, *Leitfaden der Logik*, of the year 1888), although relevant anticipations can be found in the works of Rudolf Hermann Lotze – Stumpf's teacher in Göttingen – and Julius Bergmann). On the history of the *Sachverhalt*, see B. Smith, '*Sachverhalt*', *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. VIII, Schwabe, Basel 1992, 1102–1113.

judging does not include that very act among its constituents. *That God exists* can be thought without thinking that subject x or y judges so; but if that is true, then judgement contents are, in that sense at least, subject-independent, that is, in that sense at least, *objective*:

For whereas formations are indeed contents of mental acts, they nonetheless all display an objective character; their concept contains nothing pertaining to the present individual <mental> act. [...] What is given to us in mental acts, besides phenomena, [...] are not the mental acts themselves, but only the formations. [...] We can very well conceptually think a formation without it presently being the content of the relevant mental act; for example: <we can very well think> a state of affairs without there presently being a judgement whose content it is. This becomes obvious in that we understand the meaning of a that-sentence when it is uttered in an isolated way, although, as such, it does not express an assertion, but only the content of a possible, true or false, <assertion>.⁵⁴

But what kind of items are Stumpfian states of affairs? They clearly are entities, though obviously dependent ones: states of affairs *only* exist as contents of actual acts of judging. In other words, states of affairs are immanent products of judgements:

But the state of affairs cannot be given in an isolated way, independently of any mental act, and thereby being real. It can be real only as content of an actually occurring judgement. [...] Thus, mental acts [...] are immediately known facts; but formations are facts only as contents of mental acts.⁵⁵

Thus, the objectivity of Stumpfian formations or states of affairs is not to be understood as independent existence, let alone of extra-mental existence. Their objectivity is not an ontological, but an epistemic one: what only exists as content of a given act of

54. *Erscheinungen*, 30–32 (note 1); see also C. Stumpf, *Erkenntnistheorie*, 2 Bde, Barth, Leipzig 1939, I, 88: «When Hinz and Kunz think the same concept ‘two’ or ‘square’, or when I think such a concept today and tomorrow, there are certainly so many distinct acts of thinking, and also so many thought-products in the psychological sense of “concept”; but there is only a unique, and always identically the same, concept in the sense of the meaning, in the sense of that which is thought of. What we call concept has this double side, the subjective and the objective one. Objective here does not mean: outside every thinking subject and independent from him, but only: independent from the individual subject and its current act of thinking».

55. *Erscheinungen*, 32.

judging can be thought without thinking that very act. That, to be sure, does not mean that the concept of judgement content can be thought without including that of a judgement; it only means that it can be thought without including the concept of *a particular* act of judging. And that is enough to provide Stumpfian formations with solid epistemic objectivity.

5. CONCLUDING REMARK

The aim of what precedes is not – and cannot be – to settle once and for all the question of what *dicta propositionum* are, and what they are not. Much more modestly, I hope to have argued in favour of my hypothesis – namely: *dicta* are immanent (that is: mental) and yet objective entities – in a way that makes it at least worth of serious criticisms.⁵⁶

56. Many thanks to the participants to the many “Abelard workshops” held in Geneva since 2016 (Irène Rosier-Catach, Caterina Tarlazzi, Enrico Donato, Federico Viri), where the main ideas developed in this paper have been sharply discussed. I am also grateful to the two reviewers of this paper for their extremely helpful comments and suggestions, as well as to Eduardo Saldana, for his careful proofreading of the text.