


THE CONCEPT AS A REPRESENTATION OF THE REAL AND "FORMALLY
POSSIBLE OF ONESELF" JOHN BOLER'S PRESENTATION ON THE
RELATIONS OF PEIRCE AND DUNS SCOTUS

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ABSTRACT

"a real entity, possibly existing in many individuals, in their own virtual knowability prior to the act of the intellect"

(DUNS SCOTUS) (In: Quaestiones VII q. 18, pp. 354-5, n. 58-65)

This paper was presented at the 23rd International Meeting of Pragmatism, held at PUC-SP in October 2024. In a slightly more courageous, and I would even say daring, way, I tried to reflect on the thought of Professor John F. Boler regarding the relationships he established when reading Charles Peirce from the thought of Duns Scotus. And in this endeavor, the question posed is – after all, is the real thing thought of as being real? Is the concept, as a representation, real in itself and not in the object? The possible answer in this little research is that in Peirce there is a given solution that Duns Scotus gave to the "*problem of universals*"².

Keywords: Pragmatism. Charles Peirce. Duns Scotus. John F. Boler. Problem of Universals. Realism. Impersonation.

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² The scholastic realism derived from the reflection on universals in Scotus and Peirce's even more extreme proposal, allows us to project a reality from within the community, as J. Boler states. However, in view of the misunderstandings that mark the trajectory of Peirce's thought and the philosophy of pragmatism in general, [my effort will involve the task of pointing out some mistakes] is what PICH (2005) says about Prof. Boler.

INTRODUCTION, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Charles Peirce (1839-1914) and Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) are attributed – by common agreement – with the foundation of contemporary semiotics, especially the so-called "theory of social semiotics".³ These theories are revealed, for example, to be of great importance and relevance for the study of images, and ultimately – of singularity and reality itself. This contemporary movement presents itself in divergent traditions in the construction of the passage of ideas from the twentieth century. From the nineteenth to the twentieth, that is, from the first proposal made by Peirce, in the USA, and the second, by Saussure, in Europe. There are other important contemporaries who follow the proposals of the authors in question, such as Lucia Santaella, Roland Barthes, Winfred Nöth and others. In the specific case of Peirce, it can be said that there is a great wealth of references to authentic and fictional scenes and dialogues between characters since antiquity. However, Peirce also understands semiotics as a "study of semiosis", that is, *"of processes in which signs represent objects and create interpretants"*, which makes relevant the fact that purely formal syllogistic did not make any progress worth mentioning in the Middle Ages (Cf. CP 1.567). Because of this, the American thinker focused *"on the writings of the scholastic masters..."* (CP 1.561) to the point that, being Peirce, a true nominalist, some time later, under the influence of F. Abbot⁴; become an authentic realist⁵.

We intend here – as already stated – to present one of the aspects in which Prof. John Boler has of medieval philosophy, especially in his presentation of Duns Scotus (1266-1308) made in his reading of Charles Peirce. To this end, we begin with Nöth (2016, pp. 34) in which he states regarding Peirce's writings, as an avid reader of literary texts of

³ Hodge and Kress (1988), in their book *Social Semiotics*, delimited the theoretical boundaries of social semiotics, thus founding a new paradigm for "the science of the life of signs within social life", as defined by Saussure (2012, pp. 47) when suggesting the creation of the discipline "semiology". In social semiotics, images (static and moving), colors, layouts, gestures, music, the arrangement of objects in space, and clothing are also seen as resources that provide a complex network of choices for the production of meanings in the most diverse contexts of social interaction. To gauge Peirce, in his own way, one can cite his category – secondness – which is divided into: Icon, Index and Symbol. Peirce (2005, pp. 52) defines icon as "anything that is a quality, an individual existent, [...] anything, insofar as it is similar to that thing and used as a sign of it." The concept of Index, on the other hand, is "[...] necessarily some quality in common with the Object and it is with respect to these qualities that he refers to the Object." Finally, the symbol – "is the sign that refers to the object that denotes by virtue of a law, usually an association of general ideas that operates in the sense of making the Symbol be interpreted as referring to that Object" (PEIRCE, 2005, pp. 53). For Peirce (2000), a sign, or representation, is that which, under a certain aspect or way, represents something to someone. In this way, it is addressed to someone, in that person's mind to another sign, that is, the sign is a representation of the object.

⁴ Cf. ABBOT, F. E. (1855) *Scientific Theism*. Cambridge: University Press: John Wilson and Son. On the topic of influence, see – DILWORTH, D. A. (2022). "Transcendental Naturalism and Skeptical Materialism: Paradigms Inherited in Emerson, Santayana and Peirce". In: *Cognitio: Revista de Filosofia*, 23(1).

⁵ IBRI, (2019, pp. 92) states that *"... the further development of his realism took place through an improvement of logical resources such as the proposition of the theory of continuity (synequism) and the logic of relatives, which led to the notion of continuum replacing that of universal, making him conceive the great scholastic question about the reality of generals in the form ..."* (Cf. PEIRCE, 1976, pp. 343. NEM-IV).

all genres, such as poetry, drama, short stories, novels, biographies and historiographies. And before diving into a cut of Boler's thought, it is also important to understand that the foundations of Peircia's approach to discourse analysis is the well-known "general theory of signs" (SANTAELLA, 1995), and we are also more interested in the "*semiotic theory of interpretation*",⁶ which is much more comprehensive than the theory of signs, but is known to be less known in approach.

In this way, we begin the enterprise with a "touch" in Medieval philosophy, accompanied by the authors Jacques Le Goff and Alain De Libera, where they state that, especially between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, one of the most striking and decisive human experiences flourished not only for its time, but especially for Western rationalism in later times – that is, "*the creation and assumption of the university as the greatest place of the human spirit in the identity of the intellectual, given to thinking about the world beyond the prosaic of everyday life*". In fact, De Libera comments on a kind of "cultural translation", that is, a cultural and philosophical movement of transit from and through Byzantine culture, starting from "pagan philosophy", and from which a "high specialization" emerges, highlighting, as is also known, the *Trivium* and the *Quadrivium*, as well as *lectio*, *meditatio*, *glossa*, *quaestio* and *disputati*⁷. Also in this period, and in our article, the Franciscan Duns Scotus stands out, who is, among the great medieval thinkers, the one about whom the least is known, and it can be added that he is also the one whose work provokes the greatest debates⁸.

Duns Scotus is read by Peirce, and it was he who introduced into philosophical discussions numerous conceptual, argumentative, and doctrinal innovations about being, univocity, universals, intuitive knowledge and experience, the sciences and their organization, the nature of possibility, infinity, will, freedom, and providence, happiness, power, and poverty. to name just a few⁹. From this, it is added that the "logical-

⁶ The meaning of one sign is another sign, that is, the processes of signification, thus result from a series of successive interpretants. Thus, "*for Peirce, human knowledge can be represented by a triad: sign, object, interpretant; in which three levels of fundamental relations are established: (a) signification or primeirity – where the sign relates to itself, in its way of being, that is, in the way it appears; (b) objectification or secondness – in the relationship between the sign and the object, where reference is made to what it represents, refers to or indicates; (c) and in interpretation or thirdness – when sign and interpretant are related, in the types of interpretation that will emerge in the people who use them*" (SILVA & TOURINHO SILVA, 2012). Cf. also – SANTAELLA, L. (1983) *What is semiotics*. São Paulo: Brasiliense.

⁷ Cf. LE GOFF, J. (2003) *Os intelectuais na Idade Média*. Translated by Marcos de Castro. Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio, pp. 119. DE LIBERA, A. (2011) *A filosofia medieval*. Translated by Nicolás Nyimi Campanário and Yvone Maria de Campos Teixeira da Silva. 3. ed. São Paulo: Loyola, pp. 368. Cf. also – FRANCA, L. (1952) *The pedagogical method of the Jesuits*. Rio de Janeiro: Agir; [e] JAEGER, W. (1986) *Paideia: a formação do homem grego*. Translated by Artur M. Parreira. São Paulo: Martins Fontes.

⁸ Cf. GILSON, E. (2001) "A Filosofia no século XIV". In: *A Filosofia na Idade Média*. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, pp.735-80.

⁹ Quote is part of the text produced by the advent of the 7th centenary of the death of Duns Scotus (Cf. <https://repositorio-aberto.up.pt/bitstream/10216/55709/2/MeirinhosLazaroJDEfilosofia000126588.pdf> -

epistemological foundation" of Scotistic realism lies in the fact that the concept represents "semiotically" and allows the intellect to reach, in an immediate way, the "intentional relationship" with things. Scotus is a reference both in the Middle Ages and in the first modernity, and much more for its subtlety, for now the idea of "universal", for example, can be characterized, roughly speaking, as something capable of simultaneously constituting more than numerically an item, that is,

"[...] the identical, the similar, and the equal are founded on the one, so that although a similitude is founded on a thing of such a kind of quality, yet the relation is not real unless there is a real foundation and a real proximate reason to found; Therefore the unity which is required on the basis of a relation of similitude is real: it is not, however, numerical unity, because nothing one and identical is similar or equal to itself."¹⁰

Thus, IBRI, (2004, pp. 168) when describing in Peirce a kind of realism of scholastic coloring, categorically states that the system of semiotics and other issues of the Peircian system have their origin, as is known, in Antiquity and the Middle Ages. LOUCEIRO (2008, pp. 167), in turn, corroborates Prof. Ivo and describes that in Peirce there is "*an Aristotelian from the scholastic wing, approaching Scotism, but going much further in the direction of scholastic realism*" (CP 5.77 n.) or even "*a scholastic realist of a somewhat extreme type*" (CP 5.470). In this description of Peirce as a Scotista, IBRI also informs us, in a footnote, (2004, pp. 168), that "*the relations between Peirce and Duns Scotus are the subject of the work of BOLER (1963)*."

Professor Boler, already cited in paragraphs 1 and 3 of this article, when addressing Peirce's work, also describes as substantial the writings of medieval philosophers, in particular Duns Scotus, especially with regard to the constitution of metaphysics. Thus, when we read PICH (2005, pp. 62) it was also rescued from his research¹¹, especially with regard to the idea that Prof. Boler admits that Peirce probably knew Scotist theories of potentiality and even that, "*in certain aspects, the notion of potentiality could have been*

Accessed on 11/04/2024). The text is a reference to production by – José Meirinhos & Manuel Lázaro Pulido (Medieval Philosophy Office - Institute of Philosophy of the University of Porto). Cf. also – MERINO, J. A., (2008) *João Duns Escoto. Introduction to his philosophical-theological thought*, Trans. José David Antunes, Editorial Franciscana, Braga. Cf. also – SÖDER, J. R. (2005) *Johannes Duns Scotus – Pariser Vorlesung über Wissen und Kontingenz*. Freiburg: Herder, pp. 9-32.

¹⁰ Cf. DUNS SCOTUS, *Ordinatio* II, d. 3, p. 1, q. 1, n. 18. Translated by Vitor Bragança, In: *ANALYTICA*, Rio de Janeiro, vol. 25 nº 1, 2021, pp. 07 – [...] *idem, simile et aequale fundantur super 'unum', ita quod licet similitudo habeat pro fundamento rem de genere qualitatis talis, tamen relatio non est realis nisi habeat fundamentum reale et rationem proximam fundandi realem; igitur unitas quae requiritur in fundamento relationis similitudinis, est realis: non est autem unitas numeralis, quia nihil unum et idem est simile vel aequale sibi ipsi.*"

¹¹ Referring to the lecture that Prof. John Boler, gave at the 7th International Meeting on Pragmatism, promoted by the Center for the Study of Pragmatism and held at the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo, between November 8 and 11, 2004. Cf. (2005), "Scotus and Peirce on Reality and Possibility", In: *Cognitio*, São Paulo, v. 6, n. 1, pp. 61-84, jan./jul., pp. 61.

more useful to Peirce's purposes than that of a community of natures", the author, (2005, pp. 63), denotes the intention to bring Scotus' conceptions of "common nature" and "possibility" closer to the metaphysical principles of Peirce's philosophy.

It is also supposed that Boler is suspicious of Peirce in the sense of an association of the idea of "potentiality" with Aristotle. With this, Peirce would be much more in the field of Aristotelianism than of scholasticism itself, since the understanding of "Form (□□□□)"¹² is particularly linked to "originality", since it is conceived that in the "forms" or "patterns" are "the intellectual life of thought" (PICH, 2005, pp. 62). For Boler, too, Peirce did not know the idea (cf. the concept in Aristotle's *De anima*). The issue of substantial form, paradigmatically interpreted as the "human soul" in Late Scholasticism, is portrayed as something that has "powers" (PICH, 2005, pp. 63). In the investigation of Scotus in Peirce, especially in the veil of the semiotic point of view, it is important to ascertain whether there is a relationship of radicality and alterity between sign and object, while in the production of the imaginary the being of the object is totally constituted by the sign (IBRI, 2004, pp. 170). It is also important to emphasize that in Peirce, philosophy must distance itself from the pretension of being a pure exercise of skepticism. Hence, we rescue the article by PICH, (2005, pp. 62) when he states

[S]if, according to Scotus, nature – or, one might say, the actual "common nature" – "'loses' its community when instantiated", "potentiality can transcend its own exercise", and precisely this shows the point of contact of "potentiality" with Peirce's would-be's.

In this presentation, it is our intention to address how Duns Scotus measures reality and how Peirce read this approach. Two authors will be our mediators in this endeavor, firstly, the aforementioned Professor Boler, with his contextual work, and in the second place, Prof. Roberto Hofmeister Pich¹³, who offers us the analysis in question.

John Boler investigates the "ontological commitments" of "potency" in Book IX of Duns Scotus's *Quaestiones super libros metaphysicorum Aristotelis*, i.e., on "Scotistic

¹² Dr. Marcos Zingano, professor at the Department of Philosophy University of São Paulo, USP. He states that in Aristotle, first, the "Forms" have little influence on sensible things, (as in Plato), since they belong to different worlds and do not concretely constitute the object that corresponds to them. Form is not only a model of sensible things, but it can be said that it is the "Form of Form", that is, form, "to eido – to eido". In this sense, it is a question of the *first substance* as substance of a substance, (Z3, 1028b 35), or again, "I understand by form the quidity, that is, the first substance", (Z7, 1032b1-2). Cf. ZINGANO, M (2003) "Form, Matter and Definition in Aristotle's Metaphysics", In: *Cad. Hist. Fil. Ci.*, Campinas, Série 3, v. 13, n. 2, pp. 277-299, jul.-dez. On the other hand, PICH, (2005, pp. 62), states that with regard to Peirce "[he] ... he knew that Aristotle's scientific-naturalist ideas were little known to the scholastics – too limited to the consideration of "substantial forms", an "obstacle to the progress of science" (Cf. BOLER, 2005, pp. 21-22)".

¹³ Roberto Hofmeister Pich, is a Professor at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul – Porto Alegre, and has as a strong aspect the richness of the epistemological thought of the "Subtle". The construction of the premise should be seen in – PASNAU, R. (2003) "Cognition", pp. In: WILLIAMS, T (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 285-311.

realism" and "reality." In (PICH, 2005) it is stated that Duns Scotus analyzed *Aristotle's work Seconds Analyticals* – especially when focused on the epistemological status of theology – and, in a way, placed "scientific knowledge" (*scientia*) in the consideration of its object "under a real reason" (*sub ratione reali*). Thus, "'science', insofar as it is defined as strict knowledge, is real knowledge" (PICH, 2005, pp. 64).

In Boler's reflexive analysis, PICH (2005), he proposes the distinction that exists in Scotus in the double sense that is present in the relations between words (spoken or written), with concepts and things. In a second moment, with the words being a sign¹⁴. In this case, the first proposition occurs in the Scotist differentiation between the concept, first as an *accident* that is found in the soul as a form (*informans animam*), that is, as a real entity or *ens diminutum*, and, secondly, as a *concept*. It is important to emphasize that nature is neither singular nor universal in itself, but indifferent or common to singularity and universality. What is assumed, even in the scrape of research, is that "in some aspect" there must be a true identity between the thing and knowledge, since common nature must therefore be something real in concrete things. Otherwise, intellectual (and scientific) knowledge will have no reference in them (CEZAR, 1996, pp. 447-448. 454).

Well, in this sense, nature is therefore in itself a formal reality, but it is not an existent reality. And Scotus, in the resourcefulness of his semiotics, does not understand, for example, that the word is a "distinct representational entity", but considers it, as a common nature of the thing, with the distinction of "two ways of being" (PICH, 2005, pp. 65). Regarding the differentiation said about the word just now, it can also be affirmed that what is called the first intention, caused immediately by the thing, means an intelligible and real-essential characteristic of the thing itself, the "nature", the "essence", the "definition of what we think", that in Scotus, the object known on the basis of the present object is a representation of the present object in its *preliminary*¹⁵ structure, because the real concept one is co-caused by the intellect (PICH, 2005, pp. 67). This semiotic foundation points to

[T]he "word" (*vox*) or the "name" (*nomen*) which is associated with a concept such as *passio animae*, or "which means [immediately] a resemblance [i.e., the *species*], insofar as [the latter] is a sign of the thing [*signum rei*]", then signifies the thing itself, even if mediately.¹⁶

¹⁴ PICH (2005, pp. 65) cites in a note – TACHAU (1988, pp. 66). "On the particularity of the semiotic character of concepts in Scotus", and also indicates – PANACCIO (1999, pp. 214-9).

¹⁵ According to ABBAGNANO (2007, pp. 820), the term *quiddidade* (lat. *Quidditas*) was introduced by the Latin translations made in the century. XII (mainly related to the Arabs) from the works of Aristotle; and corresponds to the Aristotelian expression *quod quid erat esse*. This term means *necessary essence* (*substantial*) or *substance* (v. Substance).

¹⁶ Cf. *Primum librum perihermeneias quaestiones* I q. 2, pp. 187, n. 3. [It may be added that a concept, such as *Similitudo rei* e *passio animae*, is an internal expression of a spiritual activity, namely, the *simplex apprehensio* of an object. The concept is, therefore, a terminus *incomplexus*. Cf. PICH (2004, pp. 208ff.).

ALLUNTIS; WOLTER (1975, pp. 518); KNUDSEN (1982, pp. 486) point out that it is part of the process of knowledge that a formal content of a primary intention is related to the formal content of another primary intention, and that second intentions, at least, perform the function of comparison, or even – relations of reason (*relatio rationis*) – (Cf. TACHAU, 1988, pp. 63); (KAUFMANN, 1994, pp. 207 and *Ordinatio* I d. 23, q. un., pp. 352, n. 10, DAHLSTRÖM, 1980, pp. 88; PERLER (2003, pp. 176-7). What is considered in the second moment is understood as an entity insofar as the entity is considered from the perspective of the first moment. Being intelligible in themselves, second intentions are a means "*by which something [real, i.e., a real universal] is understood*" (PICH, 2005, pp. 67).

Well, as for the core of our investigation, P. ENGELHARDT (1976, pp. 473); DAHLSTROM (1980, pp. 89) states that in Scotus, the manner and presentation of the possible between metaphysics (*intentiones primae*) occurs, which tends to deal with "*being qua being*" and logic (*intentiones secundae*) – which is the real object under a real formal reason, and from which it is warned that they can be maintained, insofar as second intentions show "*the real character of reality as structurable and thought as structuring*".

In another expectation, the idea of a *habit of reason*, that is, *Intentio* (first intentions – *species intelligibilis* and second) receives diverse – and even ambiguous – uses by Scotus, although, in general, he understands "intention" as a "concept of understanding" (PICH, 2005, pp. 64). The first intention exists in the understanding only because it is caused by the object¹⁷. In the concept of first intention or in the *intelligible species* (*species intelligibilis*), Scotus sees not only a relationship with extramental reality (*species sensibilis*), but the requirement of semantic explanations, namely, of the relations between words (spoken or written), concepts and things¹⁸. The active intellect by "similarity" (*similitudo*), has its function of apprehending (PICH, 2005, pp. 68) and also denotes that reality is not defined by the intellect, because – "*in no way by an act of the considering intellect, but rather that such an entity would be, even if no intellect considered it, I say 'before every act of the intellect'*"¹⁹. There is also a "bi-conceptual" discourse that beckons, without a shadow of a doubt, the different acts of knowledge, having two (or more) different formal objects as objects of knowledge (PICH, 2005, pp. 69). Our intention was to

¹⁷ Cf. TACHAU (1988, p. 63-6). Cf. DUNS SCOTUS, *Ordinatio* I d. 23, q. un., pp. 360, n. 20; I d. 27, q. 1-3, pp. 97, n. 83.

¹⁸ Cf. Specifically, in *Ord. IV d. 1 q. 2*, Scotus – expressly states in terms of "intentions" – his understanding of – *ens rationis* or *ens in anima* as "considered secondly" (*secundo consideratum*), not as "considered first" (*primo consideratum*) or as a concept to whose consideration the intellect is primarily moved by the external thing (PICH, 2005, pp. 66). Cf. also – DE VITIIS, P. (1976) 'La dottrina delle categorie e del significato in Duns Scotus', In: *Rivista di Filosofia neoscolastica*, 68, pp. 158-162.

¹⁹ Cf. DUNS SCOTUS, *Ordinatio* I d. 2, p. 2, q. 1-4, pp. 350, n. 390.

reach this point, in the specific case of this communication, that is, to demonstrate that for Scotus, in things, before all consideration of the intellect, there is something common – nature with its specific or real generic unity, a unity that is less than the unity of an "this" of the particular substance (TWEEDALE, 1993, pp. 77-93).

The fundamental concept in Scotus to understand the realism of universals: a *distinctio formalis*²⁰. It is a distinction that "*is made by the mind, but has a basis in fact*", as Mayorga (2007, pp. 85) explains. In this way, it is understood that Scotus understands that the "*things that are said*" (*dicuntur*) should be read as "*things that are conceived*" (*concupiuntur*). What is at stake, therefore, is not the words that express, but the concepts that are expressed. Similarly, in the second division, when dealing with "*things that are*" (*eorum quae sunt*), what is at issue is not entities as they have something real (*aliquid reale*), but entities as "*are according to reason*" (*'sunt' secundum rationem*). Thus the universal exists in the mind, and it is the proper entity of ordinary nature which is the foundation of both individuation and universality. But that common nature remains as such untouched. Finally

[A] the Scotist analysis of *realitas* allows, therefore, (a) to understand how "universal" realities are and (b) how reality, with formal non-identities and communities, is. In these terms, the Scotist theory was important for the conception of the ontological logical status of universal concepts and for C. S. Peirce's *theory of reality* (PICH, 2005, pp. 70, in Pierce – CP 5.331; 8.13).

²⁰ With reference to – SILVA, C.V.S. (2021) *The distinction between essence and existence: its genesis and its discussion in Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus*, il. Dissertation (Master's Degree in Philosophy) — University of Brasilia, Brasilia. Furthermore, "*the formal distinction (distinctio formalis) is that which occurs in the formality (formalitas) of the perceived entity, having neither a properly real nor a properly mental origin*" (Cf, still – <https://educacao.uol.com.br/disciplinas/filosofia/duns-scotus-ser-humano-perdeu-a-intuicao-direta-das-essencias-> of the entities – Accessed on 21/04/2024)

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