

THE SPECIFIC READING OF A-PROPOSITIONS IN A
 DEFENSE OF WILLIAM OF SHERWOOD

CHARLES F. KIELKOPF

In his *Medieval Logic and Metaphysics* [1], D. P. Henry charged that William of Sherwood failed in his attempt to solve a sophisma.¹ The purpose of this paper* is to make a case that Sherwood had a correct solution.

William of Sherwood confronted the following sophisma ([1], p. 73 and [4], pp. 21-22): Suppose that there are only asses so that (a) below is true. Next consider the following argument which we label A1.

- (A1) (a) Every animal is an ass.
 (b) Every man is an animal.

So, (c) Every man is an ass.

Sherwood suggested that (b) is necessarily true since in it the genus is predicated of one of its species. If both (a) and (b) are true, it seems that we have to accept (c) because the form of A1 certainly seems valid. But we cannot accept this conclusion. So we have to show that one of the premisses is false, that the argument is invalid, or that the conclusion need not be interpreted as the falsehood which it seems to be.

To appreciate Sherwood's solution, let us review the distinction between the specific (proper) reading and the numerical (common) reading of universal affirmative sentences, such as 'Every man is an animal', which I call *A*-propositions instead of *A*-sentences. Sherwood wrote: "It must be known, therefore, that the word 'every' or 'all' is sometimes taken properly and divides for specific parts and at other times taken commonly and divides for numerical parts" [4], p. 20. When it is read specifically, 'Every *S* is *P*' is read as: Every species of *S* is a species of *P*. Often a specific reading is naturally expressed by talking of types or kinds of *S*. Here, though, I restrict myself to using 'species' to motivate

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talk of a specific or species reading.² Read numerically, 'Every *S* is *P*' is read as: Every individual which is *S* is an individual which is *P*. On Henry's formulation,³ the numerical reading has existential import in the sense that 'Every individual which is *S* is an individual which is *P*' implies that there is an individual which is *S*. Let us accept that numerically read *A*-propositions have such existential import because, as Kretzmann shows ([4], p. 21), Sherwood made this assumption. On Henry's formulation,⁴ the specific reading lacks existential import in the sense that 'Every species of *S* is a species of *P*' does not imply that there are any individuals in any of the species of *S*. Let us agree that specifically read *A*-propositions do not have such existential import. Observe, though, the difference between saying that there are no species of *S* and saying that no species of *S* has any members. A subject term of a specifically read *A*-proposition stands for species. Terms standing for species have simple supposition as opposed to what was called personal supposition. Terms standing for individuals in the way in which subject terms of numerically read *A*-propositions with existential import stand for individuals have personal supposition.⁵ So we have accepted here that the subject term of a numerically read *A*-proposition has personal supposition but that the subject term of a specifically read *A*-proposition may lack personal supposition. I will argue below that for Sherwood the subject term of a specifically read *A*-proposition has simple supposition. Also on Henry's formulation, we get the following two claims of sufficient conditions for the truth of specifically read *A*-propositions⁶:

(C1) If every individual which is *S* is an individual which is *P*, then every species of *S* is a species of *P*.

(C2) If there are no members of any species of *S*, then every species of *S* is a species of *P*.

Henry's charge that Sherwood did not solve his sophisma is based on C1 and C2. I am sure Sherwood would not have accepted C1 and C2, and I think he would have been justified in rejecting them.

First, let us see how acceptance of C1 and C2 destroys Sherwood's solution.⁷ If we let unprimed *a*, *b*, and *c* represent numerical readings of the corresponding propositions from A1, and *a'*, *b'*, and *c'* specific readings, we get the following eight arguments:

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| 1. <i>a</i> , <i>b</i> , therefore <i>c</i> . | Unsound; <i>b</i> is false. |
| 2. <i>a</i> , <i>b</i> , therefore <i>c'</i> . | Unsound; <i>b</i> is false. |
| 3. <i>a</i> , <i>b'</i> , therefore <i>c</i> . | Invalid. |
| 4. <i>a</i> , <i>b'</i> , therefore <i>c'</i> . | Valid for Henry. |
| 5. <i>a'</i> , <i>b</i> , therefore <i>c</i> . | Unsound; <i>b</i> is false. |
| 6. <i>a'</i> , <i>b</i> , therefore <i>c'</i> . | Unsound; <i>b</i> is false. |
| 7. <i>a'</i> , <i>b'</i> , therefore <i>c</i> . | Invalid. |
| 8. <i>a'</i> , <i>b'</i> , therefore <i>c'</i> . | Valid; but is it sound? |

A solution for the sophisma by use of the numerical/specific distinction

would show that none of the eight arguments above are sound. We can immediately, with Sherwood and Henry, dismiss arguments 1, 2, 5, and 6 as unsound because *b*, being a numerical reading of 'Every man is an animal', is false under our assumptions that there are no men and that the numerical reading has existential import. Sherwood, I believe, dismissed arguments 3, 4, and 7 as formally invalid. Henry, however, held that 4 is valid because on his formulations the numerical reading implies the specific reading. Let us grant Henry that 4 is valid. If argument 4 is valid for Henry's reason, viz., that *a* implies premiss *a'*, 4 will be unsound if *a'* is false, and the gist of Sherwood's solution is that *a'* is false. We do not need to labor the point that 3 and 7 are invalid while 8 is valid. So we need only consider the truth of the premisses of argument 8 which is written below as A2.

- (A2) (a') Every species of animal is a species of ass.
 (b') Every species of man is a species of animal.

So, (c') Every species of man is a species of ass.

Sherwood dismissed A2 as unsound because he saw *a'* as false; indeed, I suspect that he saw *a'* and *c'* as analytically false.⁸ I certainly think that *a'* and *c'* are analytically false. However, Henry accepted A2 as sound. He wrote on p. 73 of [1] about Sherwood's solution: "contrary to his assertions, if the three inclusions are taken specifically, . . . then the inference is valid and all three are true just because there are no men". Actually, on Henry's formulations, 'There are no men' suffices only to show that *c'* is true by his condition C2. He needs 'There are only asses' to get *a'* true by his condition C1. But, since we are assuming that there are only asses, we need only consider whether Henry should have accepted C1 and C2. We can immediately answer 'no' if this question is taken as asking whether or not Henry should have accepted C1 and C2 if his goal was to interpret specific readings as Sherwood understood specific readings. Sherwood's solution shows that he would have rejected C1 and C2. So our question is: Should C1 and C2 give truth conditions for specifically read A-propositions regardless of what Sherwood thought?

I have three reasons for answering 'no' to this last question. My first reason is that specifically read A-propositions are explicitly about species, not about the individuals, if any, which are members of the species. Hence, we should not expect that facts about the individual members of species would be relevant unless the specifically read A-proposition explicitly directs us to pay attention to species membership. For instance, 'Every species of dinosaur is an extinct species' explicitly directs us to pay attention to the membership of dinosaur species, and it is true just because there are no dinosaurs. In general, however, specifically read A-propositions are not about the number of members in species. In general, they simply tell us that all species of one kind are species of another kind. So, in general, it seems that we should only have to pay

attention to what it is to be a species of S, and what it is to be a species of P, to determine the truth of a specifically read A-proposition. For instance, consideration of quantity of members seems totally irrelevant to the truth of 'Every species of dinosaur is a species of reptile'. These suspicions about relevance are supported by consideration of ordinary talk about taxonomical systems.

Most often expressions of the 'species of S' form are used to make claims about a taxonomical system. Certainly we do not, and should not, take as true all taxonomical claims about species with no members. It is false, indeed analytically false, that every species of dinosaur is a species of mammal. So, C2 is opposed to standard usage. Also, if the only fish alive were some species of pike, we would not say that every species of fish is a species of pike. So, C1 is opposed to standard usage. Hence, my second reason for answering 'no' is that acceptance of C1 and C2 is opposed to standard ways of talking about species. When we read A-propositions specifically a presupposition is that there is a domain of discourse consisting of species. A suggestion from Sherwood indicates that this presupposition is justified.

A third reason for answering 'no' comes from an intriguing suggestion of Sherwood that we cannot fail to refer to a species if we characterize one. My italics in the following passage mark the source of this suggestion.

... a specific part is a part that is due to a universal insofar as it is a universal—i.e. a part in the sense that it is a conditionally extant [part]. A numerical part, on the other hand, is an actually extant part, not due to a universal as such. *A part of man in the first sense is man conditionally in Socrates; likewise man conditionally in Plato. Even if no man actually exists, these parts are.* A part of man in the second sense is man actually in Socrates, or Socrates; likewise man actually in Plato. Unless there is an actually existing man, these parts are not.

... pars secundum speciem est pars quae debetur universali in quantum est universale, et haec est pars secundum quod est habitualiter ens. Pars autem secundum numerum est pars actualiter ens et non debetur universali per se. *Primo modo pars hominis est homo habitualiter in Sorte . . . et similiter homo habitualiter in Platone, et hae partes sunt nullo homine actualiter existente.* Secundo modo est pars hominis actualiter in Sorte . . . et similiter homo actualiter in Platone, et hae partes non sunt nisi homine actualiter existente.⁹

I recommend acceptance of the suggestion of this passage and take it as positing species (types, kinds) even if characterized by an inconsistent species description. Thus, 'Every species of white and not-white rabbit is a species of mammal' is, to me, an analytic truth about species which necessarily have no members. Similarly, 'Every species of white and not-white rabbit is a species of fish' is an analytic falsehood about species which necessarily have no members. In these cases a universal, which is

the combination of properties denoted by 'white and not-white rabbit', accompanies or maybe is the species which would exist in an object if an object could be a white and not-white rabbit. Still this species itself which would exist in objects if objects could be white and not-white rabbits, i.e., which only exists conditionally in objects, exists in some way even if no objects can meet these conditions. However, I shall not push my point about inconsistently described species onto Sherwood. The sophisma at hand requires consideration only of consistent characterization of universals. The important points are as follows: Mere use of terms for predicating properties seems to guarantee that we are talking of properties, i.e., features or universals. Certainly, the universals may not exist as individual objects; but, still, mere use of certain terms seems to bring a guarantee that there is something which we are correctly or incorrectly attributing to objects. For instance, it is difficult to understand what we would be worrying about if we worried whether there was anything being attributed to an object when we said that the object is white. Species need only universals to exist and these universals do not need instances to exist in the way in which universals exist, whatever that way may be. For instance, there need not be any dinosaurs for there to be the features which dinosaurs had. Hence, species do not need members to exist in the way in which species exist, whatever that way may be. Consequently, for specifically read *A*-propositions, we do not have to consider the case of their not being able to be falsified because nothing falls under the subject term. That is, we do not have to consider such a case if we accept the suggestion from Sherwood that mere use of a consistent term in the subject position of a specifically read *A*-proposition guarantees the existence of the requisite species.

For the preceding reasons I conclude that D. P. Henry wrongly dismissed Sherwood's solution of the sophisma and inaccurately formulated Sherwood's specific reading of *A*-propositions. Henry himself offers no solution to the sophisma. Presumably, Henry accepted argument A2 as a sound argument, given as true the contingent claim that there are only asses. But such acceptance of A2 as sound would be an even worse error than dismissal of Sherwood's solution because, for reasons suggested earlier, the conclusion of A2 is analytically false. Of course, to argue that Sherwood's solution is basically correct is not to deny that his solution needs to be supplemented with an account of the epistemology and ontology of species, together with a suitable formulation of specifically read *A*-propositions in some contemporary formal language for logic. In other words, his solution needs to be supplemented with an adequate account of simple supposition.

NOTES

1. Henry's concern is to clarify several medieval theses and analyses by formulating them in the Ontology of Leśniewski. This defense of Sherwood does not require close consideration of Henry's symbolizations. For a discussion of sophismata see footnote 18, Ch. I, of [4]. On

- p. 4, Kretzmann characterizes sophismata as “arguments turning on the misuse of or natural ambiguities in various devices of ordinary discourse.”
2. Henry shows in [1], p. 70, how ‘Every man is living’ can be read specifically by taking features of individual men, actual or possible, as constituting subspecies (types) of men.
 3. See formula .2 on p. 68 of Henry’s book.
 4. Henry does not explicitly formulate the specific reading. But the consequent of formula .14 on p. 72 is, I believe, what Henry would give as a formulation of the specific reading.
 5. For a discussion of simple supposition, see p. 49 of [1]; Ch. 5, section 7, of [3]; and especially pp. 251-56 of [2] in which the Kneales are very critical of the notion of simple supposition.
 6. See p. 73 of [1] for explicit claims that Henry holds C2; and .14 of p. 73 for C1.
 7. Pp. 21-22 of [4] has an exposition of Sherwood’s solution.
 8. See footnote 18 on p. 21 of [4] for the suggestions that Sherwood sees a' and c' as analytically false.
 9. A valuable aspect of Henry’s book is the parallel English/Latin translations. This pair is from p. 70. The italics are added. The translation of the Latin is from p. 20 of [4]. The Latin is from p. 49 of [5].

REFERENCES

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- [5] William of Sherwood, *The Syncategoremata of William of Sherwood*, ed. J. R. O’Donnell, *Medieval Studies*, vol. 2 (1941).

The Ohio State University
Columbus, Ohio