

*CURSUS CONIMBRICENSIS* – SEBASTIAN COUTO S.J.  
NATURE CONSIDERED IN ITSELF  
IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PROBLEM  
OF UNIVERSALS

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The main objective of this paper is to set forth the concept of nature in itself (*natura secundum se*) defended in the debate concerning the nature of universals by the great Portuguese scholastic Sebastian Couto S.J. (1567–1639). The paper is divided into three main sections. First we briefly introduce Couto and his extensive commentary on selected logical writings of Aristotle, which is part of the famous multi-volume philosophical course called *Cursus Conimbricensis*. Since there is little information on this work available, we lay out the circumstances of its origin and historical significance. We then situate the problematic of nature in itself into the broader historical-systematic context of the debate about universals, and within this context we then explicate Couto's theory of nature in itself. In conclusion, we summarize and evaluate the results.

### 1. *Cursus Conimbricensis*

The sixteenth century is rightly considered to be the time of culminating prosperity in Portugal and Spain. The favourable economic and social conditions of this period co-constituted the background for an extraordinary cultural and spiritual development. The religious schism prompted by the Reformation gave rise to a new Catholic religious community, the Society of Jesus, whose members soon became the ideological leaders of the Counter-Reformation movement. Portuguese Jesuit philosophers active at the Arts Faculty of Coimbra and the University of Évora gained great renown. In late sixteenth century they published a series of commentaries on the important writings

of Aristotle, which are known under the common title *Commentarii Collegii Conimbricensis Societatis Iesu*.<sup>1</sup> The “Conimbricenses”, as these commentaries came to be called, enjoyed great popularity and their many further editions were used not only at many universities and Jesuit colleges in Europe, America and Asia (India, China, Japan), but also by academic centres associated with the Reformed churches. Hence the particular impact of these works on continental rationalism, especially in Germany. The “Conimbricenses” were also studied (at the Jesuit college of La Flèche) by René Descartes, and later Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz and Christian Wolff, who greatly influenced the pre-critical thinking of Immanuel Kant.<sup>2</sup>

The emergence of these commentaries was prompted by the unsatisfactory teaching practice at universities under Jesuit administration, where students were forced to write down everything their professors dictated during class. Instead of studying primary and relevant secondary sources, the students often just copied and memorized the notes taken during lectures, which resulted in a decline in the quality of studies. The Superior General of the Jesuit order, the Spaniard Jerome Nadal (1507–1580) therefore instructed the teachers of philosophy at the Faculty of Arts of Coimbra during a visit to the Portuguese province in 1561 to work out commentaries on all (significant) works of the famous Greek philosopher Aristotle, which would facilitate and improve the existing method of teaching philosophy and theology. The commentaries were also to include the original texts of Aristotle,

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<sup>1</sup> *Commentarii Collegii Conimbricensis Societatis Iesu in octo libros physicorum Aristotelis Stagiritæ*, Conimbricæ: A. Mariz, 1591 (reprint Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1984); *Commentarii Collegii Conimbricensis Societatis Iesu in quattuor libros physicorum Aristotelis de Cælo*, Lyon: Guichard Jullieron, 1594; *Commentarii Collegii Conimbricensis Societatis Iesu in libros meteorum Aristotelis Stagiritæ*, Lisboa, 1595; *Commentarii Collegii Conimbricensis Societatis Iesu in libros Aristotelis qui parva naturalia appellantur*, Lisboa, 1595; *Commentarii Collegii Conimbricensis Societatis Iesu in libros Ethicorum Aristotelis ad Nichomachum aliquot Cursus Conimbricensis disputationes in quibus præcipua quaedam Ethicæ disciplinæ capita continentur*, Lisboa, 1595; *Commentarii Collegii Conimbricensis Societatis Iesu in duos libros Aristotelis de generatione et corruptione*, Conimbricæ, 1595 (reprint Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2005); *Commentarii Collegii Conimbricensis Societatis Iesu in tres libros Aristotelis de Anima*, Conimbricæ, 1598 (reprint Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2006); *Commentarii Collegii Conimbricensis Societatis Iesu in universam dialecticam Aristotelis Stagiritæ*, Conimbricæ, 1606 (reprint Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1976).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. MARTINS, Antonio. The Conimbricenses. In PACHECO, Maria Costa – MEIRINHOS, José Fernando (eds.). *Intellect et imagination dans la Philosophie Médiévale / Intellect and Imagination in Medieval Philosophy*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2006, pp. 101–117, here p. 2.

supplemented with the commentaries of major interpreters since ancient times up to the present.<sup>5</sup>

The realization of the task initiated by Nadal was entrusted to a group of scholars, which was headed by probably the most influential Portuguese philosopher of the time, Pedro da Fonseca S.J. (1528–1599). The group also included many important scholars such as Manuel Gois (1543–1597), Balthazar Álvarez (1561–1630), Cosme Magalhaes (1563–1624) and Sebastian Couto. Fonseca's bold and very rigorous initial plans envisaging, among others, a critical edition of Aristotle's original text, taking into account the views of all the major ancient, medieval and contemporary commentators of Aristotle, as well as completion of the whole work within two or three years, soon proved to be too demanding and not entirely realistic. As a result of personal conflicts, methodological disagreement and other external problems, which are not yet fully understood, Fonseca resigned from the work on the common project after a few years, the other scholars involved with the group fluctuated, and the planned progress of the work slowed down. The fairly successful completion of the project was mostly due to Manuel Gois, who took on the greatest part of the responsibility. Under his leadership all the commentaries of Coimbra were published between 1592 and 1606.<sup>4</sup>

It is important to note that Couto's commentary on Aristotle's logic, which includes the discussion of nature in itself, was the last to appear in 1606.<sup>5</sup> About two years earlier, an unauthorized version of a course of logic had appeared in several places in Europe under the title of

<sup>5</sup> Nadal's order was fully in accordance with the then current Jesuit practice, characterised by basing the teaching of philosophy on the works of Aristotle. This approach to teaching philosophy was codified by the Jesuits a few years later in the famous official document *Ratio Studiorum* (of 1599), which laid down the mandatory rules of scientific formation in this order. See *Ratio atque Institutio Studiorum Societatis Iesu. Monumenta Paedagogica Societatis Iesu*. Vol. 5. LUKÁCS, Ladislaus. (ed.). *Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu*. Vol. 129. Roma: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1986, pp. 357–454.

<sup>4</sup> From the historical and systematic point of view it is interesting that *Cursus Conimbricensis* does not include a commentary on the *Metaphysics*, even though many passages and references explicitly indicate that Gois had originally planned its publication. The reasons why this plan was not carried out are not yet clarified. According to Martins this absence cannot be satisfactorily explained by the fact that at that time Fonseca's three-part commentary on the *Metaphysics* was already available. Cf. MARTINS, Antonio M. *The Conimbricenses*, p. 110.

<sup>5</sup> This commentary is Couto's most important work. In addition to it, there are extant several not very extensive writings in moral theology. Cf. STEGMUELLER, Friedrich. *Filosofia Teologia e nas e Universidades de Coimbra Évora no Século XVI*. Coimbra: CUP, 1957, p. 74.

“Conimbricenses” (so-called *Logica furtiva*), which in the introduction to his commentary Couto characterizes as “full of errors and inaccuracies” and from which he fully distances himself.<sup>6</sup> We will therefore base further interpretation solely on Couto’s commentary. This includes the full text of Porfyry’s *Isagoge*, Aristotle’s *Categories* and *On Interpretation*, selected passages of the first fourteen chapters and chapter 28 of the *Prior Analytics*, parts of some chapters of the first book of the *Posterior Analytics* and the first three chapters of *Topics*. Of course, all the writings were supplemented with Couto’s rigorous and extensive commentary, which clearly shows Couto’s rigorous philological education, the emphasis he placed on reading the sources in original language, as well as the impact of contemporary humanism manifesting itself in the new *explanatio* method: a philologically rigorous analysis of words and sentences, carried out in the annotations, which refers to similar words or expressions of other classical authors in order to help to explain and defend the Latin translation of the original Greek text. Materially, Couto’s commentary is characterised by a clear rigorous analysis of logical and philosophical problems, providing a (sometimes perhaps too excessive) collection of all important arguments both for and against the defended thesis, and especially by a clear conceptual framework. Couto’s own philosophical position draws decisive incentives from the two most influential schools of the time, the Thomists and the Scotists, and though he more often inclines to the school of the Angelic Doctor, his efforts mostly aim at finding a “third way”, which attempts to integrate the advantages of both schools and at the same time avoid their shortcomings.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. The problem of nature considered in itself and its historical-systematic context

The problematic of nature considered in itself is traditionally an important part of the logical-metaphysical considerations of universal

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<sup>6</sup> *Collegii Conimbricensis Societatis Iesu Commentarii doctissimi In universam Logicam Aristotelis, nunc primum editi*. Basileae: Bibliopolio Frobeniano, 1604. A simple and quick confrontation of the two versions of the course reveals that the works are not fully identical. An extensive scientifically correct examination of the two writings, which would reveal the differences in the intentions of the authors and help to clarify the circumstances and reasons for publishing the Course in 1604, has not yet been carried out. Cf. MARTINS, Antonio M. *The Conimbricenses*, p. 109.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *The Coimbra Jesuits’ Doctrine on Universals (1577–1606)*. *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 2007, vol. 18, pp. 531–544, especially pp. 533–534.

concepts.<sup>8</sup> The dispute over the nature of universal concepts is a perennial philosophical problem; however, one of the crucial incentives to it was provided by the Neo-Platonic philosopher Porphyry (252–304), who in the preface to his *Isagoge* (introduction to Aristotle's *Categories*) asks three fundamental questions concerning the nature of universals, which, however, on account of their extreme difficulty, he does not answer.<sup>9</sup> The answers to these questions have since then divided philosophers against one another. Let us briefly examine the basic solutions to the problem.

From the systematic point of view, these solutions can with some degree of simplification be divided into two contrasting groups. One conception is nominalist, traditionally divided into so-called extreme nominalism, advocated e.g. by Roscelin of Compiègne (1050–1121), and so-called moderate nominalism or conceptualism, under which the mature doctrine of William of Ockham (1287–1348) can be classified. According to extreme nominalism, universals are mere universal names (linguistic forms), which signify a number of individuals. Conceptualism further admits that apart from universal names, there are also universal mental entities, i.e., acts of the intellect, by means of which we represent and thus cognise individuals belonging to a particular set. Since late Middle Ages these entities have been called “formal concepts”.<sup>10</sup> The other conception is realist (it also takes multiple different forms) and its proponents construe universals, very roughly speaking, as some “things”; either as Platonic independently existing ideas, or as universal forms existing as universal in individuals (ultra-realism), or finally, as intentional entities (so-called objective concepts), which only occur as universal in thinking, but have a foundation in reality,

<sup>8</sup> Some passages in this section are taken over from SVOBODA, David. Absolutně uvažovaná přirozenost: Petr Fonseca a jeho významní středověcí předchůdci. *Studia Theologica* 2012, vol. 14, no. 4, pp. 102–126.

<sup>9</sup> PORPHYRY. *Isagoge*. In BUSSE, Adolfus (ed.). *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca* IV/1, 1,9–16: “I shall omit to speak about genera and species, as to whether they subsist (in the nature of things) or in mere conceptions only; whether also if subsistent, they are bodies or incorporeal, and whether they are separate from, or in, sensibles, and subsist about these, for such a treatise is most profound, and requires another more extensive investigation.”

<sup>10</sup> A formal concept is a certain quality of the intellect, i.e., an act of intellectual cognition, which represents the cognized object. Cf. SOUSEDÍK, Prokop. Projevy realismu a nominalismu ve scholastické logice. In HAVLÍK, Vladimír. (ed.). *Mezi jazykem a vědomím*. Praha: Filosofia, 1999, pp. 193–209.

from which they are derived by abstractive operation of the intellect (moderate realism).<sup>11</sup>

From the historical point of view, the dispute over the nature of universals became the focal point of philosophical investigation especially in the Latin West at the time of scholasticism.<sup>12</sup> A number of incentives contributed to the appearance of the exceedingly numerous scholastic works on this subject; however, the crucial texts were the ones considered standard at the schools and universities of the time, and therefore constituted the common frame of reference of almost all treatises on universals. The authority of the works of Aristotle was central (the works were read together with the works of his later commentators such as Porphyry and Boethius); these, however, as a whole admit of a number of interpretations.<sup>13</sup> From our point of view, Aristotle's not fully integrated and fairly incompatible statements on the nature and relationship of the universal and the individual are significant: these statements prompted a number of different interpretations already in ancient times.<sup>14</sup>

This interpretational as well as material problem was extensively elaborated on and clearly laid out several centuries later by the medieval Arabic philosopher Ibn Sīnā, better known under the Latin name Avicenna (990–1037). Avicenna's basic idea is simple: if we consider nature in itself, it is neither singular nor universal, but fully indifferent with respect to both attributes.<sup>15</sup> Nature thus construed is constitut-

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. LIBERA, Alain. *La Querelle des Universaux. De Platon à la fin du Moyen Âge*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1996. An objective concept is roughly speaking the object of a formal concept, i.e., the thing itself or an aspect of a real thing, as the object of intellectual cognition.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. WÖHLER, Hans-Ulrich. *Texte zum Universalienstreit. Vom Ausgang der Antike bis zur Frühscholastik*. Vol. 1. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1992. ID. *Texte zum Universalienstreit, Hoch- und spätmittelalterliche Scholastik*. Vol. 2. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1994.

<sup>13</sup> Aristotle is the author of the definition of the universal accepted by the majority of scholastics, according to which the universal is one which exists in the many and is predicated of many (*universale est unum in multis et de multis*). ARISTOTLE. *Prior Analytics*, I, 11, 77a 7, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. e.g. ARISTOTLE. *Categories* 2a 13–15, Princeton: Princeton University press, 1984; ID. *Metaphysics* 1038b 9–12, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984. For example, the late ancient commentator on the works of Aristotle, Alexander of Aphrodisias (2nd/3rd century AD), tried to resolve this interpretational and material difficulty by construing universality as a certain accidental modification of the essence as such. See TWEEDALE, Martin M. Alexander of Aphrodisias' theory of essence and universals. *Phronesis* 1984, vol. 29, pp. 279–303.

<sup>15</sup> In this context, nature means (roughly) that by which a thing is determined in terms of species and genus.

ed only by the essential characteristics (i.e., in the case of a horse by horseness) and all other attributes, including singularity and universality, are somehow external to it, “accidents” of a kind. We conceive nature in itself by abstracting the features common to the nature as part of the concept in the mind on the one hand and the nature as part of a real individual on the other. The common component, which occurs in the mind with the intention of universality and in real things as individual, is the nature in itself.<sup>16</sup> The scholastics called nature thus conceived *common nature* (*natura communis*).<sup>17</sup>

Avicenna’s concept of nature in itself did not elicit a great response among his Arabic and Muslim contemporaries. However, it became exceedingly influential later in the Latin West at the time of first and second scholasticism, where, since early 13th century, it initiated an unprecedented flourishing of different versions of moderate realism. Avicenna’s conception of common nature helped to bring about the fact that both the nominalism prevalent in the 12th century, whose most important proponent was Roscelin of Compiègne (1050–1121), and the highly influential ultra-realism of the time, advocated especially by William of Champeaux (1070–1121), were superseded by moderate realism.<sup>18</sup>

The most famous representatives of high scholasticism such as Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) and John Duns Scotus (1265–1308) elaborated on Avicenna’s intellectual legacy in an innovative manner.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. AVICENNA. *Metaphysica* V, 1, 4 (*Avicenna latinus: Liber de philosophia prima sive scientia divina*, II). VAN RIET, Simone (ed.). Louvain – Leiden: Peeters – Brill, 1977: “Equinitas etenim habet definitionem quae non eget universalitate, sed est cui accidit universalitas. Unde ipsa equinitas non est aliquid nisi equinitas tantum; ipsa enim in se nec est multa nec unum, nec est existens in his sensibilibus nec in anima...” Regarding Avicenna’s conception of nature cf. MARMURA, Michael Elias. Quiddity and Universality in Avicenna. In MOREWEDGE, Parviz (ed.). *Neoplatonism and Islamic Thought*. New York: State University of NY Press, 1992, pp. 77–87; MARMURA, Michael Elias. Avicenna’s Chapter on Universals in the Isagoge of his *Shifā’*. In WELCH, Alford Tomas – CACHIA, Pierre (eds.). *Islam. Past Influence and Present Challenge*. Albany: Edinburgh University Press, 1979, pp. 34–56.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. OWENS, Joseph. Common nature: A point of comparison between Thomistic and Scotistic metaphysics. In ROSS, James Francis (ed.). *Inquiries into Medieval Philosophy: A Collection in Honor of Francis P. Clarke* (Contributions in Philosophy 4). Greenwood: Westport, 1971, pp. 185–209. IDEM. Thomistic Common Nature and Platonic Idea. *Mediaeval Studies* 1959, vol. 21, pp. 211–223; HONNEFELDER, Ludger. *Natura communis*. In *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*. Vol. 6. Basel – Stuttgart: CO AG Verlag, 1984, col. 494–504.

<sup>18</sup> See COPLESTON, Friedrich. *A History of Philosophy*. Vol. II: *Augustine to Scotus*. London – New Jersey: Search Press – Paulist Press, 1950, p. 143.

Their teaching later became the subject of further debate which was alive in the environment of so-called early modern university philosophy (second scholasticism) from 15th up to 18th century.<sup>19</sup> One of the important figures of the time was the Portuguese philosopher Couto, whose conception of nature in itself is laid out in this paper.

### 3. Couto's conception of nature in itself

Couto discusses the problematic of nature in itself within the treatment of universals, found in his commentary on Porphyry's *Isagoge* and divided into several sections (so-called questions).<sup>20</sup> From our point of view, the first four questions are crucial. In these he addresses the following topics: (1) what is a universal; (2) the unity of a universal, (3) aptitude (*aptitudo*) to being in the many, (4) whether universals are generated by the operation of the intellect, or if they are universal as such. Nature in itself is discussed in all four questions, but it is most directly focused on in section 4, where Couto asks whether nature in itself is universal. The solution to the problem, of course, derives from the conclusions established in the previous sections, and our exposition must therefore be set in the wider context of Couto's treatise. It consists in a discussion of the two central characteristics of the universal, its unity and its aptitude to being in the many.<sup>21</sup> In what follows we will therefore first focus on the problem of the unity of the universal and its aptitude to being in the many. We will then supplement the findings we have reached by an explication of nature in itself.

In the strict sense, a universal is one, which can be in the many.<sup>22</sup> According to Couto, unity is the primary property of universals and it

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<sup>19</sup> It is characteristic of Aquinas's doctrine that he only attributes essential predicates to nature in itself; unity, universality, and existence do not belong to nature thus conceived. According to Duns Scotus, not only the essential predicates can be predicated of nature in itself, but also the proper attribute (*proprium*), a certain type of unity (*unitas minor*); nature in itself also has a certain entity. Cf. OWENS, Joseph. *Common nature*, pp. 215–220.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *In Isagogem Porphyrii, Commentarii Collegii Conimbricensis Societatis Jesu in universam dialecticam Aristotelis Stagiritae (= In Isag)*. Conimbricae: Cardon, 1606, pp. 53–224.

<sup>21</sup> *In Isag*, p. 104: “[...] nullam rem denominari posse universalem, cui non convenient duae illae conditiones, scilicet unitas praecisionis et aptitudo proxima ad essendum in multis.”

<sup>22</sup> *In Isag*, pp. 79–80: “Universale est id, quod aptum est, ut in pluribus insit. [...] universale esse unum quid. Sic exponendam esse particulate quod [...]” According to Couto, only univocal concepts which have just one definition, i.e., have absolute and full

has a certain priority with respect to the aptitude to being in the many. We will therefore first focus on unity.<sup>25</sup>

Unity expresses the undividedness of a thing and one is (something) undivided.<sup>24</sup> Of the many types of unity possessed by the things around us, universals have so-called *unity in itself* in the strict sense. One in itself is that, which has only one essence.<sup>25</sup> Unity in itself is further divided into *formal* and *numerical unity*. Formal unity is undividedness of a categorical being as to its essence; that is, undividedness as to essential specific or generic predicates – it is subdivided into the unity of species and the unity of genus. Numerical unity is the undividedness of a real individual, which is not divided in any possible manner; for example, Socrates is numerically one, since he in himself is not divided at all.<sup>26</sup>

Of the above types of unity, universals are characterised by formal unity. Formal unity is a necessary property of the common nature and accompanies it in each of its three possible states.<sup>27</sup> From our point of

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unity, are universal in the proper sense of the word. This distinguishes them from all other concepts (analogous concepts, collective concepts, accidental concepts, etc.) which do not have such unity and are therefore not universal in the strict sense. Univocal universal concepts can also exist in many things, as actualised in them and identical with them. Nature in itself is the component of a universal univocal concept which is actualised in the thing (as identical with it). In universal predication we then characterize and represent the true nature of the things themselves. Of course, Avicenna's conception of nature in itself is the crucial element of this theory.

<sup>23</sup> *In Isag.*, pp. 104–105: “[...] unitas praecedit aptitudinem. Quod imprimis est manifestum, cum universale fit per intellectum; prius enim praescindimus naturam a differentibus contrahentibus, et post in ea resultat capacitas essendi in multis.”

<sup>24</sup> *In Isag.*, 24, p. 85: “Unum, idem est, atque indivisum [...]”

<sup>25</sup> *In Isag.*, p. 86: “Unum per se [...] est illud, quod habet determinatam essentiam [...]”

<sup>26</sup> *In Isag.*, p. 86: “Unitatum per se [...] alia est formalis, alia numeralis. Formalis est ea, quae competit naturae communi, distribuiturque in genericam, et specificam [...] numeralis est propria individuorum. Illa definitur rei communis in se ipsa, hoc est in natura ratione sua indivisio. Numeralis indivisio rei singularis in se ipsa. Per illam dicuntur homo et brutum unum in animali, Plato et Socrates unum in homine. Per hanc dicitur Socrates idem secum.”

<sup>27</sup> *In Isag.*, p. 87: “[...] haec ‘unitas formalis, D. S.’ convenit naturae necessario, eamque comitatur in quocunquesit státu, ut caeterae passiones inseparabiles [...]” In this Couto differs from Avicenna and also from Thomas Aquinas, according to whom nature in itself has no unity at all; he is consonant with the influential doctrine of John Duns Scotus, who was (probably) the first to attribute this type of unity to universals. To express this unity, Scotus used the term “lesser unity” (*unitas minor*). Scotus's theory was widely received by other scholastics and became a generally accepted doctrine even among ideological adversaries of the Scotists, as were the Thomists. Concerning the concept of lesser unity cf. IOANNIS DUNS SCOTI. Reportata Parisiensia. In ID. *Opera omnia*. VIVÈS, Jean Louis (ed.). 26 vols. Paris: Louis Vivès, 1891–1895, II, 12, 3–8. There is abundant secondary literature on the problematic: Czech and Slovak readers can refer to CHABADA, Michal. *Ján Duns Scotus. Výbrané kapitoly z jeho*

view it is important that the formal unity of nature in the intellect admits of further division. Thus, for instance, the generic unity of human nature is divided and contracted to many individuals by the addition of individual differentiae. This clearly implies, according to Couto, that formal unity cannot be the undividedness which constitutes universals and is inherent to them as such. If formal unity were sufficient to constitute a universal, its unity would have to be communicable to subordinate natures and consequently genera could be multiplied to species and species to individuals. From that it follows, however, that individual species of animals would concurrently be many genera, and many species-identical individuals would also constitute many species, which is obviously absurd.<sup>28</sup> Formal unity therefore belongs to universals (and nature in itself), but since it is not absolute undividedness, but only in a certain aspect (*unum secundum quid*), it is not inherent to universals as such.

According to Couto, universals have their own proper type of undividedness, called *unity of precision*.<sup>29</sup> Unity of precision is an undividedness inherent only to common natures, which belongs to them only in the state, in which they precede, by the priority of nature, contraction to subordinate natures. Unity of precision pertains, for example, to the nature of man or horse, so far as it is actually undivided, not contracted to distinct individuals by individual differentiae. It is called unity of *precision*, because it does not belong to the common nature considered in any of its states (in that way formal unity pertains to it), but strictly speaking (*praecise*) only in the state, in which it precedes division into subordinate natures, but is not actually divided and contracted. Unity of precision is therefore the undividedness of the common nature to subordinate natures.<sup>30</sup>

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*epistemológia a metafyziky* [Selected chapters from his epistemology and metaphysics]. Bratislava: UKB, 2007.

<sup>28</sup> *In Isag*, p. 91: “Unitas formalis multiplicatur in inferioribus, ergo si ea sufficeret ad constituendum universale, utique unitas universalis esset communicabilis multis, et consequenter generica multiplicaretur in speciebus, et specifica in individuis. Unde singulae species animalis essent genera, et singula individua speciei essent species, quo nihil absurdius dici potest.”

<sup>29</sup> In Latin *praecisio* means literally “cutting off”. Precision in our case means the *exclusion* of generic, specific and individual differentiae from the content of the concept of the given common nature. In this Couto follows the doctrine of P. Fonseca, who probably coined the concept. Cf. FONSECA, Petrus. *Commentarium in Libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis*. Coloniae: Lazar Zetner, 1615. Vol. II, lib. V, cap. XXVIII, quaestio III (*Quae unitas sit rerum universalium propria*), pp. 959–971.

<sup>30</sup> *In Isag*, s. 87: “[...]haec unitas [...] ‘est’ indivisio rei communis in sua inferiora. [...] Quam [...] vocant praecisionis, quia non cadit in naturam, nisi prout praescinditur et

But how does common nature attain unity of precision? Couto believes that it pertains to it due to the operation of the intellect traditionally called abstraction.<sup>51</sup> The characteristic feature of abstraction of univocal generic and specific concepts is perfect exclusion of the specific and individual differentiae from the “matter” of the concepts. When the intellect abstracts a generic concept, it grasps, i.e., makes its object, only the generic nature of a thing without the specific differentiae which divide it in things and multiply it to different species subordinate to genus. Abstraction of a specific concept then consists in that the intellect conceives the specific nature of a thing, while leaving the individual differentiae which the specific nature has in individuals aside. By abstractness the specific nature is actually separated from individual differentiae, which divide it and multiply it to different individuals subordinate to the species. The unity of precision of generic and specific concepts therefore manifests itself in that, due to the abstractedness, the generic and specific natures are not actually divided into subordinate natures and therefore have the highest degree of undividedness, i.e., *absolute unity (unitas simpliciter)*. It needs to be stressed that although unity of precision excludes actual division of the common nature, it does not exclude the possibility to be divided, i.e., the aptitude (*aptitudo*) to being in the many. This aptitude, according to Couto, always necessarily follows and accompanies unity of precision.<sup>52</sup> If, however, this aptitude is actualized and the common nature is actually divided into subordinate natures, it loses the unity of

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veluti liberatur a suis inferioribus.” Unity of precision differs from the formal unity by that it does not belong to the common nature in all its states.

<sup>51</sup> *In Isag*, p. 88: “[...] unitas praecisionis in solo statu abstractionis naturae competit.” In this respect Couto differs from Fonseca, who believed that the unity of precision is real indivision, which the common nature has from eternity, independently of the operation of reason. Cf. FONSECA, Petrus. *Commentarium*, p. 997: “[...] obiectum proprium et peculiare intellectus, quod est universale, duobus modis praecedere intellectus, et quod naturam rei obiectae, et quoad unitatem praecisionis et aptitudinem essendi in multis, quibus praecedit contractionem naturae per differentias. Natura enim absolute sumpta est id, quod obiicitur, unitas autem et aptitudo est conditio, sine qua non obiicitur.”

<sup>52</sup> *In Isag*, p. 92: “[...] nihil habere posse hanc aptitudinem, quod unum non sit unitate praecisionis.”; p. 105: “[...] cum universale fit per intellectum, prius enim praescindimus naturam a differentiis, et postea in ea resultat capacitas essendi in multis.” In this Couto again diverges from P. Fonseca, according to whom the primary property of universals is their ability to exist in the many, which is then followed by the unity of precision as their secondary characteristic. Cf. FONSECA, Petrus. *Commentarium*, 960.

precision. Unity of precision is therefore, unlike formal unity, separable (*separabilis*) from the common nature.<sup>53</sup>

These considerations lead us to the second essential characteristic of the universal, its aptitude to being in the many. It is a certain potency of the common nature, and because we cognize a potency by means of its act, Couto begins by characterizing the act which actualizes this potency.<sup>54</sup> He bases his account on the moderate realist identity theory of predication.<sup>55</sup> According to this theory, in a proposition, e.g. *Socrates is a man*, we identify (roughly speaking) the content of the general concept which signifies the predicate of the proposition with the object represented by its subject. The content of the predicate predicated of an individual is *sensu stricto* the nature in itself, i.e., the common component of the individual and the universal. If we claim that Socrates is a man, we do not identify the universal with the individual; we characterize the given individual by predicating a certain identity of the given concept and the individual in form or content. The necessary condition for this theory is that the common nature expressed by the predicate is materially identical with the subject, about which it can be truthfully predicated. In this context, Couto characterizes the act to be in the many as an act, which is a (universal) whole in its (subjective) parts as identical with them. The universal whole is a univocal generic or specific concept, whose subjective parts are its subordinate natures, with which this whole is identical in terms of its essence.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, if we abstract a generic or specific concept, the abstracted nature thereby attains the aptitude to being in the many.

On this basis, and closely following Duns Scotus, Couto defines the aptitude to being in the many as a non-contradiction to being in

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<sup>53</sup> *In Isag*, p. 87: “[...] ‘unitas praecisionis’ non sit perpetua, sed a natura separabilis.”

<sup>54</sup> *In Isag*, p. 93: “[...] aptitudo [...] potentia nominatur. [...] ita more potentiae, per actus cognoscenda est.”

<sup>55</sup> On this cf. ASHWORTH, Earline Jennifer. Singular terms and predication in some late Fifteenth and Sixteenth century Thomistic logicians. In MAIERÙ, Alfonso – VALENTE, Luisa (eds.), *Medieval theories on assertive and non-assertive language*. Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2004, pp. 517–536.

<sup>56</sup> *In Isag*, p. 94: “[...] eiusmodi actum nihil esse aliud, quam inesse in inferioribus, ut totum in partibus, per identitatem, qua possumus dicere hoc est hoc. Universale est quoddam totum respectu suorum inferiorum, ut haec rursus partes comparatione illius. [...] quia pars non dicitur vere de suo toto, nec enim dices, homo est anima, additur per identitatem [...]. Quoniam praedicari de pluribus est germana passio universalis, non posset autem vere praedicari, nisi haberet cum particularibus identitatem, nam cum unum de alio enuntiamus, idem esse dicimus [...]”

the many (*non repugnantia ad essendum in pluribus*).<sup>37</sup> According to Couto, as we already know, the common nature has this aptitude due to the operation of the intellect, and therefore the nature contracted in a real individual does not have it.<sup>38</sup> Couto brings up the objection that some thinkers (the Scotists) distinguish between proximate aptitude (*a. proxima*) and remote aptitude (*a. remota*). The common nature has proximate aptitude to being in the many, when it is abstracted from the subordinate natures; when it is contracted in an individual or individuals, it has remote aptitude to being in the many.<sup>39</sup> Couto adopts this distinction, but rejects with many arguments that the common nature contracted by an individual differentia in an individual has remote aptitude to being in the many.<sup>40</sup> The basic idea of Couto's argumentation is simple: the nature in an individual is absolutely defined and contracted by this individual differentia to this individual, and therefore it cannot have any aptitude to being in many individuals.<sup>41</sup>

In this context, Couto raises the question whether the nature becomes universal due to the operation of the intellect, or is universal as such. Couto first recalls the already mentioned Avicennian distinction of the three states of common nature: nature in itself is in the so-called *state of essence*, because we ascribe only essential predicates to it.<sup>42</sup> Then

<sup>37</sup> A point of interest is Couto's criticism of Fonseca's conception of the ability to exist in the many as a certain potential and separable way of being; it is called potential, because it never actually exists together with the nature, it only has it in potential being and in the state prior to division into subordinate natures; it is called separable, because the nature loses it when it passes from the state of potential being to real existence. Couto rejects this conception claiming that if this mode of being cannot take on existence, it is not even possible; it therefore does not have and cannot have any entity, and is therefore pure fiction. Cf. *In Isag*, p. 98: "Quidquid participat entis realis descriptionem, eodem modo participat communem illam entis realis descriptionem, qua dicitur (id, quod potest existere), ergo si modus potencialis nequit ulla ratione existere, proculdubio entitas realis non est."

<sup>38</sup> *In Isag*, p. 98: "[...] aptitudinem universalis convenire rebus per operationem intellectus [...]"

<sup>39</sup> *In Isag*, p. 101: "[...] natura communis, praecisa ab omnibus inferioribus, aptitudinem obtinet [...] proximam [...] eadem cum existit in aliquo, vel pluribus singularibus, retinet suam aptitudinem ad essendum in omnibus [...] remotam [...]"

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*: "[...] sententia, quae negat in natura communi reperiri aptitudinem remotam essendi in multis, communis est et a nobis defendenda."

<sup>41</sup> See *In Isag*, p. 102: "Natura in quolibet individuo ita est ad unum determinata, ut nec per Dei potentiam esse queat in aliis, ergo non potest in eodem simul habere indeterminationem [...] ut sit in aliis."

<sup>42</sup> *In Isag*, p. 105: "[...] operae pretium erit afferere tres illas naturae communis considerationes, seu status [...] Primum est cum natura sumitur absolute secundum sua praedicata essentialia, non attendendo ad existentiam realem in suis

he reformulates the original question with respect to each of the three states of nature. We are most interested in the answer to the question whether the common nature is universal in the state of essence. This of course depends on whether the nature in itself has the two fundamental characteristics of a universal, i.e., unity of precision and the aptitude to being in the many. Couto's answer is preceded by a long discussion stating the arguments of the two opposing schools: the Scotists, who defend a positive answer, and the Thomists, who defend a negative response. The crucial presuppositions of the opposing resolutions of this dispute are different theories of distinctions and ultimately different conceptions of being. We cannot lay out these subtle theories in detail; let us just say that the core of the dispute lies in whether there is an actual distinction *secundum rem* between the common nature and the individual differentia (*distinctio formalis*) or whether the distinction is only virtual (*d. virtualis*).<sup>43</sup> If this distinction is actual, as Scotists teach, then nature in itself is universal; if the above distinction is only virtual and not actual, as Thomists hold, nature in itself is not universal. Couto eventually decides for the Thomistic solution. Let us look briefly at least at some of the arguments in order to illustrate his concept of nature in itself.

The first argument is based on the presupposition that only that which has unity of precision is universal. However, if there is no distinction between the common nature and the individual differentia materially, then the common nature in an individual is fully individualised. Unity of precision, as we have already seen, excludes any multiplication and contraction of the common nature to individuals, and therefore cannot be universal in itself.<sup>44</sup> A further argument relies on the fact that only essential or necessary predicates pertain to nature in itself. However, unity of precision, as all acknowledge, is a contingent property and therefore cannot pertain to nature in itself.<sup>45</sup> Another consideration is

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particularibus, nec obiectivam in intellectu, qui dicitur status solitudinis et essentiae [...]"

<sup>43</sup> *In Isag*, p. 107: "[...] est prima opinio Scoti [...] afferit hos gradus metaphysicae in eodem individuo distingui inter se formaliter [...] secunda sententia celebris in schola thomistarum [...] astruit [...] distinctionem [...] virtuales [...]"

<sup>44</sup> *In Isag*, p. 109: "Universale [...] est [...] quod habet unitatem praecisionis, sed nisi natura communis a parte rei differat a singulari, non potest habere huiusmodi unitatem, ergo nec esse universalis. [...] Unitas praecisionis repugnat naturae singulari [...] at posita identitate graduum metaphysicorum a parte rei nihil est, quod singulare non sit, ergo non datur ulla natura communis, cui competat unitas praecisionis."

<sup>45</sup> *In Isag*, p. 114: "[...] de natura secundum se [...] non dicuntur, nisi praedicata necessaria, sed illa unitas, omnium concessione, est contingens, ergo non convenit naturae secundum se."

devoted to the (proximate) aptitude to being in the many. As we know, common nature attains it by operation of the intellect. The abstraction of the common nature, however, presupposes a certain relationship of this nature to the individuals subordinate to it. This relationship consists in that all the individuals from which the nature is abstracted have the same formal unity, which differs from every other formal unity of individuals of different species. We can therefore say that the distinction between the different (proximate) aptitudes to being in the many derives from the diversity of the formal unities of individuals belonging to different species.<sup>46</sup>

## Conclusion

Couto deals with nature in itself in the context of the problem of universals, basing his considerations on Avicenna's concept of the three states of nature, which he further develops and refines under the ideological influence of various schools and thinkers, especially the Thomists. In line with Avicenna and other scholastics he ascribes essential predicates to nature in itself, but unlike Avicenna and Thomas Aquinas (in accord, however, with most of his contemporaries) Couto believes that nature in the state of essence has formal unity. Although in the theory of universals Couto accepts Fonseca's doctrine of unity of precision, by which his view differs from most earlier and contemporary scholastics, he denies that this unity and the associated aptitude to being in the many pertains to nature in itself. Nature is therefore not universal in itself, but becomes universal by the abstractive operation of the intellect. In this doctrine, which is strongly influenced by Thomistic theories of distinctions, abstraction and being, Couto differs from some Scotists and especially from his outstanding contemporary and fellow Jesuit Fonseca. Overall we can state that Couto's conception of common nature is the foundation of his moderate realist conception of universals and identity theory of predication.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>46</sup> *In Isag.*, p. 120: "[...] aptitudo [...] quae proxima dicitur, abstractione mentis concedatur, supponit tamen quandam maiorem proportionem inter hanc naturam, et haec inferiora[...] ea vero proportio in hoc consistit, quod omnia singularia, ex quibus eam abstrahit, habent eandem unitatem formalem, quae non convenit singularibus alterius naturae; unde absolute dici potest, diverstatem potentiae proximaeprovenire ex diversitate unitatis formalis [...]"

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## **RESUMÉ**

DAVID SVOBODA

### **Přirozenost o sobě v kontextu problematiky univerzálií**

Článek pojednává o pojmu přirozenosti o sobě v díle významného portugalského filosofa Sebastiana Couto (1567–1639), autora jedné části slavného díla „Cursus Conimbricenses“. Článek je rozdělen do čtyř základních částí. Nejprve je v historických souvislostech vyložena význam uvedeného díla. Dále je z historicko-sytematického hlediska vysvětlena problematika přirozenosti o sobě a do ní je následně zasazeno Coutovo řešení. Na závěr je Coutovo pojetí porovnáno s jinými důležitými scholastickými koncepcemi přirozenosti o sobě a je zhodnocen jeho přínos.

### **Klíčová slova**

Cursus Conimbricensis, Sebastian Couto, společná přirozenost, obecniny