

*Pedro da Fonseca in a research lead dropped by John Deely*

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Pedro da Fonseca is featured in four of the twelve chapters that comprise the monograph written by John Deely and published by St. Augustine’s Press in 2020 for the second time—the first time in 2016—, entitled *Medieval philosophy redefined as the Latin age: the development of cenoscopic science, AD 354 to 1644 (from the birth of Augustine to the death of Poinsot)*. The first edition of the monograph was printed in 2010 under the editorship of the University of Scranton Press. What brought us here was a reference to Fonseca as part of an engaging research lead dropped by Deely under the heading “Criticizing the First Part of Augustine’s Definition.” See pages 341-343. On page 342, Fonseca is found in the genitive case to qualify his masterpiece: “Fonseca’s work of 1564.” At this point, the North-American philosopher is speaking of the *Institutionum dialecticarum libri octo*, which according to Deely [see page 348] had more than 50 editions as early as 1624.

The aforementioned heading comes first among three indented headings to fall under the subsection “A Thin Layer of Logic within the Thicket: A New Terminology Migrates from Paris to Iberia” [339-344], the second subsection of the fourth and penultimate section of the 9th chapter of the monograph, titled “The Thicket (i.1349–1529)” [332-344] and “After Aquinas (†1274) but before Fonseca (†1599): Bacon (†1292), Scotus (†1308), Ockham (†1349), D’Ailly (†1420), Soto (†1560)” [302-346], respectively. Deely brings the reader to the referred heading by means of a set of eight paragraphs, which introduce the reader to the aforementioned subsection. Under such a heading, the author centers on a discussion about the first part of Augustine’s definition of *signum*. On page 339 Deely stated that the original version of this definition was made up of two basic components. On the one hand, “that the genus of sign was a material structure accessible to sense;” this is precisely what Deely is alluding to when evoking the first part of the said definition. On the other hand, for the

sake of completeness, Augustine pointed out the uniqueness of signs in bringing to awareness something other than the signs themselves. Further on the same page, Deely observes that “it was the first element in Augustine’s definition, according to which a sign is a sense-accessible structure, as we have seen, that was the first to be challenged.”

On page 341, Deely discusses the use by the Ockhamites of the formal/instrumental sign distinction as an attempt to remedy a shortcoming identified in the Augustinian definition of *signum*. The author maintains that Ockham’s followers were unable to subscribe to the first part of the definition above because it implies that there should always be a “material structure accessed as such by sensation” in order for any sign to be conveyed. So, nominalists criticized Augustine’s definition for failing to recognize any but the instrumental signs. Formal signs, pertaining to a circuit solely reliant on the conveyance of signs by psychological structures that the external senses should not be able to reach, seem to the Ockhamites not to be covered by the said definition. Fonseca is featured here in connection with the question about the origin of the terminology making up the formal/instrumental signs binary. According to Deely, no one should lay claim to knowing when precisely such a terminology was first proposed.

In the follow-up, the author refers to three unsuccessful efforts at establishing the provenance of such a distinction. In a 1985 publication entitled “The Conimbricenses on the Relations Involved in Signs”, which was included in a monograph edited by Deely with the title *Semiotics 1984*, John Patrick Doyle was apparently misled by a not so careful reading of the Conimbricenses into attributing the introduction of the terminological innovation at hand to Giles of Rome. Despite the above, Deely acknowledges on page 342 that Doyle is to be credited as “one of the best and most careful medievalists of the late 20th century.” A second effort was that of Ludger Kaczmarek, also in the 1980s [see 342 and 437-438]. According to the author, Kaczmarek’s misjudgment consisted in attributing to Pierre d’Ailly—whose 1410 *Imago Mundi* is believed to have fueled what Deely [342 n. 108] referred to as Christopher Columbus’ “dreams of discovery”—credit for the introduction of the aforementioned terminology. On page 342, Deely notes that Kaczmarek’s claim was an error, since in d’Ailly “we find not *signum formale* and *signum instrumentale*, but at least *significare formaliter* and *significare instrumentaliter*.”

Dating back to the late 1990s comes a third proposal held in high regard by Deely, or else he would not have qualified it on the same page as “the fullest discussion of the historical details in this matter yet made”. The author is referring to a study published in Berlin in the year 1997, headed “Die Unterscheidung von *signum formale* - und *signum instrumentale*” and included in a Walter de Gruyter monograph authored by Stephan Meier-Oeser, titled *Die Spur des Zeichens. Das Zeichen und seine Funktion in der Philosophie des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit*. In Deely’s view, the work done by Meier-Oeser was not conclusive enough

to trace the origin of the previously mentioned terminological innovation, which the latter attributes to Domingo de Soto. Also on page 342, Deely explains that Meier-Oeser “thinks that the actual terminology in question does not come about till after (and because of) Soto (1494-1560), but he cites in particular only Fonseca’s work of 1564 to illustrate the point, which leaves matters where they stood in 1982.” Here, the author refers to his 1982 volume *Introducing semiotic: its history and doctrine*, released by the Indiana University Press [translated to Portuguese by Viviana de Campos Figueiredo and published in 1995 by Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian], linking to himself the same fault he links to Meier-Oeser.

The author claims that not even Meier-Oeser’s work, published 15 years after Deely’s aforementioned work was published, was enough to solve the puzzle of the origin of the terminological distinction between formal and instrumental *signa*. The author adds on page 342 that “here is a matter for probably more than one excellent doctoral dissertation in the history of philosophy.” Should the author be proved right in suggesting, shortly below the preceding citation, that no matter the twists and turns the fixation of the critical approach to the first part of the Augustinian definition of *signum* by means of the formal/instrumental distinction took in its evolutionary course it probably occurred “only after Soto, and in the Iberian rather than the Parisian milieu,” thoughtful doctoral students inquiring into this research lead dropped by Deely will have to delve extensively into the Portuguese Aristotle.