THE TERMS "PRIMA INTENTIO" AND "SECUNDA INTENTIO" IN ARABIC LOGIC*

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The more passages one examines in the translations from Arabic to Latin and from Arabic to English and other modern languages, the more mistakes one comes across in the translation of the Arabic expression 'alā al-qasd al-awwal (or, 'alā al-qasd al-thānī). The mistakes stem from the failure to distinguish between two senses of the expression, one an adverb, and the other a famous philosophic concept. Failing to distinguish between the two senses, the translators translated the phrase literally, often with unsatisfactory results. In this paper, I shall indicate a Greek word which was rendered by the Arabic 'alā al-qasd al-awwal. I shall refer to some English translations from the Arabic and show how wrong they are. I shall suggest that in Arabic philosophy itself al-Fārābī, rather than Avicenna, may have been the origin of the philosophic concepts of "first and second intentions." I shall point out that although these concepts may have been introduced into Latin scholasticism by Raymond Lull, he could not have derived them from the Logic of al-Ghazālī, as has been alleged.

I

The expression 'alā al-qasd al-awwal occurs in the mediaeval Arabic translation of Porphyry's Eisagoge1 where it is used to literally translate Porphyry's προηγομένως,2 translated by Boethius with the word 'principaliter.' The Arabic 'alā al-qasd al-awwal literally means "according to first intention" (prima intentione) and in some passages, to be mentioned below, it was so translated. The Greek προηγομένως means "to go first and lead the way, to precede," of which in Arabic the Greek prefix "pro" = awwal, and the verb ῤγέω = qasada; = Latin: intendere. It must be noted that in another passage3 the Greek word was rendered by the Arabic word awwalan which is obviously used as a synonym of 'alā al-qasd al-awwal.

Avicenna also in his Eisagoge4 says: "Accidents exist primarily ('alā al-qasd al-awwal) in individuals, while genera and species do not." In two other places5 the phrases do occur with the meaning of "primarily."

In a passage in al-Fārābī6 the phrase occurs as qasdan awwalan. Although this form of the phrase is different, the meaning is the same as 'alā al-qasd al-awwal,

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1 The Arabic translation of Porphyry's Eisagoge was edited by al-Ahwānī (Cairo, 1953).
3 al-Ahwānī, op. cit., p. 88; Porphyry's Eisagoge, p. 13. 20.
4 al-Madkhal, op. cit., p. 102, 1. 17. Latin, ibid., p. 126 = principaliter.
i.e., “primarily.” The Latin translation7 of this passage renders it as “principaliter.” Dieterici, however, in his German translation (p. 76) renders the phrase by “als erstes Ziel” (“as first intention”) — which is the literal translation of the Arabic. In a passage in his commentary on the De Interpretatione8 al-Fārābī says: “The intended term is that predicated of the subject primarily (qasdan awwalan). The existential word (i.e., ‘is’) is predicated only of the subject, not of the predicate-term, and that is in order that it may connect the predicate-term to the subject-term. Thus, it (i.e., the existential word) is not a predicate per se (bi-thāṭīhī) and primarily (‘alā al-qasd al-awwal); it is only predicated for the sake of something else.” Here, al-Fārābī denies that “is” is a predicate primarily, or strictly speaking, and that it is the predicate-term which is primarily a predicate. Thus in “Man is just,” it is “just” which is primarily a predicate. (In modern logic it is “is” which is the predicate). The phrases ‘alā al-qasd al-awwal (=awwalan) and ‘alā al-qasd al-thānī (=thānīyān) occur also on pp. 206–207, ibid. What all this is meant to show is this, that if we were always to translate the phrases ‘alā al-qasd al-awwal and al-thānī as “according to first and second intention,” we would hardly bring out the meanings of the passages in which they occur.

Yet this is what was done in the two existing Latin translations of Averroes’ Tahāfut al Tahāfut (which contains al-Ghazālī’s Tahāfut al-Falāsifah). In the several passages in these two works where the two phrases occur they were translated by “prima or secunda intentione.” Some, at least, should surely have been translated by “primo” or “principaliter.” Kamali and Van Den Bergh in their translations of these two works of al-Ghazālī and Averroes have done what the Latin translators did. For instance, one passage in Van Den Bergh’s translation reads: “This movement, however, does not occur, according to the philosophers, in first intention (‘alā al-qasd al-awwal) for the sake of this sublunary world; that is, the heavenly body is not in first intention (bi-‘l-qasd al-awwal) created for the sake of this sublunary world... and if this movement occurred in first intention (‘alā al-qasd al-awwal) for the sake of the sublunary world...”9 In this passage “primarily,” to me, makes better sense and brings out the meaning more clearly than “in first intention.” For what does “in first intention” mean? Kamali translates a passage in al-Ghazālī as: “He does not know the Other by first intentions (bi-‘l-qasd al-awwal). But He knows Himself as the Principle of the Universe. From this knowledge follows-by second intention—(bi-‘l-qasd al-thānī) the knowledge of the Universe.”10 This passage means that while God does not know the universe primarily (i.e., directly — the Greek προγονομενος means also “directly,” Liddell and Scott), he knows it in a secondary

7 “De Intellectu.” Le texte médiéval du De Intellectu p. 123 (see Footnote 18 below for full ref.).
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way (i.e., indirectly). Thus, in all these cases we should be guided by the sense of the passages themselves rather than by the dictionary meanings of al-qasd, "intentio."\(^1\) While literalness in translations is generally commendable, it must not be pursued relentlessly and at the expense of clarity and intelligibility.

II

Now, one might argue that since "prima intentione" translates the Arabic 'alā al-qasd al-awwal which in turn translates the Greek πρωτογονικός (primarily, principally, directly), it could be used but that it should be understood to mean "primarily." Such an argument would be specious for two reasons. First, it should not be taken for granted that the one who translates the Arabic phrase with "prima intentio" necessarily understands it to mean "primarily": Notice the consistently literal, but senseless, translations of the phrase by Van den Bergh and Kamali, for instance. Second, and the more important reason, "prima intentio" came to be used to denote a new concept in scholastic logic, a concept which has been fathered upon Avicenna. These two reasons point to the crucial problem that requires some solution: the problem is how to distinguish, in the Latin or in any other translation, between "intentio" in the sense of "primarily," and "intentio" in the scholastic or Avicenna sense. What did the scholastics mean by "prima" and "secunda intentio"?

For this, let us take two quotations from the texts of two of the schoolmen. First, William of Ockham:

For the present it is enough to say that an intention is something in the soul which is a sign naturally signifying something for which it can stand or which can be part of a mental proposition. Such a sign is twofold. One which is a sign of something which is not such a sign... and that is called a "first intention" such as is that intention of the soul which is predicable of all men, and similarly the intention predicable of all whitenesses and blacknesses, and so on... But a second intention is that which is a sign of such first intentions, such as are the intentions "genus," "species" and such like.

Second, Albert of Saxony:

"Term of first intention" is the name given to that mental term which is significative of things not from the point of view of their being signs. Thus this mental term "man," or this mental term "quality", or this mental term "voice." Hence this mental term "man" signifies Socrates or Plato, and not insofar as Socrates or Plato are signs for other things... But a mental term which is naturally significative of things insofar as they are signs is called a "term of second intention," and if they ceased to be signs it would not signify them. Of this kind are the mental terms "genus," "species," "noun," "verb," "case of a noun," etc.\(^2\)

We learn, here, that terms of "first intention" are the individual things existing in nature, while terms of "second intention" are the universal concepts which exist as a result of the operations of discursive thought. We learn, further, that

\(^1\) Dr A. I. Sabra of the Warburg Institute, University of London, mentions, in a correspondence, that, al-ma'ānī al-mubsara in Alhazen's Optics was translated by "intentiones visibiles," whereas here ma'ānī means thing or object; but it was translated by "intentio" — and many times!

\(^2\) These two quotations are found in I. M. Bochenski, A History of Formal Logic (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1961), pp. 155-156. (Dots are not mine.)
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The “intention” whether “first” or “second”, is a psychological or mental phenomenon. Thus, one of the significations of “intentio,” according to St. Thomas,13 is “ratio.” Another signification given by Duns Scotus is “conceptus,” and Święzawski says that when Scotus speaks of “intentio” qua “ratio formalis” and “conceptus,” he thinks of both the first and second intentions.14

Thus, “prima intentio” denotes something entirely different from its adverbial use as πρωτογονομένος (principaliter). So, what should guide us in distinguishing between “intentio” in the two senses is not its literal or dictionary meaning but the sense of the passage. For instance, in a passage where al-Fārābī discusses the existence of universals we have the following:

Asked about how, and in what way, universal things exist, al-Fārābī said: “That which actually exists because of another thing, and whose existence, therefore, is according to (or, as) second intention and accidental. The existence of things universal, i.e., universals, is derived from the existence of individuals. Their existence, then, is accidental. By the word “accidental” I do not mean that universals themselves are accidents, for the universals of essences are not accidents. I mean, rather, that it is the actual existence of universals which is accidental simpliciter.”15

In this passage I think it makes sense to render ‘al al-qasd al thdni by “secunda intentione.”

III

Al Fārābī in his commentary on the De Interpretatione speaks of what he calls maʿqūl, a word which is used in the Arabic translation of this work of Aristotle to translate νοημα a concept or thought. He says that “the logician investigates concepts (or, intelligibles, al-maʿqūlāt) in two ways: in terms of their relation (i) to the things that exist outside the soul, and (ii) to words. The logician investigates also the words themselves in terms of their relation to the concepts (al-maʿqūlāt).”16 He continues to say (L. 13) that “Aristotle says that words signify concepts which are in the soul,” and (on p. 25, lines 1–2) he says that “commentators maintain that the concepts in the soul indicate things that are outside the soul. . . . Aristotle did not here mention (L. 4) the relation of concepts to things that exist outside the soul.” If I understand al-Fārābī correctly, what he is saying is that, just as “intentio,” as understood by the Latin scholars, is a psychological phenomenon, so also is maʿqūl something in the soul denoting both what is outside it, i.e., a natural existent — “prima intentio,” and what is inside the soul, i.e., a “secunda intentio.” If this interpretation is correct, then it would make al-Fārābī’s maʿqūl have the same sense as “intentio” and “conceptus.” And if this is so, it would mean that conceptually, though not linguistically, al-Fārābī’s maʿqūl is identifiable with Avicenna’s maʿnā in the sense of concept (see below). That maʿqūl can be a synonym of maʿnā (= notio; Begriff) was recog-

15 F. Dieterici, op. cit., p. 87.
16 Kutsch and Marrow, op. cit., p. 24, lines 5, 6.
nized also by Pollak. Incidentally, in al-Fārābī’s De Intellectu there are places where ma’nā has been translated by “intentio.”

Avicenna’s ma’nā was rendered by the Latin “intentio.” (Etymologically “conceptus,” rather than “intentio,” would be a better translation for ma’nā which means meaning or concept; but it was “intentio” that was used.) Hence, it is Avicenna to whom the notion of “prima et secunda intentio” is often traced. Long before the schoolmen, Avicenna had written that the subject-matter of logic consists of the second intentions. In his “Metaphysics” he had written: “The subject-matter of logic — as you know — consists in the second intelligible intentions (or concepts, al-ma’qūlāt) which are dependent upon the first intelligible intentions (al-ma’qūlāt) with regard to the manner by which to arrive from the known to the unknown.” The Latin translation of this passage was as follows: “Subiectum vero logicae, sicut scisti, sunt intentiones intellectae secundo, quae apponuntur intentionibus primo intellectis, secundum quod per eas pervenitur de cognito ad incognitum.”

Now, could al-Fārābī have been the source of this distinction between “prima” and “secunda intentio”? We may note that Avicenna’s use of ma’qūl in reference to both “prima” and the “secunda intentio” resembles al-Fārābī’s mentioned earlier (p. 35). Al-Fārābī also, in a passage where he discusses the copula (rābiṭ) says that the copula (i.e., the verb “to be”) is among the “second concepts” (or intelligibles: al-ma’qūlāt al-thāwīnī). In his “Enumeration of the Sciences” al-Fārābī says: “As for the subject-matters (al-mau‘ādūt) of logic — namely, those concerning which the (logical) laws are given — they are the concepts (or the intelligibles: al-ma’qūlāt), inasmuch as they are signified by words, and words inasmuch as they signify concepts.” Although al-Fārābī here makes no distinct mention of “second” concepts (or intentions) as such, they are, of course, implied. Also, in his book on “The Intellect” al-Fārābī speaks of the “first concept” (or intelligible: al-ma’qūl al-awwal) and the “second concept” (or intelligible: al-ma’qūl al-thawīl), and says that “when it (i.e., the potential intellect: intellectus in potentia) has acquired for itself the second concept, it becomes actual intellect (intellectus in effectu) by means of the first concept and the second concept.” In al-Fārābī, the intelligible exists in potentiality in sensible thing,
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i.e., in “first intentions,” and when it is abstracted from them it then exists in the mind in actuality. Thus, he says: “Before becoming actual, the intelligibles (al-maʿqālāt) which are potential are forms in matter outside the soul.”25 It is on the basis of al-Fārābī’s theory of “abstraction” as explained in his De Intellectu that Dr Ibrahim Madkour — he is the only one I know — has found in al-Fārābī the origin of the doctrine of the “two intentions.”26 I myself think that there is much in al-Fārābī’s writings, both of philosophy and terminology, to justify the view of his having anticipated Avicenna.

IV

In scholasticism itself it is said that it was Raymond Lull (1235–1315) who introduced the terms “prima and secunda intentio,” having derived them from the logic of al-Ghazālī.27 (To Lull, just as to al-Fārābī and Avicenna, the “second intentions” are the subject-matter of logic.)28 We know that al-Ghazālī’s Tahāfut al-Falāsifah was translated (in 1328) into Latin as part of Averroes’ Tahāfut al Tahāfut, and therefore we cannot give credence to the view that it was never translated.29 Al-Ghazālī’s Maqāsid al-Falāsifah was translated into Latin during the second quarter (1125–1150) of the 12th century.30 And we are told that “Lorsque les scholastiques ou leurs editeurs citent la Logique d’Algazel, ou la Metaphysique d’Algazel, ou la Science Naturelle d’Algazel, c’est toujours au Maqāsid qu’il faut songer d’abord, si l’on veut identifier la citation.”31 It is said that it was from the logical part of the Maqāsid of al-Ghazālī that Lull derived the “intentions.”32 The Latin translation of the sections that deal with physics and metaphysics has been published by Muckle,33 and the logical part by Lohr.34

We know, so far, that the two Arabic words qaṣd and maʾnā were both rendered by the Latin “intentio.” Qaṣd, used on page 9,35 has nothing to do with either of the two senses of “intentio” we are now concerned with. Maʾnā, used a few times,36 has, like qaṣd, nothing to do with the two senses either. It just means “meaning.” For instance, al-Ghazālī says (pp. 70–71) that essence has two

28 Yates, op. cit., p. 156 (footnote 3); “Logicus tractat de secundariis intentionibus.”
30 D. Salman, op. cit., p. 105.
35 Al-Ghazālī, Maqasid al-Falāsifah, Cairo Edition.
36 Ibid., e.g., pp. 25, 64, 70, 71.
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meanings, and then goes on to say “the first meaning” is so-and-so, and the “second meaning” is so-and-so. But the Latin translation (Lhor, op. cit.) has “intentio.” (In some other places the Latin translation has “modus.”) After comparing the metaphysical part in the Latin translation with the Arabic this is what I found: that three different Latin words were used to translate ma’nā. They are “intentio”37 (written intencio), “sensus,” and “aliquod.”38 We must note here that al-Ghazālī’s ma’nā, where it was rendered by “intentio,” was wrongly translated: his “intentio” had nothing to do with al-Fārābī’s ma’qūl. Consequently, I do not see how Lull ought to have derived his “intentions” from al-Ghazālī’s Maqṣād. I notice that al-Fārābī’s Iḥsān was known to Lull.39

The result of our investigation may be summed up as follows: The Arabic expression (‘alā) al-qasd al-awwal has two different meanings. It means (i) “primarily” (or, “principally”); (ii) it means “prima intentio” in respect of a “concept.” It was often rendered literally in the Latin translations with unsatisfactory results. In translating it more attention must be paid to the sense of the passage in which it occurs rather than to its dictionary meaning. Avicenna is often credited with having originated it, but the idea already occurs in al-Fārābī. When all is said, however, so far as the original philosophic or logical idea is concerned, the idea is certainly traceable to Aristotle’s doctrine of the primary and secondary substances. It is remarkable that in some places where al-Fārābī uses the expression ‘alā al-qasd al-awwal (or thānī), he adds to it the expression bi-dhātihi, i.e., per se, essentially, or bi-l-araḍ, i.e. accidentally, κατὰ συμβεβηκός.40 These expressions must be references, on the one hand, to the self-existing primary substance, and on the other, to the secondary substances plus the other nine accidental categories, of the Categories of Aristotle.

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37 Arabic: pp. 107, 11 (occurs twice), 114, 128=Muckle’s ed. of Latin tr. op. cit., pp. 27, 29–30, 32, 43.
38 On aliquod see my footnote 11 above.
39 Osman Amine, op. cit., p. 21.
40 E.g., Kutsch and Marrow, op. cit., pp. 105 (already referred to in footnote 8 above), 206, 207. See also the reference of footnote 15 above.