



Semantic and Ontological Aspects of Wyclif's Theory of Supposition

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Abstract

The relationship between thought and reality was a focal point of Wyclif's reflection. On the one hand, Wyclif believed that thought was linguistically constrained by its own nature; on the other hand, he considered thought to be related to reality in its elements and constitution. Hence he deemed language, thought, and external reality to be of the same logical coherence. Within this context, the theory of supposition was intended to explain the different roles that terms can have in relation to language and the extra-mental world when they appear as extremes in propositions. Characteristically, his theory of supposition provides an account not only of the truth-values of a sentence, but also of its meaning; it is not therefore simply a theory of reference, but a sort of complex analysis of language viewed as a semiotic system whose unique interpretative model was reality itself. It gives clear evidence of Wyclif's realist stance and of his conviction that any kind of linguistic and semantic features must be grounded on ontological structures.

Keywords

essence, individual(s), meaning, predication, signification, supposition, universal(s)

1. Signification, Supposition and Meaning

The relationship between thought and reality was a focal point of Wyclif's reflection. On the one hand, Wyclif believed that thought was linguistically constrained by its own nature; on the other hand, he considered thought to be related to reality in its elements and constitution. Hence he deemed language, thought, and external reality to be of the same logical coherence.¹ Within this context, the theory of supposition was intended to explain the different roles

¹ Cf. Conti (2006), 114-118, and Spruyt (2008), 24-25.

that words (or phrases) can have in relation to language and the extra-mental world when they appear as extremes (that is, as subject or predicate) in propositions.² Characteristically, his theory of supposition provides an account not only of the truth-values of a sentence, but also of its meaning; it is not therefore simply a theory of reference, but a sort of complex analysis of language viewed as a semiotic system whose unique interpretative model was reality itself. It gives clear evidence of Wyclif's realist stance and of his conviction that any kind of linguistic and semantic features must be grounded on ontological structures.

In what follows, I shall consider the most important aspects of Wyclif's theory of supposition, trying to set it in relation to the medieval tradition of treatises on signification and supposition and particularly to its main source, the theory expounded by Walter Burley in his *De puritate artis logicae tractatus longior* (composed between 1325 and 1328), which contains an original and intelligent defence of the older view of *significatio* and *suppositio simplex* against Ockham's attacks.³ Thus, in the first part of this paper I shall present a short outline of Wyclif's definition and divisions of supposition, as developed in the first chapters, and especially in chapter 12, of his treatise on logic (*De logica*, composed around 1360). In the second part, some applications of the supposition-theory to the discussion of some fallacies and sophisms will be analyzed. In the final section, I shall draw some conclusions about the general significance of Wyclif's doctrine in the light of his philosophical programme.

2. Supposition Defined

Wyclif defines supposition as the signification of one categorematic extreme of a proposition (subject or predicate) in relation to the other extreme:⁴

Suppositio est significatio termini categor<emat>ici qui est extremum propositionis, in comparacione ad aliud extremum. Et est extremum in propositione subiectum vel predicatum.

²) Following the medieval usage, in this paper I shall employ the terms 'proposition' and 'sentence' as if they were synonymous.

³) Cf. Burley, *De puritate artis logicae tractatus longior*, ed. Boehner (1955), I, i, iii, p. 7, 6–10. As is well known, according to Ockham, in *suppositio personalis*, which he takes to be the normal case, a term supposits for what it signifies, that is, one or more individual things. Burley argues that, if so, then a common term, like 'man', should signify Socrates, Plato, and any other individual man, and therefore no one could learn the meaning of the term 'man' without learning that it applied precisely to Socrates, to Plato and so on—which is obviously false.

⁴) Cf. Wyclif, *Tractatus de logica*, ed. Dziewicki (1893–1899), ch. 12, vol. 1, 39.

This definition, which is drawn from Burley's *De suppositionibus* (composed in 1302), sounds partially different from the standard definition of supposition, as it seems to somehow equate signification and supposition, since supposition is considered as a particular kind of signification. On the contrary, according to the most common view, which went back to Peter of Spain's *Summulae logicales*, the *significatio* and *suppositio* of terms were clearly distinct functions, inasmuch as the latter presupposed the former, but was a *proprietas terminorum* totally different from it.⁵ In fact, (1) signification consisted in the relation of a linguistic sign to what it signifies apart from any propositional context; (2) a word capable of standing for something else or for itself in a proposition first had to have signification; (3) a term only had supposition in a propositional context; and (4) the kind of supposition a term had depended on its propositional context. In any case, in a traditional realist perspective, supposition served to tell us which things are involved in the truth-conditions of a given sentence: whether they are expressions, real universals, or individuals.

At the very beginning of the chapter on supposition, like Walter Burley,⁶ Wyclif divides supposition into improper (*impropria*), in which a term stands for something different from its primary *significatum* by special custom (*ex usu loquendi*), and proper (*propria*), in which a term stands for something by the virtue of the expression itself. So a term has improper supposition when it is used in a figurative speech, as in the case of the term 'cup' in the sentence 'I have drunk a cup [of wine]' (*'bibi ciphum'*). Wyclif divides proper supposition into material (*materialis*), when the term stands for itself or its sound (as it occurs in "I is a pronoun" or "Johannes' is trisyllabic"), and formal (*formalis*), when the term stands for what it properly signifies. Formal supposition is two-fold: simple (*simplex*) and personal (*personalis*). Like William of Sherwood, Peter of Spain, and Burley, and against Ockham and his followers, Wyclif affirms that the supposition is simple if the term stands for an extra-mental universal only (*solum assertive supponit pro re universali ad extra*), as it occurs in 'Man can be predicated of every man' (*'homo predicatur de omni homine'*) and 'Man is a species' (*'homo est species'*). According to Wyclif, in both cases the term 'man' supposits for the human nature, which is an extra-mental form common to a multiplicity of singulars. Simple supposition is divided into equal (*equa*) and unequal (*inequa*). A term is in simple equal supposition if it stands for the common nature that it directly signifies, as occurs in 'man is a species' (*'homo est species'*). A term is in simple unequal supposition when it stands for

⁵ Cf. Maierù (1972), 92 and 218-219.

⁶ Cf. Burley, *De puritate artis logicae tractatus longior*, ed. Boehner (1955), I.1.1, p. 2, ll. 17-18.

(1) a less common nature than what it signifies (*pro specie inferiori*), as occurs in 'substance is a species' ('*substantia est species*'), or (2) a concrete accident or the characterizing property (*pro accidente vel proprio primo*), as occurs in 'this universal-man is capable of laughing' ('*hic homo communis est risibilis*')—where the presence of the demonstrative 'this' modifies the *significatum* of the subject-term 'universal-man', so that in the sentence at issue it supposit for that concrete exemplification (the human nature proper to an individual man) which is identical with the subject of inherence (a given human being) of the accidental form, or characterizing property (in the example, the capacity-of-laughing), signified by the predicate-term. Supposition is personal when the term which plays the role of subject in a sentence stands for one or more individuals (*pro uno singulari vel pro multis*). In the first case, the supposition is personal and singular (*suppositio personalis singularis*), as it occurs in 'this man is' ('*hic homo est*'); in the second one, it is personal and common (*suppositio personalis communis*). Personal and common supposition is twofold. If the term stands for many singulars considered separately or for some (that is, at least one) determinate individual named by the common term itself, the supposition is *personalis distincta* (or *determinata*, as Wyclif calls it in the final section of chapter 12), as occurs in 'these (men) are' ('*isti sunt*'—*suppositio personalis communis distincta*). If the term stands for many singulars considered together, supposition is *personalis universalis*. In turn, *suppositio personalis universalis* is divided into *confusa distributiva* and *confusa tantum*. There is *suppositio personalis communis universalis confusa distributiva* when the (subject-)term stands for everything that has the form signified by the term, as occurs in 'every man is' ('*omnis homo est*'). There is *suppositio personalis communis universalis confusa tantum* when the form (or property) signified by the term at issue is affirmed (or not affirmed) equally well of one of the bearers of that form as it is of another, since it applies (or does not apply) to each for exactly the same reasons, as occurs in 'each of them is one of the two' ('*uterque istorum est alter istorum*'), where the expression 'one of the two' has merely confused supposition, since neither of the two can be both of them (*quia non est dare aliquem istorum qui est uterque istorum*). The *suppositiones confusae* are so called since they involve many different individuals, and this is the case for the subject of a universal affirmative proposition.⁷

Wyclif takes a resolutely realist stance, as his own formulation and division of supposition (where simple supposition is described as that possessed by a term in relation to a universal outside the intellect and personal supposition as

⁷ Cf. Wyclif, *Tractatus de logica*, ed. Dziewicki (1893-1899), ch. 12, 39-40.

that possessed by a term in relation to one or more individual) make evident. In this way, he stresses the ontological implications of Burley's theory. In the *De suppositionibus* and *De puritate*⁸ the *Doctor Planus et Perspicuus* had adopted a semantic point of view in describing supposition, since he defined formal supposition as the supposition that a term has when it stands for its own *significatum* or for the (individual) *supposita* which fall under it. In the first case, we properly speak of simple supposition, and in the second, we speak of personal supposition. Wyclif makes clear what Burley had stated only implicitly: the *significatum* of a common term is always a common nature (that is, a universal form) really existing outside the intellect. This fits in with his theory of meaning and his ontology.

In the first chapter of his treatise on logic Wyclif maintains that (1) a categorematic term is a *dictio* to which a mental concept, a sign of a thing (*intentio significans pro re*), corresponds in the soul.⁹ (2) Categorematic terms are divided into common (namely, general expressions), like 'man' and 'dog', and discrete (namely, singular referring expressions), such as personal and demonstrative pronouns and proper names.¹⁰ (3) Common terms originally and primarily (*principaliter*) signify common natures—for instance, the term 'man' originally and primarily signifies human nature.¹¹ (4) Categorematic terms can be divided into substantial terms, such as 'man', and accidental terms, such as 'white'. A substantial term signifies a common nature proper to a set of individuals (of which the term is the name) without connoting any accidental property, while an accidental term signifies (but we would rather say 'refers to') a common essence, proper to a set of individuals, and also (we would add: connotes) an accidental property, that is, a property which is not constitutive of the essence referred to.¹² (5) Categorematic common terms can be divided also into abstract and concrete. According to Wyclif, a concrete term, like 'man', is a term which signifies a thing that can *indifferenter* supposit *simpliciter*

⁸ Cf. Burley, *Tractatus de suppositionibus*, ed. Brown (1972), 35-36; and *De puritate artis logicae tractatus longior*, ed. Boehner (1955), I, i, iii, pp. 6-10.

⁹ Cf. Wyclif, *Tractatus de logica*, ed. Dziewicki (1893-1899), ch. 1, 2.

¹⁰ Cf. Wyclif, *Tractatus de logica*, ed. Dziewicki (1893-1899), ch. 1, 2-3.

¹¹ Cf. Wyclif, *Tractatus de logica*, ed. Dziewicki (1893-1899), ch. 1, 3.

¹² Cf. Wyclif, *Tractatus de logica*, ed. Dziewicki (1893-1899), ch. 1, 3: 'Terminus substancialis est terminus qui significat naturam rei sine connotatione accidentalis proprietatis; ut iste terminus, *homo*, significat essenciam humanam sine connotatione extranea. [...] Sed terminus accidentalis est dicio significans essenciam rei, connotando accidentalem proprietatem: sicut iste terminus, *albus*, significat substanciam et similiter albedinem, que est proprietas extranea ab essencia, que est substancia.'

and *personaliter*.¹³ On the contrary, an abstract term is a term which signifies only a common nature without connoting anything else, like '*humanitas*' and '*albedo*'. It is worth noting that in defining concrete terms Wyclif plainly attributes the capacity for suppositing to things, does not clarify the metaphysical composition of such things signified by concrete terms, and describes the twofold supposition of concrete terms as a sort of signification.¹⁴ (6) Finally, categorematic terms can be divided into terms of first and second intention. A term of first intention is a sign which signifies what it signifies (*significat suum significatum*) without connoting the properties of being-individual or being-universal (*non connotando rationem singularitatis aut universalitatis*) which characterize categorial items. For example, '*Deus*' and '*homo*' are terms of first intention. On the contrary, a term of second intention is a term which connotes such properties and refers to a common nature without naming it. '*Universale*' and '*substantia prima*' are terms of second intention.¹⁵

As is evident, the basic ideas of Wyclif's theory of meaning are that (1) every simple expression in our language is like a label naming just one *essence*¹⁶ in the world, and (2) distinctions among terms as well as their linguistic and semantic properties are derived from the ontological features of signified things. He affirms that everything which is, signifies in a complex manner that it is something real.¹⁷ He openly claims that supposition is also a property of signified things, and explains the semantic difference between general terms, such as 'man', which can name a set of individuals, and singular expressions, such as 'Socrates' or 'a certain man' ('*aliquis homo*'), which name just one item, by means of the different modalities of existence of their different *significata*. Singular expressions name and signify individuals; general terms name and

¹³ Cf. Wyclif, *Tractatus de logica*, ed. Dziewicki (1893-1899), ch. 1, 5.

¹⁴ Cf. Wyclif, *Tractatus de logica*, ed. Dziewicki (1893-1899), ch. 1, 5-6.

¹⁵ Cf. Wyclif, *Tractatus de logica*, ed. Dziewicki (1893-1899), ch. 1, 7.

¹⁶ In Wyclif's philosophical terminology the term 'essence' is often used in order to designate the categorial items considered as common natures or instances of a certain nature. An essence therefore is a being which has a well defined nature, even if the name 'essence' does not make this nature known (cf. *De materia et forma*, ch. 4, 185-186). As a result, the term 'essence' is less general than 'being' ('*ens*'), but more general than 'quiddity' ('*quidditas*'), since every essence is a being, and not every being is an essence, and every quiddity is an essence, and not every essence is a quiddity, inasmuch as individual items are essences, but not quiddities (cf. *Tractatus de universalibus*, ed. Mueller (1985), ch. 1, 15-16; ch. 6, 116-124, *passim*, especially 123).

¹⁷ Cf. Wyclif, *Tractatus de logica*, ed. Dziewicki (1893-1899), ch. 5, 14: 'Proposicio large loquendo est *ens complexe significans*; et sic quia omne quod est significat complexe se esse, omne quod est satis bene potest dici propositio.' On this peculiar doctrine, his pan-propositionalism, see Cesalli 2005.

signify common natures. In Wyclif's view, a common term gives a name to a certain set of individuals only by way of the nature that (1) it originally and directly signifies and (2) is common to a certain group of individuals as their own quiddity.¹⁸

The first three chapters of his *Tractatus de logica* (on terms, universals, and categories respectively) make clear that Wyclif identifies secondary substances (that is, the universals of the category of substance) with the *significata* of general (concrete) terms of that category (such as 'man' or 'animal') and individual substances with the *significata* of singular expressions of that category (such as 'this man', which refers to a single human individual only). Furthermore, he holds that (1) common terms of the category of substance, when used predicatively, specify which kind of substance a certain individual substance is; (2) individual substances are unique physical entities, located at a particular place in space and time; and (3) universal substances are the specific or generic natures proper to the individual substances, immanent in them, and apt to be common to many individuals at the same time. As a result, like Burley, Wyclif thinks of universals and individuals as linked together by a sort of relation of instantiation. In other words, he conceives of individuals as *the* tokens of universal natures, and universal natures as *the* types of individuals. This consequence is common also to many other realist authors of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. But, because of his peculiar reading of the relation between universals and individuals, Wyclif derives from it an original conception of the signification and supposition of concrete accidental terms, such as 'white', by which the new theories and divisions of supposition developed in Oxford in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were to be inspired. According to them, any concrete accidental term which occurs as an extreme in a proposition can stand for (1) the substrate of inherence of the accidental form that it connotes (*suppositio personalis*), or (2) the accidental form itself (*suppositio abstractiva*), or (3) the aggregate composed of the individual substance, which plays the role of the substrate of the form, and the singular accidental form at issue (*suppositio concretiva*).¹⁹

¹⁸ Cf. Wyclif, *Tractatus de logica*, ed. Dziewicki (1893-1899), ch. 1, 7: "Terminus significat primarie illud quod principaliter apprehenditur per illum; sicut iste terminus, *homo*, primarie vel principaliter significat hominem, scilicet naturam humanam, et secundarie significat *Johannem* vel *Robertum*."

¹⁹ Cf. for instance William Penbygull, *De universalibus*, ed. Conti (1982), 196-197. On this subject see Conti (2005), 177-184.

In his last commentary on the *Categories* (composed in 1337),²⁰ the *Doctor Planus et Perspicuus* affirmed that, instead of signifying simple categorial items, concrete terms signify aggregates of individual substances along with the form primarily signified by the term itself. In the case of concrete accidental terms, like ‘white’ (*album*), such aggregates are not properly beings (*entia*), since they are lacking in numerical unity, and hence they do not fall under any of the ten categories. The metaphysical constituents of such aggregates (substance and accidental form) are related to the concrete accidental term in different ways: on the one hand, the form is the primary *significatum*, even if the concrete accidental term is not the name of the form; on the other, the concrete accidental term can only supposit for the substance. So concrete accidental terms name substances, but indirectly, through the accidental forms from which they take their names, insofar as substances are the substrates of existence (*subiecta*) in relation to the accidental forms. This fact accounts for the difference between concrete substantial terms (such as ‘man’) and concrete accidental terms, since the forms that concrete substantial terms primarily signify are the constitutive elements of the essence of the substances that the concrete substantial terms name. Therefore, in this case, the name of the form is just the same as the name of the substances.²¹

Wyclif seems to believe that the *significatum* of a concrete term is a sort of twofold entity formed (1) by one (or more) individual substance(s) and a common nature in the case of a concrete substantial term, and (2) by one (or more) individual substance(s) and an accidental common nature in the case of a concrete accidental term. In the first case, the common nature at issue is really identical with and formally different from the primary substances that the concrete term refers to. In the second one, the accidental nature at issue is really different from the primary substances in which it inheres as well as from the substantial nature (or natures) proper to them. This is the logical consequence of his metaphysical convictions about universals and accidents. As is well known, according to Wyclif, formal universals are common natures, or *veritates*, in virtue of which the individuals that share them are exactly what they are—just as the human species is the truth, or form, or nature, by which every man formally is a man. They are prior, and so ‘indifferent’ to any division into universals and individuals. Universality (*universalitas* or *communicabilitas*) is,

²⁰ Cf. Burley, *Expositio super Praedicamenta Aristotelis: de sufficientia praedicamentorum*, ed. Venetiis (1509), f. 21ra; *de substantia*, f. 24rb; and *de relatione*, f. 34rb.

²¹ Cf. Burley, *Expositio super Praedicamenta Aristotelis: de denominativis*, ed. Venetiis (1509), f. 19va-b.

as it were, their inseparable property (*quasi passio*) and not a constitutive mark of the nature itself. Common natures possess it only potentially; it becomes an actual determination when one or more individuals instantiate them. Universals *qua* natures of a certain kind are really (*realiter*) identical to, but formally (*formaliter*) distinct from their individuals, since common natures and individuals share the same empirical reality (that of individuals) but, conceived of properly as universals and individuals, they have opposite principles: the natural-tendency-to-be-common (*communicabilitas*) for universals and the impossibility-of-being-common (*incommunicabilitas*) for individuals. Hence common natures are formal causes in relation to their own individuals, and individuals material causes in relation to their natures, since individuals are *partes subiectivae* of the common natures.²² All the genera, species, and individuals belonging to the category of substance are therefore really identical (as the individuals which instantiate a certain specific nature instantiate also all the forms superior to it) and, if considered in themselves, formally distinct from each other as well as concrete accidents among them and in relation to the substances in which they inhere.

In fact, the chief feature of Wyclif's treatment of accidents is his twofold consideration of them as abstract forms (quantity and quality) or *respectus* (the other six accidental categories) and as concrete determinations (or modes) of individual substances. In the *De actibus animae* (composed in around 1365) he seems to conceive of them as modes of substance, without actually distinct realities.²³ By contrast, in his *De ente praedicamentali* (composed in 1369) he clearly states that accidents are *essences* really distinct from substance.²⁴ Indeed, in Wyclif's opinion, accidents, considered in an absolute way, according to their essential being (*esse essentiae* or *esse in genere*), which causes what they are, are abstract forms, really distinct from substances; but, if they are considered from the point of view of their concrete existence, they are not *really* distinct from the substance in which they are present, but only *formally*, since in the latter case they are mere determinations (or modes) of substances.²⁵

²² Cf. Wyclif, *Tractatus de universalibus*, ch. 1, 15-16; ch. 2, 64; ch. 4, 86-87 and 90-92; ch. 11, 239-240. On Wyclif's theory of universals and individuals and the connected theory of predication see Spade (1985); Kenny (1986); Conti (1997), 150-158; Spade (2005); Conti (2006), 95-102.

²³ Cf. Wyclif, *De actibus animae*, ed. Dziewicki (1902), pars II, ch. 4, 122-123 and 127.

²⁴ Cf. Wyclif, *De ente praedicamentali*, ed. Beer (1891), ch. 7, 61. See also his *Tractatus de logica*, ed. Dziewicki (1893-1899), ch. 3, 11.

²⁵ In the *Tractatus de universalibus*, ed. Mueller (1985), ch. 4, 91-92, in defining the formal distinction and its three different kinds, Wyclif maintains that (1) the formal distinction is the difference by which things differ from each other even though they are constitutive elements of the same

As a consequence, there is a difference between Burley and Wyclif in individuating the *significatum* of a concrete accidental term. According to Burley, no universal form can inhere in another one, as inherence concerns only individual items; therefore the *significatum* of a concrete accidental term is the set of all the individual aggregates of a substance and the accidental form signified by the abstract term corresponding to the concrete accidental term at issue—for instance, in the case of the term ‘album’, the set constituted by those aggregates of an individual substance and the abstract form of whiteness (*albedo*) that inheres in it. In Wyclif’s view, the *significatum* of a concrete accidental term seems to be an aggregate formed by two (or more) natures, one of which indirectly inheres in the other(s), by means of the individuals which are its subjects (or bearers). In the *Tractatus de universalibus*, he accepts that a sentence such as ‘*species humana est risibile*’ is a well formed and true proposition, even though ‘*species humana est risibilis*’ is not, because the human species is really identical to something (the concrete human beings) which is capable of laughing.²⁶

Wyclif ends chapter 12 with three *notanda*, by which he completes his treatment of supposition. In the first, he recalls that categorematic common concrete terms can supposit both *personaliter* and *simpliciter* at once (*mixtim*) when the propositions where they occur as subjects are universal affirmative or indefinite. For instance, the term ‘animal’ in (1) ‘*omne animal fuit in archa Noe*’ as well as the term ‘homo’ in (2) ‘*homo moritur*’ can supposit *personaliter* for every individual animal and man respectively, and if so, the first sentence is false and the second true, and *simpliciter* for every species of animals and the human nature respectively, and then both sentences are true.²⁷ In the second *notandum*, Wyclif contends that proper names (like ‘*Johannes*’), personal and demonstrative pronouns (like ‘*hic*’ and ‘*istud*’), and those terms of second intention by which we speak of singular items considered as such (namely, expressions like ‘*persona*’ and ‘*individuum*’) cannot supposit distributively,

single essence or supposit; and (2) among others, this is the case for the concrete accidents inhering in the same substance, as they coincide in the same particular subject, but differ from each other because of their own natures.

²⁶ Cf. Wyclif, *Tractatus de universalibus*, ed. Mueller (1985), p. 240, ch. 11: ‘Non est aliquod genus vel individuum accidentis, quin ipsum sit vere praedicabile tam de universali quam de individuo substantiae, diversimode tamen quia utrobique in concreto: de individuo formaliter et de universali secundum essentiam. Ut species humana, quamvis sit risibile, quantum et quilibet homo qualitercumque accidentatus, non tamen est risibilis, quantitative divisibilis, accidenter qualis vel quomodolibet aliter accidentata.’

²⁷ Cf. Wyclif, *Tractatus de logica*, ed. Dziewicki (1893–1899), ch. 12, 40–41.

since they were devised in order to signify *discrete vel singulariter* only.²⁸ Finally, in the third *notandum*, he lays down the following rules about the supposition possessed by the subject-term and the predicate-term in the Square of Opposition: (1) in every universal affirmative proposition, the subject supposits *mobiliter*, that is, it has confused and distributive supposition (*in universali affirmativa subiectum supponit mobiliter, id est, confuse distributive*), while the predicate has *suppositio confusa tantum* or simple supposition. Supposition is *confusa tantum* if it does not allow for descent to a certain singular or universal (*quando non contingit descendere ad singulare nec universale*)—in other words, a (predicate-)term has supposition *confusa tantum* when it is used attributively of its extension. The supposition is *simplex* if the predicate-term refers to a common nature, as is the case in '*omnis homo est homo*', where the predicate '*homo*' supposits for human nature. (2) Both the subject and predicate of a universal negative proposition have confused distributive supposition, if they are common terms, as occurs in '*nullus homo est lapis*'. (3) In particular affirmative propositions, such as '*aliquis homo est animal*', both the subject and predicate have determinate supposition. (4) In particular negative propositions, the subject-term has determinate supposition and the predicate-term has distributive confused supposition.²⁹

With these explanations in our minds, we may now look at some uses and applications of the supposition theory to fallacies and sophisms.

3. Supposition Applied

In the second chapter of the third treatise of his *Continuatio logicae* (composed between 1360 and 1363 according to Thomson,³⁰ but between 1371 and 1374

²⁸ Cf. Wyclif, *Tractatus de logica*, ed. Dziewicki (1893-1899), ch. 12, 41. Dziewicki's text reads '*simpliciter*' instead of '*singulariter*', but this does not make any sense, as, in Wyclif's view, those terms are *discreti* (we would say 'atomic'), and therefore they cannot stand for a multiplicity of things in a proposition. But if they could supposit *simpliciter* they would signify a *common* nature, and through this common nature the set of individuals which share it. So, ultimately, they could supposit distributively for those singular items which instantiate the nature at issue, just as any other term which has simple supposition. In the case of terms such as '*persona*' and '*individuum*', this would imply the existence of an individual common nature, that is, an (auto-contradictory) entity present in all the individuals as the cause of their being individuals—an entity that Wyclif could not admit within his world, as Alyngton, Whelpdale, Penbygull, and Tarteys after him explicitly argued. On this point see Conti (1999).

²⁹ Cf. Wyclif, *Tractatus de logica*, ed. Dziewicki (1893-1899), ch. 12, 41-42.

³⁰ Cf. Thomson (1983), 5-6.

according to Mueller)³¹ Wyclif deals with the problem of the truth-conditions of copulative sentences (that is, propositions of the form: *p* and *q*). It is just in order to solve it that he examines some fallacies connected to the question of universals and introduces further interesting remarks about supposition.

The starting point is the analysis of the truth-condition of the following sentence:

(A) *Sortes est animal et illud est asinus.*

Wyclif observes that, according to the general rules concerning the supposition of relative terms (*termini relati*, or *relativa*—that is, not those terms which fall under the category of *ad aliquid*, but such terms as pronouns, which, in a molecular sentence³²—refer to other terms present in it), we must consider that sentence equivalent to this one:

(A.) *Sortes est animal et illud animal quod est Sortes est asinus.*³³

For this case as well the rule holds that any pronoun necessarily supposits for a subset of that set (of *res*) that the common term to which the pronoun refers (according to Wyclif's terminology, the *antecedens*) stands for (*omne tale relativum limitacius se habet quam suum antecedens*). In fact the propositional context within which the *antecedens* is set (and in particular the verb connected with the *antecedens*) narrows its extension (*omne relativum refert suum antecedens sub habitudine alicuius actus verbi sui antecedentis*). In his opinion, those authors who stated that any pronoun is extensionally and intensionally equivalent to its *antecedens* (*omne relativum converti cum suo antecedente*) were wrong.³⁴ Their theory entails the following two unsuitable consequences: (1) it cannot supply a valid *de re* interpretation of sentences such as: '*ego scio quis fuit ille homo qui commisit illud furtum*', since they are forced to admit that the sentence at issue is true even if the speaker actually does not know who the thief was, but simply knows that the thief is anyone of the human beings that the term '*homo*' could stand for at that moment:³⁵

Querendo ergo a tali sophista quis fuit ille qui fecit talem turpitudinem, diceret quod ego et quilibet homo mundi est ille.

³¹ Cf. Mueller (1985), xxxv and xxxvii-xxxviii.

³² Namely a sentence composed by two or more elementary sentences.

³³ Cf. Wyclif, *Logicae continuatio*, ed. Dziewicki (1893-1899), tr. 3, ch. 2, vol. 2, 26.

³⁴ Cf. Wyclif, *Logicae continuatio*, ed. Dziewicki (1893-1899), tr. 3, ch. 2, 26-27.

³⁵ Wyclif, *Logicae continuatio*, ed. Dziewicki (1893-1899), tr. 3, ch. 2, 27.

(2) It cannot produce any solid argument against the opposite thesis, that is, Wyclif's thesis on this subject. The main argument of his opponents—says Wyclif³⁶—is that if one admits the existence of extra-mental universal essences really identical with their own individuals, then one must admit that every relative term, in any propositional context, always refers to the same set of things to which its antecedent refers apart from any propositional context (*absolute*). In Wyclif's view, such an *inconveniens* is prevented by his own formulations of the supposition theory and his solution to the problem of the relationship between universals and individuals, according to which universals are really identical with but formally distinct from their individuals. In fact, thanks to the formal distinction³⁷ it is possible to explain:

- (1) how universals can be distinguished from each other and from their individuals;
- (2) how the *ens transcendens* is common to God and His creatures;
- (3) why universal essences cannot receive the accidental predications proper to their individuals; and
- (4) why universal essences cannot be counted with their individuals.

(1) As far as the first problem at issue is concerned, Wyclif claims that a universal essence *qua* nature of a certain kind is identical with its own individuals (for example, *homo* is the same thing as Socrates), but *qua* properly universal (that is a truth or nature that can exist in many things and can be shared by them) it is distinct from its own individuals, considered *qua* individuals, because of the opposite constitutive principles: *communicabilitas* for universals and *incommunicabilitas* for individuals. Because of this *distinctio formalis* between universals and individuals, the rule of the transitivity of predications among identicals does not obtain: one cannot infer from 'Socrates is a man' and 'man is a species' that 'Socrates is a species', notwithstanding the identity between *homo* and Socrates. On the other hand, this formal difference between Socrates and the human nature does not mean that Socrates and his species are *two* different realities; it simply means that because of two opposite properties, the impossibility-of-being-common proper to Socrates and the natural-tendency-to-be-common proper to the human nature, Socrates is distinct from what is its species:

³⁶ Cf. Wyclif, *Logicae continuatio*, ed. Dziewicki (1893-1899), tr. 3, ch. 2, 28.

³⁷ On Wyclif's theory of identity and distinction, see Conti (2006), 72-78.

Sor differt a specie debet exponi resolvendo hoc verbum differt, significans confuse ad differentiam supradictam; ut si Sor aliqua differentia differt a specie, ergo Sor differt a specie. Et antecedens patet ex hoc quod Sor ratione incommunicabilitatis differt a specie.³⁸

(2) The second problem runs as follows: if the *ens transcendens* is common to God and the creatures, then, since to be common implies being identical, (a) the *maxima differentia*, the difference between God and the creatures, should be compatible with identity; and (b) God would be His own cause of existence, since Being is the first *causatum* and God is (really identical with) it.³⁹ Wyclif's reply is that Being is common to God and creatures in the same way as, for instance, the universal-man (*homo communis* or *in communi*—that is, the human nature)⁴⁰ is common to every man.⁴¹ Therefore, this syllogism:

(S₁) *ens transcendens est Deus et ens transcendens est aliud a Deo, ergo, aliud a Deo est Deus*

is as invalid as:

(S₂) *homo communis est Sor et ille homo communis est Plato, ergo, Sor est Plato.*

In fact, the universal-man, because of the property of being communicable, is formally distinct from Socrates and from any other man, who are neither communicable nor sharable. The first syllogism (that is, S₁)—Wyclif concludes—is not an expository one, as it appears to be, but a paralogism, since the *ens transcendens* is not a singular entity, like Socrates or a stone. As a consequence the copula in the premisses does not mean identity as in the conclusion. In the second syllogism (that is, S₂), the only logically possible conclusion is not that Socrates is Plato, but that Socrates is (identical with) the same thing which is (identical with) Plato (*ergo, Sor est illud quod est Plato*). In a similar way, the only logically possible conclusion of S₁ is that *quodlibet est ens transcendens*,

³⁸ Wyclif, *Logicae continuatio*, ed. Dziewicki (1893-1899), tr. 3, ch. 2, 35-37.

³⁹ Cf. Wyclif, *Logicae continuatio*, ed. Dziewicki (1893-1899), tr. 3, ch. 2, 38.

⁴⁰ For the identity between the universal-man and the human nature and in general between a universal-something and a common nature see Wyclif, *Tractatus de logica*, ed. Dziewicki (1893-1899), ch. 12, 42: 'In ista propositione: *omnis homo est homo* iste terminus *homo*, qui est predicatum, supponit pro homine communi vel natura humana, quod idem est; et sic significat quod *homo communis vel natura humana est omnis homo*.'

⁴¹ Cf. Wyclif, *Logicae continuatio*, ed. Dziewicki (1893-1899), tr. 3, ch. 2, 38.

quod est Deus, even though it is not God (that is, it is not identical to God Himself).⁴²

(3) The explanation of the third point is crucial, since it represents Wyclif's reply to Ockham's main argument against realism. As is well known, Ockham had maintained that (1) the assumption of a relation of identity between universals and individuals was inconsistent with the standard definition of (real) identity, which implies transitivity in predication; and that (2) from an ontological point of view, the only kind of distinction which could hold between two created beings was the real one, as (in his opinion) any form of distinction between two created beings necessarily implied a real distinction between them. From these two theses and the presupposition of the truth of Aristotle's statement that there cannot exist real universal forms apart from their individuals, Ockham had derived a rejection of any type of extramental reality for universals. His most general argumentation⁴³ was that, if universals are something existing *in re*, really identical with their individuals, then whatever is predicated of individuals must be predicated of their universals too, and so a unique universal entity (say, the human nature) would possess contrary attributes simultaneously via the attributes of different individuals, a clearly unacceptable conclusion.

Wyclif acknowledged that Ockham's critique showed that the traditional realist description of the relation between universals and individuals and the traditional notions of identity and difference (or distinction) were inconsistent, but he was convinced that realism as a whole was still defensible. So he tried to remove the aporetic points of the traditional realist theory of universals by elaborating new notions of identity and distinction which he then used to interpret the relation between universals and individuals, and thereby the nature of predication. He thought that not all that is predicated of individuals can be directly (*formaliter*) predicated of universals and *vice versa*. In his opinion, a universal of the category of substance could directly receive only the predications of substantial forms, or essences, more common than itself (namely those forms which are put on a higher level in the *linea praedicamentalis*). On the other hand, he believed that the accidental forms inhering in substantial individuals could be predicated of the substantial form itself (which those individuals instantiated) only indirectly (*essentialiter*), through and in

⁴² Cf. Wyclif, *Logicae continuatio*, ed. Dziewicki (1893-1899), tr. 3, ch. 2, 39.

⁴³ Cf. Ockham, *Expositio in librum Praedicamentorum Aristotelis*, ch. 8, 1, ed. Gál (1978), 164-168; *Summa logicae*, ed. Boehner et al. (1974), I, 15, 50-51.

virtue of the individuals falling under that substantial form.⁴⁴ As a consequence, Wyclif distinguished four different kinds of predication, which he conceived as a real relation between metaphysical entities: (i) predication by essence (*secundum essentiam*); (ii) formal predication (*per inherenciam forme*); (iii) causal predication (*secundum causam*); and (iv) habitual predication (*secundum habitudinem*).⁴⁵

(i) To speak of predication *secundum essentiam* it is sufficient that the same essence is both the real subject and predicate, even though the formal principle connoted by the predicate-term differs from that connoted by the subject-term. ‘*Deus est homo*’ and ‘*Universale est particulare*’ are instances of predication *secundum essentiam*. In fact, the same essence that is a universal is also an individual, but the forms connoted by the subject-term and by the predicate-term are different. (ii) Formal predication is that predication in which the form signified by the predicate-term is directly present in the essence signified by the subject-term. This happens whenever an item in the categorial line is predicated of something inferior, or an accident of its subject of inherence. In fact, in both of them, the subject-term and the predicate-term refer to the same essence in virtue of the form connoted by the predicate-term itself. Universal essences, such as *homo in communi*, and abstract forms, such as *humanitas*, do not support this kind of predication, since this kind of predication necessarily requires that the real subject of the predication is capable of undertaking a change—something impossible for universal essences and abstract forms. ‘Man is an animal’ (*‘homo est animal’*) and ‘Peter is musical’ (*‘Petrus est musicus’*) are instances of formal predication. (iii) We speak of causal predication when the form designated by the predicate-term is not present in the essence signified by the subject-term, but is something caused

⁴⁴ See, for instance, the *Tractatus de universalibus*, ed. Mueller (1985), ch. 11, 239–240.

⁴⁵ Cf. Wyclif, *Logicae continuatio*, ed. Dziewicki (1893–1899), tr. 3, ch. 2, 40–42. In the second and third chapters of the *Purgans errores circa universalia in communi* (composed between 1366 and 1368) Wyclif lists the following three main types of predication: formal predication, predication by essence, and causal predication; on the contrary, in the *Tractatus de universalibus* (ch. 1, 35–36) causal predication is replaced by habitual predication—a kind of predication that Wyclif had already recognized in the *Purgans errores circa universalia*, but whose position within the main division of the types of predication was not clear, as it seems to be a sub-type of formal predication, even though it does not satisfy the criterion of the direct inherence of the form signified by the predicate in the essence signified by the subject. Formal predication, predication by essence, and habitual predication are defined almost in the same way in the *Purgans errores circa universalia* and in the *Tractatus de universalibus*, but in the *Tractatus de universalibus* formal predication, predication by essence, and habitual predication are described as three non-mutually exclusive ways of predicating, each more general than the preceding one (or ones).

by that entity. '*Dies est lacio solis*' is an example of this kind of predication. (iv) Finally, we speak of predication *secundum habitudinem* when the form connoted by the predicate-term is not present in the essence designated by the subject-term, but simply implies a relation to it, so that the same predicate may be at different times truly or falsely spoken of its subject, without there being any change in the subject itself. According to Wyclif, we use such a kind of predication mainly when we want to express theological truths, like these: that God is known and loved by many creatures, and brings about, as efficient, exemplary, and final cause, many good effects. Universal essences too can support this kind of predication. On the basis of such a division of predication and his theory of supposition, Wyclif denies that universal essences can receive the accidental predications of their individuals. He therefore rejects Ockham's argumentations as well as any syllogism of this form:

(S₃) *hoc albatu*r, *et hoc est illa essentia: igitur illa essentia albatu*r.⁴⁶

In fact, in his opinion, the middle term (that is, the pronoun '*hoc*') has different suppositions in the two premisses: personal in the major, where it stands for a singular substance, and simple in the minor, where it stands for a common nature or universal essence. Therefore, the only logically possible conclusion is: '*illa essentia est album*', as the substantival adjective in its neuter form, which plays the role of predicate in the sentence, shows that the form signified by the predicate-term is not directly present in the subject, but is indirectly attributed to it through its individuals. As a consequence, the term has personal, and not simple, supposition and the sentence is equivalent to this: '*illa essentia est illud quod est album*'.⁴⁷

(4) Finally, as to the problem of whether universal essences must be counted with their individuals or not, Wyclif answers that this is impossible, since the universal-man is not another man in addition to the concrete existing human beings. He argues that adding the universal-man as a third man to Socrates and Plato, given that there are only these two individual men in the world, commits a fallacy of equivocation. When a number is added to a term of first intention (like 'man'), the presence of this numerical term modifies the kind of supposition from simple to personal; but one can refer to a universal only with a term with simple supposition. As a consequence the universal cannot be counted

⁴⁶ Cf. Wyclif, *Logicae continuatio*, ed. Dziewicki (1893-1899), tr. 3, ch. 2, 42.

⁴⁷ Cf. Wyclif, *Logicae continuatio*, ed. Dziewicki (1893-1899), tr. 3, ch. 2, 43.

with its individuals—and in fact any universal is really identical to each one of its individuals, and so it cannot differ in number from each of them.⁴⁸

It is clear that the final outcome of Wyclif's metaphysical choices is therefore a mixed logical system, where the copula of the standard philosophical sentences of the form '(every or some) A is B' which he deals with can have different values. Causal and habitual predications do not require the presence of an absolute form in the real subject nor any kind of identity between the *significatum* of the subject-term and that of the predicate-term, whereas predication by essence does require such an identity. Causal and habitual predications involve a loose connection between the real predicate and the real subject, since the form or essence signified by the predicate-term is not present in the real subject and simply entails a reference to it. Though predication by essence indicates a partial identity between the real subject and predicate (which share some, but not all, metaphysical component parts), it excludes that the form connoted by the predicate-term is directly present in the essence denoted by the subject-term. Formal predication, on the contrary, requires such a direct presence. It is intended to be a sort of kind of predication over and above to the standard Aristotelian types, namely essential and accidental predication, as defined in the second and fifth chapters of the *Categories*. It means that the subject-thing in virtue of its nature or by means of one of its inhering forms is a member of a certain set of essences that the predicate-term of the proposition names and signifies. In this way Wyclif was trying to give a logically satisfactory solution to the problem of the relationship between common natures and singular items, which had always been the most difficult issue for medieval Realists. His theory of supposition is aimed at this same goal, as his discussion of the sophism *I promise you a coin that I do not promise* in the third chapter of the third treatise of the *Continuatio logicae* plainly proves.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Cf. Wyclif, *Logicae continuatio*, ed. Dziewicki (1893–1899), tr. 3, ch. 2, 48: 'Tunc dicitur quod terminus numeralis, additus termino prime intencionis, limitatur ad significandum numerum primo modo dictum (scilicet acceptum pro multitudine singularium). Unde, sicut terminus distribuens limitat speciem specialissimam ad suppositionem personalem, ita ille terminus numeralis limitat terminum prime intencionis, et specialiter speciem specialissimam, ad suppositionem personalem. Cum ergo homo communis sit quilibet hominum singularium, non ponit seorsum in numero cum illis; ideo existente *omni homine*, *Sorte* vel *Platone*, non superest tercius homo communis ab illis, sed est uterque illorum, et non esset tercius, nec esset tercius persona hominis. Et per idem non oportet, ubique ubi est unus homo, esse duos homines.'

⁴⁹ On Wyclif's discussion of this sophism see Read (1985).

Like Burley⁵⁰ before him, Wyclif defends the claim that what is explicitly promised by 'I promise you one of these coins I have in one of my hands' (*'promitto tibi alterum illorum denariorum in altera manuum mearum'*), is the universal-coin, and not a singular one, even if I can fulfil the promise only by giving any singular coin, since a universal cannot be given or possessed except by a singular.⁵¹ Thanks to his distinction between simple and personal supposition, he is able to explain from a semantic point of view the difference between promising a coin in general and promising a particular coin: in the first case the term 'coin' (*'denarius'*) has simple supposition, and therefore the proposition is true if and only if what is said is true of the universal-coin; on the contrary, if the term 'coin' has personal supposition (more precisely, personal and singular supposition), the proposition is true if and only if what is said is true of a particular coin. According to him, by promising a singular, a universal is promised *secundarie* and *confuse*, and conversely.⁵² So, given two coins in my hands, coin *A* and the coin *B*, the proposition 'I promise you one or the other of these coins' is true, even though, when asked whether I promised coin *A*, my answer is 'No', and so too when asked whether I promised coin *B*. In fact, according to Wyclif, what I promised is the universal-coin, since the phrase 'one or the other of these coins' has simple supposition and therefore stands for a universal, however restricted in its instantiations to one or other of the two coins in my hands.⁵³ This does not mean, however, that the universal-coin is a sort of third coin over and above the two coins in my hands, since Wyclif had already rejected this mistaken conclusion in the previous chapter of the *Logicae continuatio*.

⁵⁰ Cf. Burley, *Expositio in libros octo Physicorum Aristotelis. Prologus*, ed. Venetiis (1501), f. 8vb.

⁵¹ Cf. Wyclif, *Logicae continuatio*, ed. Dziewicki (1893-1899), tr. 3, ch. 3, 62: 'Nemo placitans pro communi promissione denarii vendicat illum denarium vel illum, sed vendicat quod debetur sibi denarius: quod fuit promissum. Sed quia tale commune non potest dari vel haberi nisi per singulare, ideo requiritur promittentem dare singulare; et tunc sequitur ipsam, dando universale, impleri promissionem. Non enim potest quandoque dari vel promitti singulare, nisi in sic faciendo involvatur universale; quia omnes tales predicaciones secundum habitudinem suscipiunt universale a suis singularibus. Et sic conceditur quod habeam communem denarium per ante (si habeam aliquem denarium) non tamen ex illa promissione, ideo vendico illud commune michi dari ab illo qui sic promisit; quia, si posset michi dare illud sine denario singulari, placet michi. Sed cum non potest, ex dacione sua multiplicius habeo illud commune. Quotquot enim denarios quis habuerit, tottupluciter habet communem denarium.'

⁵² Cf. Wyclif, *Logicae continuatio*, ed. Dziewicki (1893-1899), tr. 3, ch. 3, 64.

⁵³ Cf. Wyclif, *Logicae continuatio*, ed. Dziewicki (1893-1899), tr. 3, ch. 3, 67.

4. Concluding Remarks

If the foregoing account is correct, Wyclif's formulation of the supposition-theory and his theory of universals and predication are linked together, and rest upon a sort of componential analysis, where things substitute for lexemes and ontological properties for semantic features—as shown by his convictions that (1) whatever is is a real proposition (*propositio realis*) and (2) supposition is a property of terms and extra-mental things as well. For Wyclif, everything which is is a real proposition, since everything which signifies in a complex manner that it is something real, and everything save God is compound (at least of potency and act),⁵⁴ and therefore can be conceived of and signified both in a complex (*complexe*) and in a non-complex way (*incomplexe*). When we conceive of a thing in a complex manner we think of that thing considered according to its metaphysical organization, and so as a real proposition (in other words, as a sort of state of affairs). Even the abstract forms, because of their own inner structure, are such—for example, humanity is equal to the 'sum' of the form of animality and that of rationality, which combine as potency and act respectively. As a consequence, we can refer to the same entity by means of various types of linguistic expressions: abstract terms, concrete terms, infinitive expressions (like 'being a man'—'*hominem esse*'), and complex nouns (such as 'universal-humanity'—'*humanitas communis*', 'universal-man'—'*homo in communi*', and 'the species of man'—'*species hominis*'), which have to be considered as synonymous.⁵⁵ This is the logical result of Wyclif's idea that the world consists of essences (that is, single items classified into ten different types or categories), which are not simple, but composite, because they are reducible to something else, belonging to a different rank of reality and unable to exist by themselves: being and essence (in the sense of quiddity)⁵⁶, potency and act, matter and form, abstract genera, species and differences. For that reason, everything one can speak about or think of is both a thing (we could say: a molecular object) and a real proposition (we could say: a sort of atomic state of affairs), while every true sentence expresses either a simple or a complex real proposition, that is, either the union (if the proposition is affirmative) or the separation (if the proposition is negative) of two (or more) things. In particular, according to him, a singular man (*iste homo*) is nothing but a real proposition, where the actual existence in time as an individual (*ista persona*)

⁵⁴ Cf. Wyclif, *De ente praedicamentali*, ed. Beer (1891), ch. 5, 38-39.

⁵⁵ Cf. Wyclif, *Tractatus de universalibus*, ed. Mueller (1985), ch. 3, 70 and 74.

⁵⁶ See above, note 16. On Wyclif's doctrine on being and essence see Conti (1997), 145-150; Conti (2006), 89-95.

plays the role of subject, the common nature (*natura humana*) plays the role of predicate, and the singular essence (*essencia istius hominis*—that is, that by means of which this individual is *this* man) plays the role of the copula.⁵⁷ Hence, in Wyclif's view, everything which is and any constitutive item of its metaphysical reality have the property of being either a real predicate or a real copula or a real subject suppositing for some other entity in the world.⁵⁸

Terminus concretus est terminus significans rem que indifferenter potest contrahi ad suppositionem simplicem vel personalem; sicut iste terminus, homo, significat in propositione tam personaliter pro persona, quam etiam simpliciter pro natura.

According to him, only on the basis of this close isomorphism between linguistic expressions and the world can the signifying power of language, the possibility of definitions, and finally the validity and universality of our knowledge be explained and ensured. So the principle that inspires Wyclif's thought is that of the analytic correspondence between the logical connections in discourse and the framework of reality, and the core of his philosophy consists in his trust in the scheme *thing(s)-designation(s)* as the only heuristic and interpretative key for the solution to any semantic and epistemological problem. Wyclif firmly believed that language was an ordered collection of signs, each referring to one of the constitutive elements of the world, and that true sentences were like pictures of the inner structures and mutual relationships of such constitutive elements. He thought of logic as turning on structural forms, independent of both their semantic contents and the mental acts by which they are grasped.⁵⁹ It is through these forms that the network connecting the basic constituents of the world (individuals and common natures, substances and accidents, concrete properties, like being-white, and abstract forms, like whiteness) is disclosed to us. As we have seen, he conceived of common natures as real essences shared by many individual items which are necessary conditions for our language to have meaning. He thought that by associating general terms with such universal essences the fact could be accounted for that each common term can stand for many things at once and can name all of them in the same way. For this reason, Wyclif represents common natures as the

⁵⁷ Cf. Wyclif, *Tractatus de logica*, ed. Dziewicki (1893-1899), ch. 5, 15. In the *Materia et forma* he develops at greatest length the idea that in all created things the essence corresponds to the God-head, the matter to the Father, the form to the Son, and the compound to the Holy Spirit; and he calls matter, form, and the compound taken together 'the created trinity.'

⁵⁸ Cf. Wyclif, *Tractatus de logica*, ed. Dziewicki (1893-1899), ch. 1, 5.

⁵⁹ Cf. Wyclif, *Tractatus de universalibus*, ed. Mueller (1985), ch. 2, 56.

significata of general terms that, because of their presence in singular items and their relations of real identity and formal distinction to them, allow us to pick out the members of the class of *res* which form the extension of general terms themselves.

His peculiar version of the theory of *significatum* and supposition, and especially his idea of two possible kinds of supposition proper to concrete accidental terms, which signify an essence able to supposit both for the individual substance in which the accidental form inheres and for the accidental form itself, restate this *hypostasizing* approach to semantics. Paradoxically, this implies that, for him, the world itself is intrinsically linguistic: a sort of semiotic system where everything is at the same time what it is and *the* natural sign of itself (and of anything else real identical to itself), so that reality could be described as a language of things. This is the opposite of Ockham's nominalism (his polemical target) based on a sharp distinction between things as they exist in the extramental world and the various forms by means of which we think of and talk about them, since for Ockham our (mental) language does not reproduce the world, but merely regards it, as they are logically independent systems.

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