Annotated Bibliography of the Medieval Theories of Supposition and Mental Language: A - L

On Abelard, Ockham and Buridan see:

Abelard: Logic, Semantics, Ontology and Theories of the Copula
The Nominalist Ontology of William of Ockham
Buridan's Logical and Metaphysical Works

BIBLIOGRAPHY

   "I focus on William Ockham's general account in "Summa Logicae" I, chapter 63, of what it is for a term to supposit for something in a proposition, and consider two interpretations of it. I first construe Ockham as offering the following nominal definition of 'supposition': (I) "Z" supposits for "X" in "P", if and only if "Z" is a term of "p" and 'this is "a"' (where 'this' indicates "x") is true, where general terms are substituted for "a"; names of substitutions for "A"; names of propositions for "P"; and proper names for "X". I argue that (I) is inadequate both as a definition of suppositing-in-some-way-or-other for something or of any particular kind of supposition. An alternative interpretation is to take Ockham as giving his general account of supposition when he says it is being posited for something in a proposition. On this interpretation, less problematic definitions of material and simple supposition are available. But the notion of being posited for, which is at least as obscure as the notion of supposition, is left unanalysed. On the first interpretation, this is the analysis that (I) is taken to provide."


   "It is often assumed that the logic of terms, including supposition theory, was despised and ignored by the logicians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in spite of the sophistication with which it had been developed during the later middle ages. (...) It is perhaps not surprising that when I looked at some eighty textbooks written during the period in question, I discovered that as many as twenty authors not only referred to the doctrine of supposition sympathetically, but usually went on to offer a detailed analysis which is neither a slavish nor an inept echo of what the mediaeval logicians had said." pp. 260-271

   Discussion of: Swiniarski "A new presentation of Ockham's theory of supposition with..."
"In this paper I criticize the argument put forward by Swiniarski that Ockham should have adopted the priority of analysis rule whereby the subject is analysed before the predicate, and that had he adopted such a rule, merely confused supposition would have become unnecessary. I point out that in later medieval logic explicit priority of analysis rules were adopted, whereby terms with determinate supposition were analysed first, whether they were subject or predicate. I also discuss the use made of merely confused supposition, particularly in the analysis of the relationship between "all A is B" and "only B is A".


"In this paper I discuss two interrelated topics to do with supposition theory and the extensionalist analysis of propositions: 1) the use of 'A' and 'B' as special signs to produce respectively merely confused and determinate supposition in the terms following them; 2) the analysis of such non-standard propositions as 'there are some men all of whose donkeys are running.' In addition, I show how logicians in the medieval tradition handled such invalid inferences as 'every man has a head, therefore there is a head that every man has'."


"In the 14th century Gregory of Rimini argued that (1) there is a mental language separate from spoken language and (2) mental propositions are unified wholes with no discernible parts. This article examines the reactions of later logicians, showing that they accepted the doctrine of mental language; but argued that mental propositions must have a discernible structure, which involves parts."


"Given their belief in mental language, late medieval logicians felt the need to give some account of its structure. I explore their different views on the part played by syncategorematic terms, impersonal and other verbs, demonstratives, pronouns, case, number and gender. I show that Ockham's views were not universally followed; and I argue that mental language was not necessarily thought of as an ideal logical language."


"Having as his principle objective the study of declarative propositions, of the predicative structure, Siger showed that the meaning of the general term is constant because it refers to changing things signified by the intermediary of the consignified concept. The "intelligible unity" of the essence grasped in the concept is the basis for the unity of the meaning relative to the "existential diversity" of things. The analysis of meaning appears insufficient when one takes into consideration the concrete symbolic function of the term at the centre of a given proposition. It is here that the doctrine of the "suppositio" comes into play. Essentially this doctrine distinguishes between the signifying function of the term and its completing function relative to the diversity of the predicates."


"La connaissance du monde s'exprime en propositions, que celles-ci soient considérées, selon les théories, comme objets ou comme moyens de la science. Le problème de la relation entre ces entités linguistiques et les représentations mental (intellections, intentions, concepts...) a une longue histoire qui remonte au traité De l'interprétation d'Aristote et aux commentaires de Boèce. Après Guillaume d'Ockham, en effet, l'idée de langage mental est certes une hypothèse qui a acquis force et consistance, mais tous les problèmes liés à la structuration de la pensée et au rapport entre le langage parlé et la pensée ne sont pas résolus. Des questions surgissent sur la structuration même de ce langage.

Le colloque organisé à Tours du 1er au 3 décembre 2005 sous les auspices de la Fondation européenne de la science (European Science Foundation) avait l'ambition de parcourir ces questions en repartant d'Augustin qui est l'initiale médiévale du problème, et en suivant cette histoire jusqu'à l'aube des Temps modernes. Ce parcours historique donc fait une part importante au Moyen Âge tardif, à la Renaissance et au XVIIe siècle. En même temps, notre ambition était aussi d'approfondir certains enjeux proprement philosophiques de ce parcours. L'horizon général est la question: est-il possible de considérer le domaine de la pensée comme étant structuré à la manière d'un langage, et par quels moyens conceptuels penser cela?"


"The principal questions in my paper are the following: How did the medieval semanticists indicate the autonymous use of words? Does the subject term in such a proposition express a linguistic item (itself, or its likes) because of the determination by the predicate? Or is it dependent on the will or intention of man, the *voluntas utentium*, as Ockham calls it?

Or is it a convention that determines the use of terms? Is a *signum materialitatis* (a sign, or mark, indicating material supposition) necessary? To what extent do the Medievals distinguish the autonymous use of language from other uses? Or is this kind of language meaningless?

There is hardly any secondary literature on this subject. (*) p. 75


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Acts of the XVIIth European Symposium for Medieval Logic and Semantics, held the University of Leiden, 2nd, 7th June. 2008.


"In the history of medieval semantics, supposition theory is important especially in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In this theory the emphasis is on the term, whose properties one tries to determine. In the fourteenth century the focus is on the proposition, of which a term having supposition is a part. The idea is to analyse propositions in order to determine their truth (probare). The Speculum puerorum written by Richard Billingham was the standard textbook for this approach. It was very influential in Europe. The theory of the probatio propositionis was meant to solve problems both in (empirically oriented) scientific propositions such as used by the Oxford Calculators, and theological propositions, especially those about the Trinity.

The book is original, concise, but not clear in every respect. Studying medieval commentaries may help us to understand Richard’s book. In the present paper three commentaries are presented. The commentators discussed problems about the status of Richard’s book, and about its doctrine: what is the relation between probatio and truth, what is the relation between probatio and supposition, what exactly are mediate and immediate terms (e.g.is the pronoun ‘this’ mediate or immediate?). The commentators sometimes criticize Richard. For example, one of them argues, against Billingham, that the verb ‘can’ ampliates its subject term and is therefore mediate."


"William Ockham developed themes of epistemology which place him in position which can easily be compared to that of modern thinkers. Such is notably the case of his works on mental language, for instance, which bring him closer to certain theories elaborated by Hilary Putnam, especially his theory of representation."

In his writings on semantics and logic, William of Ockham combines two very strong claims about mental language: that mental terms are naturally prior to and determinative of the signification of conventional signs and that mental language contains neither synonymous nor equivocal terms. (1) The first claim represents the role mental language has in explaining the origins, structure, and content of thought and language. Ockham was, as many commentators have observed, a conceptual empiricist but it would be a mistake to think that he was primarily concerned with the psychological processes that underlie our representational system. The second claim indicates that the theory of mental language is primarily a theory of signification or a semantics. The notion of a redundancy-free mental language is an idealization crafted for its explanatory role in Ockham’s semantics.

The notion of a mental language devoid of synonymous and ambiguous terms raises puzzles which threaten the internal coherence of the project. These puzzles concern a species of categorematic terms in mental language, Ockham’s absolute terms, and are not unlike the puzzles about proper names in Kripkean semantics. Although I am skeptical that Ockham’s theory is adequate to the dual tasks of being a semantics as well as a psychological thesis, I shall argue that the wrong response to these puzzles is to forfeit the theory’s status as a semantic theory by giving up the commitment to parsimony.


44. Cocchiarella, Nino. 2001. "A Logical Reconstruction of Medieval Terminist Logic in Conceptual Realism." Logical Analysis and History of Philosophy no. 4:35-72. The framework of conceptual realism provides a logically ideal language within which to reconstruct the medieval terminist logic of the 14th century. The terminist notion of a concept, which shifted from Ockham's early view of a concept as an intentional object (the fictum theory) to his later view of a concept as a mental act (the intellectio theory), is reconstructed in this framework in terms of the idea of concepts as unsaturated cognitive structures. Intentional objects (ficta) are not rejected but are reconstructed as the objectified intentional contents of concepts. Their reconstruction as intentional objects is an essential part of the theory of predication of conceptual realism. It is by means of this theory that we are able to explain how the identity theory of the copula, which was basic to terminist logic, applies to categorical propositions. Reference in conceptual realism is not the same as supposition in terminist logic. Nevertheless, the various "modes" of personal supposition of terminist logic can be explained and justified in terms of this conceptualist theory of reference."

45. Corcoran, John, and Swiniarski, John J. 1978. "Logical Structures of Ockham's Theory of Supposition." Franciscan Studies no. 38:161-183. "This exposition of Ockham's theory of (common, personal) supposition involves the logical form of the four descent/ascent conditions and the logical relations of these with the three main modes of supposition. Central theses: each condition is a one-way entailment, each mode is a truth-functional combination of conditions, two of the three modes are not even coextensive with the two-way entailments commonly taken as their definitions. Ockham's idea of "the singulars" of a general proposition is vague and problematic and the entailment used in the descent/ascent conditions probably cannot be taken to be logical consequence in any strict sense."


53. Ducrot, Oswald. 1976. "Quelques Implications Linguistiques De La Théorie Médiévale"

54. Dufour, Carlos A. 1989. Die Lehre Der Proprietates Terminorum. Sinn Und Referenz in Mittelalterlicher Logik, Analytica. Munchen, Hamden, Wien: Philosophia Verlag. "The present volume is a detailed and original study of the traditional, doctrine of terms. It can be regarded as an attempt to tackle the question: How would the scholastic philosophers have conceived and defended their doctrine had they at their disposal the methods and techniques of contemporary logic and semantics? The answer provided, a systematic reconstruction of a number of important ideas in the history of logic, is both formally illuminating and entirely faithful to the relevant text. The work begins with a general exposition of the doctrine of terms oriented around the basic semantic opposition between significatio and suppositio, analogues of the more familiar notions of sense and reference. As a means of providing a precise and coherent reconstruction of the doctrine the author does not simply provide the predictable translation of the more amenable passages into the language of predicate logic. Rather he develops, on the basis of a careful systematization of the texts themselves, a formalization of his own, incorporating an ontology of substance and accident. The advantages of this approach are revealed in its capacity to provide both a simple reconstruction of syllogistic logic by means of a sequent-calculus and a natural extension of this logic to a theory of supposition. Taking into consideration the categories of substance and accident in place of the more usual apparatus of set and element allows the author to develop a formalized theory of objects in which the two categories are allowed to yield composite objects of various sorts. This makes possible an illuminating application of the theory of concreta and abstracta (square of permutations) both to the theory of ampliatio and appellatio and to modal syllogistics. The work concludes with a sketch of possible further developments and an attempted demonstration of the philosophical relevance of the theory in the light of a critical consideration of the relevant secondary literature."

55. Ebbesen, Sten. 1979. "The Dead Man Is Alive." Synthese no. 40:43-70. "English late 13th century logicians paid greater attention to the reference (suppositio) of terms than contemporary Parisian logicians ('modistae'), who concentrated on the unchangeable meaning (significatio) allotted to terms by 'impositio'. Discussions of the sophism 'this is a dead man, therefore this is a man' revealed weaknesses in modism and contributed to the 14th century acceptance of ockham-style suppositio semantics at Paris (Buridan & al.). Appendix contains texts by Radulphus Brito and two anonymi."

56. ——. 1981. "Early Supposition Theory (12th-13th Century)." Histoire, Épistémologie, Langage no. 3/1:35-48. Reprinted in: S. Ebbesen, Topics in Latin Philosophy from the 12th-14th centuries. Collected Essays Volume 2, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2009, pp. 1-14. "The theory of supposition with the associated theories of copulatio (sign-capacity of adjectival terms), ampliatio (widening of referential domain), and distributio constitute one of the most original achievements of Western medieval logic. There is nothing really similar in any ancient text the medievals knew -though surely some Stoic writings once contained investigations of the problems these theories deal with -- nor had contemporary Byzantium anything similar. The twelfth century produced a considerable harvest of rules about the referential range of terms in various contexts. When the 13th century arrived, a standard terminology had prevailed with such names as suppositio confusa and suppositio determinata for some particularly important types of referential range and a chapter on supposition had become a standard feature of Introductions to Logic (summulae). But then the development of the theory stopped. It appears that at least on the Continent, the chapter on supposition in the summulae became one that young students would be taught very early in their career, perhaps before entering university; and then forget all about through the rest of their student career. In this paper I shall refrain from listing treatises 'de suppositionibus'; I shall on the whole refrain from following the developments of terminology and systematics. The spade-work in those fields has been done by De Rijk in his Logica Modernorum. I >will try to point to and explain some characteristic features of 12th and early 13th speculation about supposition without going into details and without paying much
attention to the opinions of individual authors, not even when they protest they disagree with something I say they thought. I am not looking for the particular, but for general attitudes and patterns of thought underlying their investigation of suppositio."


73. The article describes the evolution of Ockham’s theory of mental language and its impact on three of his dominican contemporaries at oxford: Hugh Lawton, William Crathorn and Robert Holcot, and its impact at Paris on the works of Gregory of Rimini and Pierre d’Ailly. Hugh Lawton’s critical response to Ockham relied on a liar-like paradox to show that mental language would preclude the ability to lie. Crathorn devised an alternative to Ockham’s theory in reaction, whereas Holcot defended Ockham’s views. At Paris, the debate suggested a solution to the liar paradox to Gregory of Rimini.


"The salient dispute between realists and nominalists of the fourteenth century concerns the metaphysics of supposition. Do general terms stand for extra-mental universals or not? By answering in the affirmative, Walter Burley loses his ability to provide a plausible account of indefinite promises such as "I promise you a horse." By answering in the negative, Ockham not only explains indefinite promises, but also paves the way for a conception of the faith community more revolutionary than Protestantism. In the Bible, Jesus promises his disciples that he will be with them "always, to the end of the age." In Ockham's view, this is an indefinite promise parallel to the case of the horse; it means "I promise you a Christian." According to this analysis, the universal church can survive in a single, unlikely, and even unknown, individual. Ockham thereby undermines the doctrine of papal infallibility as well as institutional religion itself."


Actes du septième symposium européen d'histoire de la logique et de la sémantique médiévales. Centre d'Etudes Supérieures de Civilisation Médiévale de Poitiers. Poitiers 17-22 juin 1985


"In this paper it is argued that the Quaestiones-Commentary on Alexander de Villa Dei's Doctrinale in the manuscript Erfurt, Ampl. Q.70a is part of the conceptualist grammatical tradition of the late 14th century. A characteristic feature of this theory is the absolute primacy of mental language to spoken or written language. An edition of the first question has been appended."


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La Référence. Actes Du Colloque De Saint-Cloud, Ecole Nomale Supérieure De
Saint-Cloud, 12-13 Octobre 1984, edited by Danon-Boileau, Laurent and Libera, Alain

"In this paper, I examine Ockham's views on "significatio" and "suppositio" in the light
of pre-ockhamistic terminist treatments of these notions. What I try to show is that
Ockham's views here are not simply nominalistic variants on traditional terminist
themes. While conceding that Ockham's nominalism is central in his theory of terms, i
try to locate the "semantical" underpinnings of his views on "significatio" and
"suppositio". What I suggest is that Ockham's account deviates from those of his
predecessors in taking the notion of standard reference or personal "suppositio" as
conceptually prior to the notion of meaning or "significatio", and I conclude that
perhaps a rejection of the atomistic semantics of his predecessors motivates this
revision of the traditional theory of terms."

RELATED PAGES

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The Nominalist Ontology of William of Ockham

Annotated Bibliographies of:

E. J. Ashworth

L. M. de Rijk