WILLIAM OF SHERWOOD ON PROPOSITIONS
AND THEIR PARTS

MARY J. SIRRIDGE

In chapter XIV of William of Sherwood's *Treatise on Syncategorematic Words*,[1] we find the author arguing that 'not' is a syncategorematic word. Syncategorematic words are defined as words which are "determinations of principal parts (of statements) insofar as they (the principal parts) are subjects and predicates."[2] They do not of themselves signify anything, strictly speaking. Rather, they consignify. That is, they combine with other expressions which are subjects or predicates of statements (enuntiationes) to form composite expressions whose significations are not determined by finding the intersection of the significations of their parts. William of Sherwood surely does not mean that syncategorematic words in isolation are meaningless in the way that, for example, the syllable 'ba' is, for they are part of the vocabulary of the language under discussion. He does mean that an interpretation which assigned referents to the names and predicates of the language would assign no referents to syncategorematic words in isolation, although it would include a procedure for determining the reference of composite expressions and the truth values of sentences in which they occurred. The expressions with which he concerns himself are for the most part the ones we should expect, i.e., quantifiers, propositional connectives, exceptives, etc.

It is curious that William of Sherwood feels that he has to give an argument that 'not' is a syncategorematic word. But he has a reason for doing so. He takes it to be a general principle that expressions are categorical or syncategorematical if their opposites are categorematical or syncategorematical, respectively.[3] In the chapter immediately preceding

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1. William of Sherwood, *Treatise on Syncategorematic Words*, edited and translated by Norman Kretzmann, Minneapolis (1966).

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

3. The question of opposites does arise, even for syncategorematic expressions. Such expressions, presumably, do not have contraries or contraries, since these notions are usually restricted to categorematic expressions. But such pairs of expressions as 'begins' and 'ceases' and 'whole' and 'nothing' are commonly taken as syncategorematic and are opposites in some broad sense.