

## WHAT DOES OCKHAM MEAN BY 'SUPPOSITION'?

MARILYN McCORD ADAMS

Supposition theory is one of the most unique and important aspects of thirteenth and fourteenth century logic. The role played by the notion of supposition in medieval logic can be compared with the role of the notions of satisfaction and reference in modern logic. As the notion of satisfaction is introduced into modern discussions of truth, so supposition and truth are related in William Ockham's discussion, and their relation was debated by late fourteenth and early fifteenth century logicians.<sup>1</sup> And what little there is of a medieval attempt at developing a theory of quantification is imbedded in medieval discussions of the divisions of personal supposition.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the demonstrated importance of the notion of supposition, medieval logicians did not bother to make it very clear just what it was for a term to supposit for something in a proposition. William Ockham's general account of this at the outset of his discussion of supposition in the *Summa Logicae* I, c. 63, is among the fullest and, on the face of it, looks fairly explicit. Remarking that supposition is a property of terms, but unlike signification, a property that terms have only insofar as they occur in propositions, Ockham explains,

Moreover, 'supposition' means, as it were, being posited in place of something else. Thus, when a term stands for something else in a proposition, in such a way that we use that term in place of something of which, or of a pronoun indicating which the term (or the nominative case of that term, if it is in an oblique case) is verified, the term supposits for that thing . . .<sup>3</sup>

The meaning of this passage is less obvious than it looks, however. In what follows,<sup>4</sup> I shall focus on this passage from Ockham and consider two interpretations of it, together with some attendant difficulties. Since the above passage incorporates the explanations of a number of other thirteenth and fourteenth century logicians, some of the problems that I uncover for Ockham will plague these logicians as well.

1 It is natural to take the above remarks of Ockham as providing a nominal definition of 'supposition': most generally, to supposit is to be

posited in the place of another; in the context of logic, supposition is a semantic relation<sup>5</sup> that obtains between a term and a thing that it stands for in a proposition. In the above passage, Ockham seems to identify this relation alternatively (a) as one that obtains between a term and a thing when the term is verified of *the thing*, or (b) as one that obtains when the term is verified of *a demonstrative pronoun* indicating that thing. It is clear, however, that Ockham regards the latter as the more precise formulation, since he regards verification, like predication, as a relation that obtains between one term and another, not between things or between terms and things. That predication is not a relation between things is a major preoccupation of Ockham's *Expositio In Librum Porphyrii De Praedicabilibus* and is similarly insisted upon in *Summa Logicae* II, c. 2, pp. 224-226. Apparently, Ockham would regard the suggestion that verification and predication are relations between terms and things, as a confusion of formal and material mode discourse.<sup>6</sup>

All that Ockham explicitly offers in the above passage is a sufficient condition of a term's suppositing for a thing in a proposition. If we are to construe Ockham there as giving a definition of what it is for a term to supposit for a thing in a proposition, it seems that we would have to take him as regarding that condition as both necessary and sufficient. If so, the suggested definition may be schematically expressed in the following biconditional.

(I)  $\alpha$  supposits for  $x$  in  $p$ , if and only if  $\alpha$  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 ' $A$ ', for ' $\alpha$ '; names of propositions for ' $p$ '; and proper names for ' $x$ '. Ockham would thus be seen as defining a more obscure semantical notion, supposition, in terms of a less obscure semantical notion, truth.

The definition given in (I) defines only what it is for a term to supposit for presently existing things, but not for merely past, future, or possible things. For in Ockham's logic, propositions are tensed.<sup>7</sup> Hence, the 'is' in 'This is  $A$ ' is a present tense, not a tenseless 'is'. Further, while Ockham stipulates that a term may be taken to supposit for presently existing things in any proposition, it can be taken to supposit for things that are merely past, future, or possible only in propositions that contain notes of past time, future time, or possibility, respectively.<sup>8</sup> Hence, propositions of the form 'This is  $A$ ' (where 'this' indicates  $x$ ) are true, only if  $x$  is a presently existing thing. The corresponding definitions of what it is for a term to supposit in a proposition for past, future, or possible things, will differ from (I) only in that the right hand side will read 'was true', 'will be true' (*Summa Logicae* II, c. 7, pp. 242-244), and 'can be true' (*Summa Logicae* II, c. 10, p. 249), respectively.

If (I) does express Ockham's definition of what it is for a term to supposit for a thing in a proposition, two apparent problems arise. (A) The first is that (I) defines the relation of supposition in terms of the relation of indication or pointing to. If this relation is in turn explained in terms of a

word's suppositing for a thing, the definition will be viciously circular. In fact, I do not think that Ockham would explain the relation of indication or pointing to in this way. Ockham thinks that mental terms and propositions are the primary ones, and that spoken and written terms and propositions merely signify by convention what the mental terms and propositions signify (*Summa Logicae* I, c. 1, pp. 8-10). The relation we are interested in is thus the relation between the subject of the mental proposition corresponding to 'This is *A*', and a thing *x*.

What is the subject of such a mental proposition, according to Ockham? It is probably *not* a mental demonstrative pronoun. In discussing the correspondence of mental and conventional language, Ockham doubts whether pronouns are among those features of conventional language that arise necessarily in our efforts to describe the world (*Summa Logicae* I, c. 3, p. 12).<sup>9</sup> He does not elaborate further on what the nature of the mental terms corresponding to spoken and written demonstrative pronouns might be, however. If we were to try to construct an answer on Ockham's behalf, I think the most promising candidate for the role would be a concept that signifies only one thing. Ockham might then analyse the relation of being indicated or pointed to in terms of the relation of unique signification by a mental term. Since he analyzes the relation of natural signification, not in terms of supposition, but in terms of resemblance (*Commentary on the Sentences*, Book I, distinction 2, *passim*), he could thus avoid the circle described above.

It might be objected, however, that if this suggestion would rescue (I) and its analogues from circularity, it would at the same time ruin them as definitions. For we almost never have uniquely significant concepts of all those things for which a term supposits in the propositions we assert. In the proposition 'Every man is an animal', for example, the term 'man' supposits for many things of which I have no knowledge. Where these things are concerned, I could not formulate the mental propositions corresponding to the spoken or written propositions 'This is a man'. Matters are even worse for propositions such as 'Every dodo can be a bird', where the terms are taken to supposit for non-existent possibles. For, according to Ockham, no human being can have fully determinate concepts of particulars (*Commentary on the Sentences*, Book I, distinction 3, question 7 C). Without such concepts, no human being could formulate the mental propositions corresponding to the spoken or written propositions 'This can be a dodo' (where 'this' indicates a non-existent possible).<sup>10</sup>

Ockham would probably be willing to allow that we have some concepts that signify at most one extant thing. Thus, in cases where the thing in question is present to one at the time at which one formulates the proposition of the form 'This is *A*', the concept corresponding to the written or spoken word 'this' would include one's intuitive cognition of that thing. Sometimes, however, we take a term of a proposition to supposit for particular things of which we are not presently having an intuitive cognition. In such cases, if one has had an intuitive cognition of that particular thing in the past, then one's memory cognition may figure in the concept one uses

to formulate a mental proposition corresponding to a proposition of the form 'This is *A*'. In still other cases, we take the term of a proposition to supposit for particular things of which we cannot (at least in this life) have an intuitive cognition. For example, in the proposition 'God is the Lord of creation' we may take 'God' to supposit for the individual Yahweh, of whom we cannot naturally have an intuitive cognition in this life (*Com. on the Sent.*, Bk. I, d. 1, q. 5; d. 2, q. 9 P, Q, R; d. 2, q. 2 F). Nevertheless, in formulating the proposition 'This is God', where 'this' indicates Yahweh, we might use a concept compounded out of the properties that we believe Him to have—such as being the first cause of the universe; being the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; being omnipotent, omniscient, etc.—which concept He uniquely satisfies.<sup>11</sup> Thus, on Ockham's view, we do have some concepts that signify only one extant thing and thus are able to formulate the mental propositions corresponding to some propositions of the form 'This is *A*'.

To rescue the purported definition in (I), however, it is not necessary that we should have any such concepts or formulate any such propositions. Ockham nowhere states that we must know or be aware of every individual supposited for by the terms of the propositions we assert. And (I) asserts only that when a term  $\alpha$  does supposit for a thing  $x$  in a proposition  $p$ , where  $\alpha$  is a term in  $p$ , the proposition 'This is *A*' (where 'this' indicates  $x$ ) must be true. Even if one supposes that a proposition must exist in order to be true, it will not follow that any human being must be able to formulate that proposition. For according to Ockham, God has completely determinate and uniquely significant concepts for everything actual and possible; and He immutably thinks mental propositions corresponding to every instantiation of 'This is *A*' (where 'this' indicates  $x$ ). (*Com. on the Sent.*, Bk. I, d. 2, q. 8 E; d. 35, q. 5 G; d. 39 B.) Hence, it seems to me that Ockham can avoid this first circle in the way described above.

(B) Nevertheless, it can be argued that (I) is circular in another way. Taken as a definition, (I) defines supposition in terms of truth. If truth were in turn defined in terms of supposition, the definition would become viciously circular. In his discussion of categorical propositions, however, Ockham seems to fall into precisely this trap. For he says that an affirmative singular categorical proposition is true, if and only if its subject and predicate supposit for the same thing (*Summa Logicae* II, c. 2, p. 224); an affirmative indefinite proposition or an *I* proposition is true, if the subject term supposits for something (*Summa Logicae* I, c. 63, p. 176; c. 72, p. 197) and the predicate supposits for something for which the subject supposits (*Summa Logicae* I, c. 63, p. 176; *Summa Logicae* II, c. 3, p. 229); a negative indefinite categorical proposition or an *O* proposition is true, only if either the subject does not supposit for anything, or it supposits for something for which the predicate does not supposit (*Summa Logicae* II, c. 3, pp. 229-230); and an *A* proposition is true, only if the predicate supposits for everything for which the subject supposits (*Summa Logicae* II, c. 4, p. 234). Focusing on Ockham's remarks about affirmative categorical propositions, Philotheus Boehner maintains that it would be "in accordance with his teachings" to define 'true' in such a way that it signifies propositions directly but

connotes "the coincidence of the supposition of subject and predicate," while 'false' signifies propositions directly and connotes "the lack of coincidence of supposition of subject and predicate."<sup>12</sup>

Consider the proposition 'Socrates is a man'. If Ockham is taken as defining truth in the above remarks, then what it means to say that 'Socrates is a man' is true, is that 'man' supposits for the same thing as 'Socrates' does, namely, Socrates. But according to (I), what it means to say that 'man' supposits for Socrates in 'Socrates is a man', is that 'man' is a term of that proposition and 'This is a man' (where 'this' indicates Socrates) is true. What it means to say that 'This is a man' (where 'this' indicates Socrates) is true, is that 'man' supposits for what 'this' indicates, namely, Socrates. And what it means to say that 'man' supposits there for Socrates is that 'This is a man' (where 'this' indicates Socrates) is true. There seems to be a vicious circularity here.

Peter of Ailly raises precisely this objection against some of Ockham's successors:

Second Thesis: Whether it is affirmative or negative, a proposition is not therefore true or false because its subject and predicate supposit for the same thing or because they do not supposit for the same thing.

Proof: Those who define 'true proposition' or 'false proposition' in terms of suppositing or not suppositing for the same thing . . . also give a definition of supposition in which it is said that supposition 'is the taking of a term in a proposition for its significatum or significata of which a term is verified by means of the copula of the proposition in which it is posited'. Thus, they define supposition in terms of verification or proposition. Therefore, they should not, conversely, define the verification of a proposition in terms of supposition or of suppositing or not suppositing for the same thing. For one ought not to give circular definitions or define the same by the same . . .<sup>13</sup>

Whether or not Ailly's is a fair objection against Ockham's successors, it is not clear that it holds good against Ockham himself because he never explicitly *defines* truth in terms of supposition. Unlike his younger contemporaries and early fifteenth century logicians, Ockham took very little interest in the project of defining truth. His closest approach to offering a definition is in the following remark from his commentary on Aristotle's *Categories*.

. . . Thus an expression is said to be true, because it signifies things to be as they are. Therefore, an expression is said to be first true and afterwards false without any change in the expression itself, because it first signifies things as they are and afterwards, because of a change in things, signifies things as they are not . . .<sup>14</sup>

Paralleling Boehner's suggestion, we could say that according to Ockham's explicit definition, 'true' signifies propositions directly and connotes that the propositions signify things as they are, while 'false' signifies propositions directly and connotes that the propositions signify things as they are not. Supposition enters into the statement of truth conditions for the above-

mentioned categorical propositions because, on Ockham's view, such propositions denote or signify that a certain relation obtains between the suppositions of their subject predicate terms. For example, an indefinite affirmative categorical proposition denotes or signifies that its subject term supposits for something and that its predicate term supposits for something for which its subject term supposits (*Summa Logicae* I, c. 63, p. 176; c. 72, p. 197; II, c. 3, p. 229). Thus signifying, it will signify things as they are, if and only if its subject term does supposit for something and its predicate term does supposit for something for which its subject term supposits. Similarly, an indefinite negative categorical proposition denotes or signifies that either its subject term does not supposit for anything or it supposits for something for which its predicate does not supposit (*Summa Logicae* II, c. 3, pp. 229-230). Hence, it will signify things as they are, if and only if either its subject does not supposit for anything or it supposits for something for which its predicate does not supposit.

Whether or not Ockham is involved in the above circle depends upon how he regards such biconditionals. If he thinks that we can never determine or recognize that any categorical proposition signifies things as they are, without first determining whether or not its subject and predicate supposit for the same thing, then regarding (I) as a definition would involve him in a vicious circularity. For if (I) expresses a definition, we cannot determine whether a term supposits for a thing in a categorical proposition, without determining that another categorical proposition is true; and we cannot determine whether the latter categorical proposition is true without determining the supposition of its terms. Nevertheless, although the text does not make Ockham's meaning clear, it is quite plausible to suppose that Ockham thought that we could recognize whether or not simple categorical propositions of the form 'This is *A*' signified things as they are, without first determining whether or not the predicate supposits for the thing indicated by the subject term. If so, the right hand side of (I) could serve as a means of coming to understand the notion of supposition. He might then, without circularity, have regarded the above biconditionals as convenient formulations of truth conditions for those who already understood the notion of supposition.

In view of the above discussion, it is worth noting that (I) invites the above charges of circularity in part because it is less straight-forward than it needs to be. Without violating his convention that predication and verification are relations between terms, he could offer the following definition:

(II)  $\alpha$  supposits for  $x$  in  $p$ , if and only if  $\alpha$  is a term of  $p$  and  $x$  is  $A$ ,

where the variables are interpreted as before. (II) can be seen as defining supposition without using any semantic term in the *definiens*. And it was the presence of such terms on the right hand side of (I) that suggested the circles described above. Nevertheless, if Ockham did hold the extreme view noted above—namely, that we cannot recognize that any categorical proposition signifies things as they are, without first determining whether

or not its subject and predicate supposit for the same thing—even (II) would fall victim to the second charge of circularity. For we could never determine that an instantiation of the right hand side was true, unless we already understood the notion of supposition.

(C) It remains to ask what it is that either of (I) or (II) attempts to define any way. This probably sounds like a foolish question. To see that it is not, notice that the truth value of the right hand side of (I) or (II) will vary as the type of supposition  $\alpha$  has in 'This is  $A$ ' or ' $x$  is  $A$ ' varies. For example, if  $x$  is 'man' and  $\alpha$  is 'man', then 'This is man' (where 'this' indicates 'man') is true where 'man' supposits materially in that proposition and false if it supposits personally. (a) Keeping this in mind, we might suppose that either (I) or (II) attempts to define what it is to supposit in some way or other for a thing. We might take them to assert that  $\alpha$  supposits for  $x$  in  $p$ , where  $\alpha$  is a term of  $p$ , just in case 'This is  $A$ ' (where 'this' indicates  $x$ ) or ' $x$  is  $A$ ' is true for some supposition or other of  $\alpha$ . Thus, (I) and (II) would assure us that 'man' supposits for itself in some way or other in 'Man is a noun', because 'This is man' (where 'this' indicates 'man') and "'Man' is man" are true for some supposition or other of 'man'. For they are true where their predicate terms supposit materially. Similarly, 'man' supposits in some way or other for Socrates in 'A man is an animal', since 'This is a man' (where 'this' indicates Socrates) and 'Socrates is a man' are true for some supposition or other of their predicate terms. For it is true when 'man' supposits personally. Again, 'man' does not supposit for the Empire State Building in 'A man is an animal' because 'This is a man' (where 'this' indicates the Empire State Building) and 'The Empire State Building is a man' are false, no matter how 'man' supposits in them.

Nevertheless, Ockham could not consistently accept either (I) or (II) as an adequate definition of what it is for a term to supposit for something in some way or other. For Ockham stipulates that "a term can always have personal supposition, in any proposition in which it occurs . . . But a term cannot have simple or material supposition in every proposition, but only in those in which the other term to which it is compared pertains to an intention of the mind or to a spoken or written word."<sup>15</sup> Hence Ockham would insist that 'man' can never supposit for itself (and hence supposit materially) in 'A man is an animal'. Nevertheless, 'man' is a term of 'A man is an animal' and each of 'This is man' (where 'this' indicates 'man') and "'Man' is man" is true for some supposition or other of their predicate terms. For the subject term of each pertains to a spoken or written word. Therefore, by Ockham's rules, the predicate term could supposit materially in each of them. Consequently, according to these rules, the right hand sides of (I) and (II) would be true, while their left hand sides were false—which would be impossible if either expressed an adequate definition.

Nor does (I) or (II) suffice as a definition of some particular kind of supposition. (b) That it is inadequate as a definition of material supposition can be seen by returning to the example 'Man is a noun'. For again, (I) and

(II) will express adequate definitions, only if every instantiation yields exactly the same truth values for both sides of the biconditionals. Ockham would want to say that 'man' does supposit materially for itself in that proposition. But, by Ockham's rules, the predicate term of each of 'This is man' (where 'this' indicates 'man') and "'Man' is man" can supposit both materially and personally. As a result, both truth values may be assigned to the right hand sides of (I) and (II), while only truth can be assigned to the left hand side. A similar argument can be given that neither (I) nor (II) defines simple supposition adequately.

(c) Ockham may have been tempted to say that (I) is an adequate definition of personal supposition only. For immediately after stating that

. . . when a term stands for something else in a proposition, in such a way that we use that term in place of something of which, or of a pronoun indicating which the term (or the nominative case of that term, if it is in an oblique case) is verified, the term supposits for that thing . . .

he adds "at least this is true when the term is taken as suppositing significantly."<sup>16</sup> And he retains this qualification when he repeats his explanation a paragraph later. But Ockham would have been mistaken if he thought this. For he would not allow 'man' to supposit personally for itself in 'A man is an animal'. Nevertheless, according to Ockham's rules, 'man' can supposit materially in 'This is man' (where 'this' indicates 'man'). And once again, both truth values will be assigned to the right hand side, where Ockham wants to assign only falsity to the left hand side.

Thus, it seems that neither (I) nor (II) can serve as a definition of some particular type of supposition, unless further conditions are added to the right hand side. Focusing on (I) and drawing on Ockham's remarks, it is not difficult to see what modifications to make for the case of personal supposition.

(III)  $\alpha$  supposits personally for  $x$  in  $p$ , if and only if  $\alpha$  is a term of  $p$  and 'This is  $A$ ' (where 'this' indicates  $x$ ) is true, and  $x$  is one of the significata of  $\alpha$ .

The added third condition, together with Ockham's rules, insures that the predicate term of 'This is  $A$ ' (where 'this' indicates  $x$ ) will never supposit otherwise than for its significata. For the term 'this' to which it is compared will, by the third condition, pertain only to  $\alpha$ 's significata, and by Ockham's rules,  $\alpha$  could supposit otherwise than personally in 'This is  $A$ ' only if the term to which it was compared pertained to something other than  $\alpha$ 's significata. Will similar additions yield adequate definitions of material and simple supposition? Consider the following:

(IV)  $\alpha$  supposits materially for  $x$  in  $p$ , if and only if  $\alpha$  is a term of  $p$  and 'This is  $A$ ' (where 'this' indicates  $x$ ) is true and  $x$  is not one of the significata of  $\alpha$  and  $x$  is a spoken or written word or words.

(V)  $\alpha$  supposits simply for  $x$  in  $p$ , if and only if  $\alpha$  is a term of  $p$  and 'This is  $A$ ' (where 'this' indicates  $x$ ) is true and  $x$  is not one of the significata of  $\alpha$  and  $x$  is an intention of the mind.

The third and fourth conditions added to the right hand sides of (IV) and (V) do insure that  $\alpha$  can supposit materially and simply, respectively, in 'This is  $A$ ' (where 'this' indicates  $x$ ). Nevertheless, they do not render the definitions adequate. For by Ockham's rule, it is still the case that  $\alpha$  can supposit personally in 'This is  $A$ '; and if it does, it will be false. It would seem that the only way to remove this ambiguity in (IV) would be to add after " 'This is  $A$ ' (where 'this' indicates  $x$ ) is true" "where  $\alpha$  supposits materially"; and in the comparable place in (V), "where  $\alpha$  supposits simply." But these additions would make the definitions circular. Now we can see why Ockham might have thought that his explanation was more relevant to the case of personal supposition than to material and simple supposition.

2 We are now in a position to appreciate an alternative interpretation of Ockham's remarks in *Summa Logicae* I, c. 63. One could suppose that Ockham is offering his definition or, if you prefer (as Boehner does, see note 12 above), general clarification of the meaning of 'supposition' when he says that supposition is being posited in place of something, and that in the context of logic it is just a term's being posited for something in a proposition. The latter would be a general definition or clarification that would apply equally to all three kinds of supposition. And it coincides with those of Peter of Spain, Walter Burleigh, and Lambert of Auxerre, none of whom make any use of the formula schematized in (I).<sup>17</sup> Personal, simple, and material supposition would be regarded as determinates of a common determinable, just as man and horse are determinates of the determinable animal. And when he says that "in general, personal supposition is that which a term has when it supposits for its significatum,"<sup>18</sup> he can be construed as defining 'personal supposition', not by (I) or (III), but by

(VI)  $\alpha$  supposits personally for  $x$  in  $p$ , if and only if  $\alpha$  is posited for  $x$  in  $p$  and  $x$  is one of  $\alpha$ 's significata.

Ockham will ultimately explain what determines whether or not  $x$  is one of  $\alpha$ 's significata in terms of his doctrine of natural signification. Similarly, when he says that "Simple supposition is when a term supposits for an intention of the mind, but is not taken significatively . . ." and "Material supposition is when a term does not supposit significatively, but supposits for a spoken or written word . . .,"<sup>19</sup> he can be seen as giving comparable definitions of material and simple supposition.

(VII)  $\alpha$  supposits simply for  $x$  in  $p$ , if and only if  $\alpha$  is posited for  $x$  in  $p$  and  $x$  is not one of  $\alpha$ 's significata and  $x$  is an intention of the mind.

(VIII)  $\alpha$  supposits materially for  $x$  in  $p$ , if and only if  $\alpha$  is posited for  $x$  in  $p$  and  $x$  is not one of  $\alpha$ 's significata and  $x$  is a spoken or written word or words.

On this interpretation, (I) might be seen as stating an equivalence, which Ockham thought would hold at least in the case of personal supposition.

One advantage of this interpretation is that it leaves us with less problematic definitions of material and simple supposition. Another is that

it seems to match exactly the procedure in the *Tractatus Logicae Minor*, which Ockham may have written<sup>20</sup> and in which the formula schematized by (I) likewise makes no appearance. The author there begins by remarking "that suppositio is 'being posited for another', for which it is said to supposit in a proposition, for which it is posited and stands, that is, for which we use the term . . ." And he proceeds to explain,

A spoken term can, however, supposit in three ways. For sometimes it supposits for its significatum . . . and then it supposits significatively . . . Or it supposits for a mental sign or mental intention, and in that case it supposits simply . . . Or it supposits for some conventional sign or for anything that can be written or spoken, and in that case it supposits materially . . .<sup>21</sup>

The explanations here correspond to (VI), (VII), and (VIII), respectively.

The disadvantage of this interpretation is that it leaves the notion of 'being posited for' unanalyzed. It is just this analysis that, on our first interpretation, (I) was supposed to provide. No other account is offered in the *Summa Logicae*. And one is inclined to say that the notion of being posited for is as much in need of explanation as the notion of supposition. The author of the *Tractatus Logicae Minor* suggests that terms are posited for things in propositions, in that the terms are parts of propositions instead of things. Thus he writes,

. . . For in speaking and writing propositions, we do not always use terms for the terms themselves. But very often we use terms and names for things that, since they are most often absent, we could not use . . .

But he proceeds to acknowledge that such things could not be parts of propositions, even if they were present.<sup>22</sup> The explanation of the relation of being posited for thus remains metaphorical.

In the *Elementarium Logicae*, which also may have been written by Ockham, we find the hint of a new approach. The author begins in the usual manner by explaining that "for names or terms to supposit or stand for something in a proposition is nothing other than for the name to be posited in the proposition for which we use the name . . ."<sup>23</sup> He argues that things other than signs cannot be parts of a proposition.<sup>24</sup> But he continues his account as follows:

A term can, however, supposit in two ways, according as we use a term for different things in a proposition. For we use a term for itself and for something else. We use a term for itself in a proposition, when we *intend* by the proposition that the term itself is something or is not something, or is somewhere or is not somewhere, or we affirm or deny something of the term itself, or we *intend* that something is or is not the term itself or something has or does not have the term, or something of the sort . . .

We use a term for something else in a proposition, however, when we do not *intend* by the proposition that the term itself is something or is not something, or that it is or is not; but we *intend* that something other than the term is something or is not something etc. . . .<sup>25</sup>

The relation of supposition emerges here as a function of the speaker's intentions. This marks a change in emphasis from Ockham's discussion in the *Summa Logicae*. Even there, Ockham recognizes that speakers could use words in non-standard ways (e.g., in *Summa Logicae* I, c. 65, p. 779). In fact, stipulating unusual meanings for expressions was a standard move in the practice of the *ars obligatoria*. But in his discussion of supposition in the *Summa Logicae*, Ockham's attention is not on such cases. His rules for when a term can have simple or material, instead of merely personal, supposition in a proposition, make this a function of the signification of the term to which it is compared. The signification of spoken and written terms is generally thought of as a function of public conventions and the signification of mental terms is a function of what they resemble, which is independent of anyone's will (*Summa Logicae* I, c. 1, pp. 8-10). Thus, 'man' can supposit for the word 'man' in 'Man is a noun', simply because 'man' is a thing of the sort that 'noun' signifies. These rules are not mentioned in the *Elementarium Logicae*. Instead, in the above passage, what a term is posited for in a proposition is asserted to be a function of what the speaker intended to make a statement about. If, by using a term, the speaker intends to make a statement about the term itself (and the term is not one of its own significata, as 'noun' is), the term supposits materially. If, on the other hand, the speaker intends to make a statement about the term's significata, the term supposits personally. Just how the speaker's intentions determine what a term is posited for in a proposition is not elaborated in the *Elementarium Logicae*, although similar issues have received attention in contemporary discussions of philosophy of language. In any case, this is not the place to pursue the advantages and disadvantages of this approach.

3 In sum, both of the above interpretations of Ockham's remarks in the *Summa Logicae* I, c. 63, have disadvantages. Pursuing the first, I found Ockham unable to provide adequate definitions either of supposition in general or of material and simple supposition in particular. The second—according to which Ockham is seen as defining what it is in general for a term to supposit for a thing in a proposition, as a term's being posited for that thing in the proposition—is unsatisfactory because no general non-metaphorical analysis of what it is to be posited for something is forthcoming in the *Summa Logicae*. Perhaps the best construction to put on the text is to accept the latter as Ockham's general account of what supposition is, and to regard (III) as a successful attempt by Ockham to provide such a non-metaphorical analysis for the case of personal supposition.

#### NOTES

1. See Paul of Venice [15], Prima Opinio.
2. That discussion of the divisions of personal supposition represents an attempt at a rudimentary theory of quantification has been suggested by Philotheus Boehner [1], p. 28; Robert G. Turnbull [20], pp. 321-322; Nicholas Rescher [18],

- p. 102; Gareth B. Matthews [9], p. 95ff.; Theodore K. Scott, [19], p. 586, and [3], p. 38; and Ernest A. Moody [11], sec. 11, pp. 43–53. Matthews has since argued that such a characterization is mistaken [10]. His arguments notwithstanding, I am inclined to think that there is some small point to saying that the divisions of personal supposition represent part of a rudimentary theory of quantification. But space does not permit me to argue for this claim here.
3. “Dicitur autem suppositio quasi pro alio positio, ita quod quando terminus stat in propositione pro aliquo,—ita quod utimur illo termino pro aliquo, de quo sive de pronomine demonstrante ipsum, ille terminus vel rectus illius termini, si sit obliquus, verificatur,—supponit pro illo . . .” [13], c. 63, p. 176. I have made all translations of passages from the *Summa Logicae*, from Boehner’s edition of that work. Page numbers refer to Boehner’s edition. Similar explanations are offered by Ockham’s successors Albert of Saxony and John Buridan. Thus, Albert writes, “Supposition, as here understood, is the interpretation or usage of a categorematic term which is taken for some thing or things in a proposition. And I say that a term of a proposition is interpreted for something in this sense: that the predicate of that proposition is indicated to be verified affirmatively or negatively of a demonstrative pronoun denoting that thing . . .” (*Logica* II, c. 1; quoted in [11], sec. 5, p. 21). Similarly, Buridan explains that “supposition as it is here used is the taking of a term in a proposition for some thing or things, in such a way that if that thing or those things are indicated by the pronoun ‘this’ or ‘these’ or the equivalent, then that term is truly affirmed of this pronoun, by the mediation of the copula of the proposition . . .” [8], pp. 99–100.
  4. A version of this paper was read at the Western Division meetings of the American Philosophical Association in a symposium with Gareth B. Matthews and Ralph McInerney, to whom I am indebted for useful discussion. I am also indebted to my husband, Robert Merrihew Adams, and to my colleague, Tyler Burge, for many helpful comments and discussions of topics associated with this paper.
  5. In [11], Moody focuses on the fact that terms have supposition only insofar as they are in a proposition and on the claim that supposition is a property that a term has in comparison with another term, and concludes that “Supposition is a syntactical relation of term to term, and not a semantical relation of the term to an extra-linguistic ‘object’ or ‘designatum’ . . .” (II, sec. 5, p. 22). He defends this claim on the ground that the metalanguage does not need to contain names of the things supposited for, since we can, for example, express what ‘man’ supposits for in ‘A man is an animal’ by saying that ‘man’ supposits for something for which ‘animal’ supposits, instead of saying that ‘man’ supposits for a man or for Socrates. “. . . Here we use names for the *terms* ‘man’ and ‘animal’, but we do not use names for their designata; the word ‘something’ does indeed refer to whatever the terms designate, but it does not, like those terms themselves, possess independent meaning. Its function is a syntactical one of quantification, of determining a connection in extension for the two terms, just as relative pronouns determine an extensional relation of the subject of the dependent clause to an antecedent subject.” (*Ibid.*) Although I think it is true that basically syntactic criteria for whether a term has one type of personal supposition rather than another, can be extracted from Ockham’s discussion (*Summa Logicae* I, c. 70, 71, 73, 74), I cannot accept Moody’s argument or his conclusion. Referring to a *relatum* by a pronoun instead of a proper name does not transform the relation from a semantic property into a syntactical one. If

signifying a man is a semantic property (as Moody admits it is), so is signifying something. Nor does the comparison of semantic properties make them any less semantic. If signifying a man is a semantic property, so is signifying something that 'animal' signifies. Similarly, for supposition. Being posited for something in a proposition is an explicitly semantic property. And if suppositing for Socrates is a semantic property, so are suppositing for something and suppositing for something for which 'animal' supposits. It is true that according to Ockham's rules, whether a term can have material or simple supposition as opposed to merely personal supposition, is determined by comparing it with the other term of the proposition. But the relevant property of the other term is that of its being apt to signify spoken or written words, or concepts, respectively.

6. It is true that Ockham reverts to the imprecise formulation in the next paragraph. But the more precise formulation reappears in his discussion of propositions about the past and future (*Summa Logicae* II, c. 7, p. 243) and in his rule for analyzing modal propositions taken in the sense of division (*Summa Logicae* II, c. 10, p. 249). John Buridan insists that properly verification pertains to propositions, not terms. Hence, he would regard even the more precise of Ockham's formulations as improper. See [4], pp. 12-13.
7. This feature of Ockham's logic is illustrated by his arguments in [12], q. 2, Article III F and q. 5. It is also discussed in the "Introduction" to [12].
8. [13], I, c. 72, ad 1am: ". . . tunc terminus supponit personaliter, quando supponit pro suis significatis vel pro his, quae fuerunt sua significata, vel erunt, vel possunt esse . . . Hoc tamen intelligendum est, quod non respectu cuiuscumque verbi supponit pro illis, sed pro illis quae significat stricte accipiendo 'significare', supponere potest respectu cuiuscumque verbi, si aliqua talia significet. Sed pro illis, quae fuerunt sua significata, non potest supponere nisi respectu verbi de praeterito.  
 "Et ideo quaelibet talis propositio est distinguenda, eo quod talis terminus potest supponere pro his, quae sunt, vel pro his quae fuerunt. Similiter pro his, quae erunt, non potest supponere nisi respectu verbi de futuro; et ideo ista propositio est distinguenda eo quod terminus potest supponere pro his, quae sunt, vel pro his, quae erunt. Similiter pro his, quae possunt esse significata, et non sunt, non potest supponere nisi respectu verbi de possibili vel de contingenti . . ." (pp. 194-195). The only notes of past or future time or of possibility that Ockham explicitly recognizes are tensed or modal verbs. Ockham's successors include participles such as 'futurus' and 'praeteritus', adjectives such as 'possibile', and adverbs such as 'possibiliter' among terms that might serve this function. See Paul of Venice [15], Pars Prima, Treatise 2, fol. 25va, lines 21-45; fol. 25vb, lines 38-72.
9. Peter Geach has argued in [7], pp. 124-132, that pronouns are not always idle—i.e., they are not always replaceable by proper nouns or general terms. For the statement obtained by replacing 'he' in 'If any man owns a donkey, he beats it' by either 'a man' or 'Smith' does not necessarily have the same truth value as 'If any man owns a donkey, he beats it' does. He might accordingly reject Ockham's suggestion that pronouns are eliminable without loss in the ideal language. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the use of the demonstrative pronoun 'this' in 'This is A' is idle, because it is in principle replaceable by a proper name, which would be mirrored in the mental language by a concept that signifies only one thing.

10. John Buridan raises a similar objection to his account of supposition in [4], I, p. 12: “. . . Quantum vero ad secundam clausulam, quae est de suppositione, apparet mihi quod sit satis manifesta, nisi quod iunior posset dubitare, quia iste terminus ‘Deus’ potest supponere et tamen, quocumque demonstrato per illud pronomen, non verificaretur de illo pronimine, quia oporteret quod Deus demonstraretur et demonstrare non possumus . . .”
11. Buridan suggests a similar account of how we might be able to “indicate” God, in reply to the above objection in [4], I, p. 12: “. . . Aliqui respondent quod, si Deus non potest demonstrari ad sensum, tamen potest demonstrari ad intellectum, vel possumus dicere quod ad hoc quod terminus possit supponere quod vere possit affirmari vel de tali pronimine vel de relativo referenti aliquem terminum priorem; verbi gratia vere dicimus ‘prima causa est et ipsa est Deus’ . . .”
12. Philotheus Boehner, [2], p. 261. Boehner acknowledges that Ockham never explicitly defines ‘true’ and ‘false’ in this way, [2], pp. 261-262, note 39. And in any case, Boehner’s definitions would obviously not apply to propositions in general, since they would not apply to negative categorical propositions. Nor does he raise the above charge of circularity against Ockham, since, as he sees it, “Ockham himself seems to have abstained from a definition of supposition. He merely remarks that supposition is a property of terms, but only when they are actually used in propositions, and that supposition is *quasi pro alio positio*. However, he clarifies the meaning of supposition by using circumlocutions and examples.” ([2], p. 234.) I shall consider the suggestion that Ockham’s basic definition of ‘supposition’ is ‘being posited in place of another’, in section II below.
13. Peter of Ailly, [16], p. 186: “Secunda conclusio: propositio non est vera vel falsa ideo quia eius subiectum et praedicatum supponant pro eodem vel quia eius subiectum et praedicatum supponant pro eodem vel quia non supponunt pro eodem, sive sit affirmativa, sive negativa. Probatur, quia illi qui diffiniunt propositionem veram aut falsam per supponere aut non supponere pro eodem . . . etiam dant illam diffinitionem suppositionis, in qua dicitur ‘est acceptio termini pro suo significato aut suis significatis, de quo aut de quibus talis terminus verificatur mediante copula propositionis in qua ponitur’, et sic diffiniunt suppositionem per verificationem vel per propositionem; ergo non debent e contra diffinire verificationem propositionis per suppositionem sei per supponere aut non supponere pro eodem, quia in diffinitionibus non debet fieri circularisatio, nec debet idem diffiniri per idem . . .” I am very much indebted to my colleague, Francesco del Punta, for first calling my attention to this work of Ailly’s and for allowing me to use his transcription of it.
14. [14], unpaginated: “. . . Unde oratio dicitur vera, quia significat sic esse a parte rei, sicut est. Et ideo sine omni mutatione a parte orationis ex hoc ipso, quod primo significat sicut est a parte rei, et postea propter mutationem rei significat sicut non est a parte rei, dicitur oratio primo vera et postea falsa . . .”
15. [13], c. 65, p. 179: “. . . semper terminus, in quacumque propositione ponatur, potest habere suppositionem personalem . . .  
     “Sed terminus non in omni propositione potest habere suppositionem simplicem vel materialem, sed tunc tantum, quando terminus talis comparatur alteri extremo, quod respicit intentionem animae vel vocem vel scriptum . . .”

16. See note 4 above. [13], c. 63, p. 176: “. . . et hoc saltem verum est, quando terminus supponens significative accipitur . . .”
17. Peter of Spain, [17], pp. 2, 4: “. . . Suppositio est acceptio termini substantivi pro aliquo . . .” Walter Burleigh, [21], p. 2: “Suppositio generaliter dicta est acceptio termini pro aliquo, scilicet pro re vel pro voce vel pro conceptu . . .” Lambert of Auxerre, [8], p. 207: “. . . Quarto modo dicitur suppositio acceptio termini per se sive pro re sua, vel pro aliquo supposito contempto sub re sua vel pro aliquibus suppositis contemptis sub re sua . . .”
18. [13], c. 64, p. 177: “Suppositio personalis universaliter est illa, quando terminus supponit pro suo significato . . .”
19. [13], c. 64, p. 178: “Suppositio simplex est, quando terminus supponit pro intentione animae, sed non tenetur significative . . .” and “Suppositio materialis est, quando terminus non supponit significative, sed supponit vel pro voce vel pro scripto . . .”
20. Eligius Buytaert in his introduction to [6] upholds Boehner’s earlier conclusion that both the *Tractatus Logicae Minor* and the *Elementarium Logicae* were written by Ockham. Father Conrad Harkins, O.F.M., has informed me that the authenticity of these works is now being questioned, but I have not seen the arguments against their authenticity.
21. [6], III, De Suppositionibus, p. 66: “. . . quod suppositio est ‘pro aliquo positio’, pro quo dicitur in propositione supponere pro quo ponitur et stat, hoc est pro quo utimur illo termino . . .  
 “Potest autem terminus vocalis tripliciter supponere, quia aliquando supponit pro suo significato qualiscumque res sit quae significatur, et tunc supponit significative . . . Aut supponit terminus vocalis pro signo mentali seu pro intentione animae; et tunc supponit simpliciter . . . Aut supponit pro aliquo signo ad placitum instituto seu pro quocumque quod potest scribi vel proferri; et tunc supponit materialiter . . .”
22. [6], III, De Suppositionibus, p. 66: “. . . Non enim semper propositiones proferendo vel scribendo utimur terminis pro ipsis terminis, sed saepius utimur terminis et nominibus pro rebus, [quae], cum saepissime sint absentes, uti non possumus; et istas quae praesentes sunt, scribere non possumus nec proferre . . .”
23. [5], III, De Suppositionibus, p. 201: “. . . Nomina enim sive termini in propositione supponere seu stare pro aliquo non est aliud quam nomen in propositione poni pro aliquo, [pro] quo utimur nomine ipso . . .”
24. [5], III, De Suppositionibus, p. 202.
25. [5], III, sec. B, De Suppositione Propria, p. 203: “Dupliciter autem supponere terminus secundum quod pro diversis utimur termino in propositione; aut enim utimur termino pro seipso aut pro alio. Utimur enim termino *pro* seipso in propositione quando intendimus per propositionem, quod ipsemet terminus est aliquid vel non est aliquid, aut est alicubi vel non est alicubi, vel aliquid affirmamus vel negamus de termino seipso, vel intendimus quod aliquid est vel non est ipsemet terminus vel aliquid habet vel non habet ipsum terminum, vel aliquid huiusmodi . . .  
 “Utimur autem termino *pro alio* in propositione quando per propositionem non intendimus quod ipsemet terminus est aliquid vel non est aliquid, aut quod est vel non est; sed intendimus quod aliquid aliud a termino est aliquid vel non est aliquid, aut huiusmodi . . .”

## REFERENCES

- [1] Boehner, Philotheus, *Medieval Logic*, The University Press, Manchester (1952).
- [2] Boehner, Philotheus, "Ockham's theory of supposition and the notion of truth," *Collected Articles on Ockham*, #16, The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure, New York (1958), pp. 232-267.
- [3] Buridan, John, *Sophisms on Meaning and Truth*, translated with introduction by Theodore K. Scott, Appleton-Century-Crofts, New York (1964).
- [4] Buridan, John, *Summalae de Dialectica, Tractatus de Suppositionibus*, edited by Maria Elena Reina, La Nuova Italia Editrice, Firenze (1957).
- [5] Buytaert, Eligius, "The Elementarium Logicae of Ockham," *Franciscan Studies*, vol. 25 (1965), pp. 151-276.
- [6] Buytaert, Eligius, "The Tractatus Logicae Minor of Ockham," *Franciscan Studies*, vol. 24 (1964), pp. 34-100.
- [7] Geach, Peter, *Reference and Generality*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, N.Y. (1962).
- [8] Lambert of Auxerre, *Logica (Summa Lamberti)*, edited by Franco Alessio, La Nuova Italia Editrice, Firenze (1972).
- [9] Matthews, Gareth B., "Ockham's supposition theory and modern logic," *Philosophical Review*, vol. 73 (1964), pp. 91-99.
- [10] Matthews, Gareth B., "Suppositio and quantification in Ockham," *Noûs*, vol. 7 (1973), pp. 13-23.
- [11] Moody, Ernest A., *Truth and Consequence in Medieval Logic*, North-Holland Publishing Company, Amsterdam (1953).
- [12] Ockham, William, *Predestination, God's Foreknowledge, and Future Contingents*, translation with introduction, notes, and appendices by Marilyn McCord Adams and Norman Kretzmann, Appleton-Century-Crofts, New York (1969).
- [13] Ockham, William, *Summa Logicae, Pars Prima, Pars Secunda, et Tertia Prima*, edited by Philotheus Boehner, The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure, N.Y. (1957 and 1962).
- [14] Ockham, William, *Expositio super libros Peryermenias*, Bologna (1496).
- [15] Paul of Venice, *Logica Magna*, Venice (1471).
- [16] Peter of Ailly, *Insolubilia*, edited by Guy Marchaud, Paris (1492).
- [17] Peter of Spain, *Summulae Logicales, Tractatus Suppositionum*, edited and translated by Joseph Patrick Mullaly, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana (1945).
- [18] Rescher, Nicholas, "Predicate logic without predicates," *Logique et Analyse*, vol. 7 (1964), pp. 101-103.
- [19] Scott, Theodore K., "Geach on supposition theory," *Mind*, vol. 75 (1966), pp. 586-588.

- [20] Turnbull, Robert G., "Ockham's nominalistic logic: Some twentieth century reflections," *New Scholasticism*, vol. 36 (1962), pp. 313-329.
- [21] Burleigh, Walter, *Tractatus De Puritate Artis Logicae*, edited by Philotheus Boehner, The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure, N.Y. (1955).

*University of California, Los Angeles*  
*Los Angeles, California*